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Bumper crop: Tri-City area pumpkins fair well after Irene

By AMANDA BELAND

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DURHAM — While some Northeastern states like New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, are facing a pumpkin shortage this year due to Hurricane Irene, some farms and patches in the Tri-City area are facing a surplus of the carvable vegetables.

According to Butternut Farm owner and resident farmer Giff Burnap, the pumpkin crop is "never-ending" at Butternut. Although the Farmington-based farm did see some damage to the pumpkin plants because of Hurricane Irene in the form of bent leaves and vines, the actual vegetables were far enough along that the rain and wind did not deter them for blossoming fully, according to Burnap.

The typical pumpkin, according to Burnap, takes at least 90 to 120 days from initial planting to be at its desired size to be picked. Butternut, which offers a "Pick Your Own" pumpkin patch at 50 cents per



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Pick Your Own pumpkin patch at .50 cents per pumpkin pound, is selling all different sized pumpkins, from the flat gourd type to the larger-than-your-head variety.

Butternut Farm does not ship their pumpkins to local farms in the area.

The Coppal House Farm, in Lee, has also faired well in the pumpkin department this season. According to owner John Hutton, Coppal's pumpkins, as similar to those at Butternut Farm, were matured past the stage where they would have been affected by Hurricane Irene. Coppal grows between 22 and 25 different varieties of pumpkins each year, and while some varieties produced a smaller crop than anticipated, other varieties produced far more than expected.

The average pumpkin at Coppal House matures in about 105 days, but the range in maturation can range from 85 to 120, according to Hutton. The farm has over 17 acres of pumpkin patches and depends mostly on crop rotation, the technique of not using the same patch of land each year but rather rotating crops to produce on new patches, to continually produce a steady and fruitful crop.

The main task to produce a good pumpkin crop, according to Hutton, is to keeping the weeds around the vegetable down. Hutton said pumpkins can be "picky" to take care of, but it really all depends on the pumpkin.

According to Hutton, Coppal has always shipped surplus pumpkins to a few regular customers in the area, but this year, they have picked up some new customer farms who's pumpkin crops were affected by the hurricane. These new customers, according to Hutton, are scattered throughout New Hampshire.

Over in Durham at DeMeritt Hill Farm, the positive pumpkin spirit continues to thrive. DeMeritt's pumpkin crop was also not disturbed by Hurricane Irene, although the farm did lose some apple trees because of the high winds. Luckily, before Irene struck, employees of DeMeritt took proactive measures and sheltered the at risk peaches and other fruit in danger of being hit the hardest.

For more information on the locations, prices, hours and "what's best" for each farm, visit their websites or call their farm stands.



John Huff/Staff photographer
Harvested pumpkins wait to be picked up from their patch at DeMeritt Farm in Durham.

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