

Brett Pfizenmaier – Pumpkin Patch

This is Kansas Profile. I'm Ron Wilson, director of the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development at Kansas State University.

“The perfect pumpkin.” That’s the objective of a young farm entrepreneur whose interest in a pumpkin seedling 4-H project has grown into a business of its own. It’s today’s Kansas Profile.

Brett Pfizenmaier and his brother Eric are owner/operators of the Pfizenmaier Pumpkin Patch. Their parents, Pat and Maureen Pfizenmaier, farm west of Clay Center.

Bobby Bulk, a family friend, helped the Pfizenmaiers with their field crops. He also loved to garden, and that knowledge would prove helpful in the future.

Brett and his brother were active in 4-H. One year Brett tried a 4-H project to learn about germination of seedlings using a nice, big pumpkin seed as an example. He planted and watered the seed and watched it grow.

After it sprouted and emerged, Brett didn’t want to just throw the seedling away, so he brought it home and planted it. In fact, he ultimately planted an 80 x 100 square foot field of pumpkins. Unfortunately, it seemed that about everything that could go wrong did go wrong.

“That first year was close to a flop,” Brett said. “We had bugs and weeds.” In the end, they produced about 100 pumpkins and gourds altogether, and they learned a lot. They tried again the next year, and with help from family friend and garden guru Bobby Bulk, they expanded production. They have grown and produced pumpkins ever since.

Brett got a degree in agronomy from K-State and returned to the farm. He married Jenna and they now have a two year old named Will. Brett’s brother Eric is now a sophomore in agronomy. He works on weekends.

The Pfizenmaiers farm the traditional crops of wheat, soybeans, grain sorghum and corn and operate a cow-calf herd. Brett and Eric also produce and market the pumpkins.

The Pfizenmaier family farmhouse is located directly on Highway 24, so it is a visible and convenient place for customers to stop. Each fall Brett and Eric set up a stand with straw bales attractive displays to market the pumpkins. It is known as the Pfizenmaier Pumpkin Patch.

About 25 percent of their production is sold wholesale to other vendors, but most of it is sold directly to retail customers at the stand on the farm.

Every year the Pfizenmaiers rotate the growing fields to a different part of the farm so as to help control insects. Once the stand opens, Brett inventories the stand daily and picks and replenishes products as needed.

“Our customers seem to like the fact that our pumpkins are pre-picked and convenient for them to pick up,” Brett said. Another remarkable factor is the number of alternatives. These are not all plain, orange pumpkins. The Pfizenmaiers offer various sizes, colors and related types, such as gourds, squash, jack-o-lanterns, pie pumpkins, giants, and more.

“We offer around 26 different varieties of pumpkins and gourds each year, and we are always upgrading and changing them,” Brett said. “The perfect pumpkin is out there somewhere, and we’re working on it.”

Brett especially enjoys interaction with repeat customers through the years. He's sold to visitors from as far away as Colorado and Texas. Sales are also strong to customers from large and small communities in the region, such as Manhattan and Beloit plus rural towns such as Clifton, population 542, and Glasco, population 520. Now, that's rural.

The Pfizenmaiers work hard to care for their pumpkins. "We do it all by hand," Brett said. That includes planting and weeding. "It's not easy to do," Brett said. "It requires constant monitoring for fungus, squash bugs, and cucumber beetles."

Pfizenmaier Pumpkin Patch is now in its fourteenth year. That first plot of 100 pumpkins has grown to three to five acres producing several thousand pumpkins annually. For more information, go to Facebook and search for Pfizenmaier Pumpkin Patch.

The perfect pumpkin and a great customer experience: That's the goal of Brett and Eric from Pfizenmaier Pumpkin Patch. They are making a difference by diversifying their farming operation and responding to this market. Now the fall season is here. It's a perfect time to go on a quest for the perfect pumpkin.

For the Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development, this is Ron Wilson with Kansas Profile.