

Pumpkin Patch Carves Out New Agribusiness Niche

In fairy tales, pumpkins turn into coaches; in Dundas, Virginia pumpkins turn into the latest successful agribusiness venture for one farm family. Producing and providing 'genuine farm charm' is the way the Parrish family has reinvented agribusiness on a four-generation piece of land in Lunenburg County called the Parrish Pumpkin Patch.

Currently, two students of the Southside Virginia Community College Agribusiness program have the cool job of working there as interns. Students gain hands-on experience to complement classroom training and determine if the responsibilities of the internship position match future full-time employment interests. The internship can also provide insights into many different facets of the business.

The Parrish' family has been instrumental to the College's Agribusiness program by providing internships and jobs to students. Casey Early of Keysville interns at the PPP. She has plans to continue her SVCC studies by transferring to Virginia Tech. Caitlin Lee of Kenbridge is also interning at the pumpkin farm and plans to continue studies online for her four-year degree. Other SVCC students who have been a part of the Patch team include Taylour Edmonds, Kelli Haizlip, Wade Bagley, Will Daniel and Taylor Robbins

Edmonds said of her experience, "It was a job: I got paid, I worked, I hustled, I complained on occasion, I sweated, I organized, and so on. I did not, however, ever have a day at Parrish Pumpkin Patch that I did not look forward to."

This innovative farm provides a great 'lab' for classes at the College. Recently, a class from the College spent a day at the farm observing the events as three school busloads of children descended.

PPP is a family affair and the idea was hatched by Liz and Jeff Parrish about nine years ago. With help from their three children and their parents, the venture has grown and morphed into a portion of the farm's annual income. They grow pumpkins from seeds in flats, transfer to the ground and tend to them until harvest.

Besides getting a pumpkin at the patch, entertainment includes an Imax theater experience in a repurposed 75-foot silo, a hayride, trip through a corn maze, farm animals and corn bins to jump in. There are also places to take photos and picnic. The pumpkin patch operates seven days a week during the month of October.

Jeff Parrish noted that the farm combines the old with the new. He said they still farm soybeans, corn and pumpkins in a place where a dairy farm stood for forty years. The farm has been featured on the Virginia Is For Lovers website as a fall event.

The parrishpumpkinpatch.com website tells the whole story. As noted in the About Us section, “The family’s favorite part of the May-November process is the PEOPLE along the journey; their supporters and staff, returning faithfuls and all the newcomers, young and old. But especially, the gratification felt by being able to run the business at their farm, where at the end of each draining day, they can take a short walk to the back door of their humble abode, and crash.”

Eli Parrish, son and integral part of the operation, studied Agribusiness at SVCC and now attends Virginia Tech to complete a four-year degree.