



**Oregon State University**  
**Extension Service**  
**Marion County**

## **Farms still offering fall/winter activities and sales with additional safety measures**

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*A sunny October day at E.Z. Orchards Harvest Festival. Photo credit: Audrey Comerford*

The sun was shining most of October 2020 as families showed up at pumpkin patches, masked and social distancing in their household groups. Kids still ran through the fields looking for the perfect pumpkin, while taking more hand sanitizing breaks than they have in past years. Large signs at the entrance to the farms, like the ones at E.Z. Orchards Farm Market near Salem, informed visitors about what to expect, and educated them on the proper COVID-19 precautions. The interaction with farm staff was different too, although you could still imagine their friendly customer service smile behind the mask. Plexiglass separates the cashiers from the paying customer and friendly chatter still takes place, if at a louder volume in order to be heard. Tape and stickers on the floor of farm markets, remind visitors to remain 6 feet apart. Bottles of disinfectant are everywhere: behind the counters, on picnic tables, in the staffs' hands as they walk around, and at pump stations dotted throughout the farm. And even

though these changes are very noticeable and perhaps a bit inconvenient, plenty of people still came to the farms to celebrate this fall tradition.

For the most part, visitors followed the guidelines and were thankful to have a place to take the family for some sort of fun and near-normalcy. Even though several farms opted to limit their fall activities from what they have done in the past due to difficulties sanitizing and the inability to social distance, there were still plenty of fall classics to engage in. Corn mazes, pumpkin patches, U-pick apples, hayrides, and animal barns were just some of the activities offered at a number of farms in Marion County. Early reports show farm products and produce sales were on par with last year and in some cases sales were up. Some farms even planted more pumpkins than in 2019 and were

sold out by Halloween. U-pick apple orchards are also reporting good numbers, some even having to close early for the season due to their crop being picked out.

People are looking to get out of the house and buy directly from the source. They want to support farms and local businesses more and some of them feel safer going to a farm stand than the supermarket. This trend is expected to continue into winter as more restrictions are placed on the public and businesses in order to help mitigate the spread of COVID-19. And of course, farms are still farming. Some Christmas tree farms, U-cut and pre-cut, have opened earlier than usual in order to help spread out crowds. A few



*Informational signs, including "Facemasks Required" at the entrance to E.Z. Orchard Harvest Festival. Photo credit: Audrey Comerford*

farms like Tucker Tree Farm opened November 20, a week before Thanksgiving, to give the option of early decorating. Other locations will move to a time slot booking system, like some pumpkin patches opted to do this fall. People are looking for extra holiday cheer as we move into the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the pandemic in Oregon and the farms are well-positioned to offer relief.

Just like with the fall activities, farms will be ready to offer their products safely this winter with outstanding customer service. Whether it is a fresh cut Oregon Christmas tree, a bottle of delicious Oregon wine, meat for a special dinner, locally grown fall and winter produce, or chocolate covered hazelnuts, consider buying directly from the source this holiday season. Before venturing out make sure you check the farm's Facebook page or website for hour changes, crop updates and COVID-19 guidelines. And always bring a mask along and follow posted instructions at the farm. By shopping directly from the farm, not only will you be doing good by supporting your local farmer, but you will also be

getting a high-quality product grown and produced right here in Oregon. It's the safest and most meaningful way to shop this holiday season.

In Marion County, Bauman's Farm and Garden and E.Z. Orchards Farm Market are open all year-long, including winter.