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Picking the Perfect Pumpkin More Challenging This Year *Wholesale prices expected to increase by 20 percent*

ROCHESTER – The pumpkin harvest is underway in Monroe County and is slightly later than usual due to cool and wet conditions experienced during the growing season. Several New York growers have indicated that markets for pumpkins are stronger this year because of decreased acreage, hail damage and soaring input costs. Pumpkin wholesale prices in the Northeast and Midwest are expected increase by as much as 20 percent when compared to last year. Retail prices are expected to range from 25 to 39 cents a pound - similar to last year - and remain stable throughout the season.

Overall, pumpkins tend to be heavier in weight and size due to abundant rains, however, wet and cool conditions have prompted concerns about storage among many growers. Pumpkins usually keep for at least two to three months if they are properly handled before harvest and well cured before storage. Bouts of sunshine during September have helped improve the color of much of the pumpkin crop.

Picking the perfect pumpkin can be a challenge. When considering the worthiness of a pumpkin, following are a few pointers.

- Expect pumpkins to come in many different shades of orange and vary in shape. Pumpkins tend to be either deep ribbed or have a smooth surface, and have a round or flat shoulder. (The shoulder is the area where the stem is anchored across the top of the pumpkin.)
- Envision a face and a back to the pumpkin, especially if it is going to be carved. Look at the pumpkin from all sides to make sure it has solid color over its entire surface.

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- Check the bottom of the pumpkin for decay and to ensure it will sit level once at home. Signs of decay include bruises, soft spots, scars and mold.
- Inspect the stem of the pumpkin to ensure it is solid and firmly anchored. A damaged stem may encourage a pumpkin to decay prematurely. Always carry a pumpkin by the bottom to decrease risk damage to the stem.
- Store pumpkins in a cool, dry place prior to carving and displaying. Do not store or sit pumpkins directly on a concrete or brick surface. Whenever possible, display a pumpkin on wood or some other type of stand to promote air movement underneath it.
- Bring pumpkins indoors if the weather forecast calls for the threat of freezing temperatures.

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