



Media Release

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Farmers' Plant and Prepare for Giants

May 15 through June 15 is prime giant pumpkin planting season in San Luis Obispo County. It takes around 150 days from time of planting to mature a giant pumpkin into its final staggering size and weight. Unlike standard backyard pumpkins, serious pumpkin growers say growing giants is a full time hobby.

Experienced growers began cultivating their growing areas in April by preparing a 20' x 20' area. Compost high in nitrogen, potassium and phosphorus is amended into the ground to create a sandy loam soil with the optimum growing characteristics for the plant.

As many people are off on summer vacations, giant pumpkin growers are home tending to their vines, protecting them from harsh weather, fertilizing their plant and then pollinating the flowers that will become the only giant pumpkin grown on the entire vine.

Once the fruit sets, pumpkin growers switch to a fertilizer rich in potassium and phosphorus and water their plant with 20 gallons of water a day to provide the squash with the nutrients it needs to grow; and grow it will, nearly 30 lbs a day for the next four weeks.

As the pumpkin gains weight, the farmers will become even more excited and paranoid. Each night the pumpkin growers will tuck their prize in under a blanket that will keep the pumpkin warm and protected from the elements and pests.

If all goes as planned, the record sized pumpkin will be harvested from the vine on October 16, lifted into the grower's truck, and transported to the San Luis Obispo County Great Pumpkin Contest in Downtown San Luis Obispo to win big prizes.

This all starts, however, with a sprout, and not just any pumpkin sprout, either a specially selected giant pumpkin seed that was specially chosen for its genetics. To aid growers, special sprouts will be available for free at the Farm Bureau office June 1 – 13 on a first come first serve offering.

400 sprouts will be handed out at the 4-H Field Day at the Paso Robles Events Center, on June 14, by the San Luis Obispo County Young Farmers and Ranchers Committee.

Preparations for the Third Annual Great Pumpkin Contest are underway. For more information on the contest and to download growing tips and information visit www.slofarmbureau.org.

Thirty-one growers of all ages from throughout San Luis Obispo County entered 43 pumpkins, weighting a total of more than two tons, into the second annual Great Pumpkin Contest. The top-three heaviest pumpkins, which won prizes from Coast National Bank, belonged to Brian Evans of San Luis Obispo-606 pounds (\$750); Rick Tibben of Nipomo-580 pounds (\$500); and Randy Cavanaugh of Arroyo Grande-562 pounds (\$250).

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Mission Statement:

"To lead San Luis Obispo County in the protection, promotion and advocacy for the benefit of our members and community"