

(9/20/23 – District Administrator’s Corner Article)

Why does everything smell like pumpkin spice, all of a sudden? Cinnamon, ginger, allspice, clove, nutmeg ... it’s as if the season has an assigned scent.

Recently, while listening to National Public Radio while I mowed my grass out in Bear Valley, I listened to talk radio speak about the history of the PSL (yes, Instagram fame has even abbreviated the Pumpkin Spiced Latte). As they analyzed, it was shared that even as food trends come and go, the Pumpkin Spice Latte is here forever. Even if it is an expensive and iconic seasonal beverage, nowhere in the entire program did they mention the pumpkin...the actual plant that is grown and becomes a part of celebrating the change of the season.

The first day of fall is Saturday, September 23, 2023—the same day as the autumnal equinox in the Northern Hemisphere. And, fall is synonymous with coming back to school and pumpkins. The round bright orange globe (actually a fruit) has become a symbol of harvest and bountiful crops. And based on tourism and agriculture, autumn is an incredibly important time for Wisconsin. Indigenous to the western hemisphere, pumpkins have been an important food source for thousands of years in the Americas.

Nearly all the first voyagers to the Wisconsin territory, whether an explorer or settler, remarked on the pumpkins they encountered in the Americas. Historically, Samuel de Champlain and Jacques Cartier saw pumpkins in Canada in the 16th century grown by indigenous residents; and Zebulon Pike is on record for analyzing the Pawnee method of drying pumpkin slices in the sun to reduce its size in the early 19th century. Missionaries Florantha and Granville Sprout recounted using local pumpkins for pies for Ojibwe children on Madeline Island in 1838 (wpr.org/fall).

The United States Department of Agriculture summarizes that just south of us, Illinois maintains its leading position in pumpkin acreage, harvesting more than twice as many pumpkin acres as any of the other top states, at 15,900 acres. Pumpkin supplies from around Wisconsin have targeted the seasonal fresh market for ornamental uses and home processing (USDA.gov). Here in Wisconsin, growers mainly produce jack-o'-lantern type pumpkins, but there has been a resurgence of celebrating the fruit for its nutritional value beyond the scent in a candle or fancy coffee.

Classrooms and hallways across River Valley will soon be filled with fall leaves, scarecrows, and jack-o-lanterns. At the root of this pumpkin trend is agriculture. It is about the seasons around us, the fruits and vegetables that we can grow, and the celebration of the harvest. As the stores start to stock Halloween candies and scented candles, and coffee shops feature fall spices, remember to thank a farmer. The family farms around us are the source for the celebration.

Sincerely,

Loren Glasbrenner, District Administrator
River Valley School District