



#FridaysOnTheFarm: Thinking Outside the Pumpkin Box

Each Friday meet farmers, producers, and landowners through our [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) stories. Visit local farms, ranches, forests, and resource areas where USDA customers and partners *do right and feed everyone*.

This Friday meet Dan Tucker and his family, owners of Yellow Prairie Farms near Caldwell, Texas. This diverse farm grows a wide assortment of specialty crops - notably pumpkins for Halloween.

Thinking outside of the box has never been a problem for Texas farmer Dan Tucker and his family, who own and operate Yellow Prairie Farms near Caldwell, Texas. When Dan and his wife Pam started working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service more than six years ago, it became a learning adventure in working together to help them achieve their goal of running a diversified operation.

Dan says he was “bit by the farming bug” as a child growing up working on his foster parent’s farm. His love for farming continued into adulthood working with his family to develop a large backyard garden. Through blood, sweat and tears, a lot of hard work, and creative thinking, it has grown into a large diversified farm operation.

The Tuckers grow a wide variety of specialty crops including heirloom melons, pumpkins, cucumbers, tomatoes, specialty okra, green beans, cantaloupes, squash, carrots, various leafy greens, purple hull peas, and black-eyed peas. Their farm also has chickens, eggs, and fresh raw honey.

Conservation Makes a Difference

Dan’s passion for farming and conservation can be heard as he talks about the family’s efforts to expand the products they grow more efficiently and effectively. He is the first to share how he enjoys working with his local NRCS staff and how they walk across the land with him to discuss his ideas and land conservation needs.

“Since there is such a small profit margin on our production, we are continuously learning through our own efforts on the farm – by working with NRCS staff and from others – about ways to improve our operation and make it more efficient and cost effective,” said Dan.

Dan says he, his family, and their staff are committed to protecting pollinators and beneficial insects on the farm by using organic or natural soaps and sprays, and not spraying during the day when

the helpful bugs are out in force. They have learned that beneficial insects help them control bad pests. They have also added pollinator habitat using cover crops to help improve their crop pollination and production.

The Tucker's innovative thinking has also led to their farm having one of the largest systems of seasonal high tunnels in Texas, developed as part of their NRCS conservation plan. The seasonal high tunnels provide environmental benefits as well as help increase production value per acre.

NRCS provided Conservation Technical Assistance and financial assistance through the Environmental Qualities Incentive Program on an irrigation pipeline for the high tunnel system and for installing a towable center pivot for the field crops. This system allows the Tuckers to easily water their crops with gravity flow from the water storage tanks.

"Used properly, the seasonal high tunnels are the best environmental decision we have ever made," said Dan. "They help us reduce water usage and fertilizer consumption by 90 percent on the farm, which reduces any runoff into the Davidson Creek watershed."

Giving Back to the Community

Dan grew pumpkins and gourds last fall on 12 acres and he credits a diversified crop mix and soil health practices for the large yield of more than 312,000 pounds. Some of the pumpkins and gourds were donated in October to the Harrie P. Woodson Memorial Library in Caldwell, Texas. October was a perfect time for Dan to make the donation since the library used the gourds and pumpkins during a story time program to teach children and parents where their food comes from. Each child had the opportunity to take home a pumpkin for Halloween.

"I'm passionate about what I do, and I want to share that passion with others," Dan added. "If someone is passionate about farming, willing to learn and work hard to accomplish their goals, I am willing to take the time to teach them how to farm and how to be successful."

Planning for the Future

The Tuckers are planting more than 25 varieties of fruit trees for a "pick your own" orchard that will be ready for limited picking in two years and full commercial operation in three years.

"Besides providing healthy varieties of berries, fruits and specialty items, we want to get people out to the farm year-round, so they have a fun educational time while they are picking their own food," concluded Dan. "Then they can see and learn how Goji berries and Kiwis can be grown in Texas, plus have the interactive experience of how all these fresh grown items look, feel, and taste."



More Information

USDA offers a variety of risk management, disaster assistance, loan, and conservation programs to help agricultural producers in the United States weather ups and downs in the market and recover from natural disasters as well as invest in improvements to their operations. [Learn about additional programs.](#)

For more information about USDA programs and services, [contact your local USDA service center.](#)

Contact your [local service center](#) to learn more about USDA resources and programs to restore wetland ecosystems on your working land.

Join the Conversation

Follow the #FridaysOnTheFarm story series and other news you can use on [farmers.gov](#) and our social media channels: [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), [Flickr](#), and [Facebook](#).