



August 21, 2017

Dear Teachers and Parents,

As we prepare for the annual pumpkin give away at Venetucci Farm, we anticipate being asked the question, **“can we eat the pumpkins?”** While we’ve always encouraged consumption of the petite pie pumpkins in the past, this year it’s a little more complicated.

As you may know, last summer the aquifer that feeds the wells on the farm tested above the EPA health advisory for PFOS and PFOA. These are two chemicals widely used in manufacturing, including in firefighting foam at Air Force bases around the country. An EPA review of scientific research related to health effects of exposure through drinking water resulted in the lowering of the acceptable exposure levels. Exercising the greatest amount of caution, the Pikes Peak Community Foundation Board responded by ceasing all sales of farm product. At the time little was known about how plants react to the presence of these chemicals in the water.

Since that time we have learned more. We sent produce samples to a certified lab in Canada, worked with researchers at the Colorado School of Mines and UCCS to assess water and soil levels, and conferred with the State Epidemiologist to better understand results. When domestic well water tests revealed PFOS/PFOA levels above the health advisory, we quickly secured an alternative source of drinking water for the humans and animals on the farm. **On the bright side, lab results from produce testing showed no detection or very low detection of the compounds in the samples, including pumpkin. After reviewing the data on produce residue levels, the state epidemiologist confirmed that “the identified levels were well below the health screening levels for fruits and vegetables”.**

12/05/2017, Mike Van Dyke, Ph.D., Chief, Environmental Epidemiology, Occupational Health, and Toxicology Branch, CDPHE.

We also learned something about the business of risk assessment, particularly when it comes to food. Because there is inherent risk involved in putting anything in your body, no one can give a 100% guarantee that any food is 100% safe. **We implement good food safety policy and practice on the farm. We build organic matter in the soil to provide the best possible growing conditions for the plants. We don’t spray pesticides or herbicides. We encourage safe handling of farm produce at home. But we can’t provide a 100% guarantee of “safety”. No one can. The best we can do is share the information we have and let each consumer make decisions for her/himself.**

That’s the short answer. The pumpkin patch is looking great. We’ve seen what hail can do to the pumpkins, but we’ve never seen this much rain in all our years of farming. Farmers on the East Coast are plagued with damage from powdery mildew from too much rain. Hopefully we won’t experience that.

Looking forward to your visit in October!

Susan Gordon & Patrick Hamilton
Venetucci Farmers

David Rudin
Education Coordinator