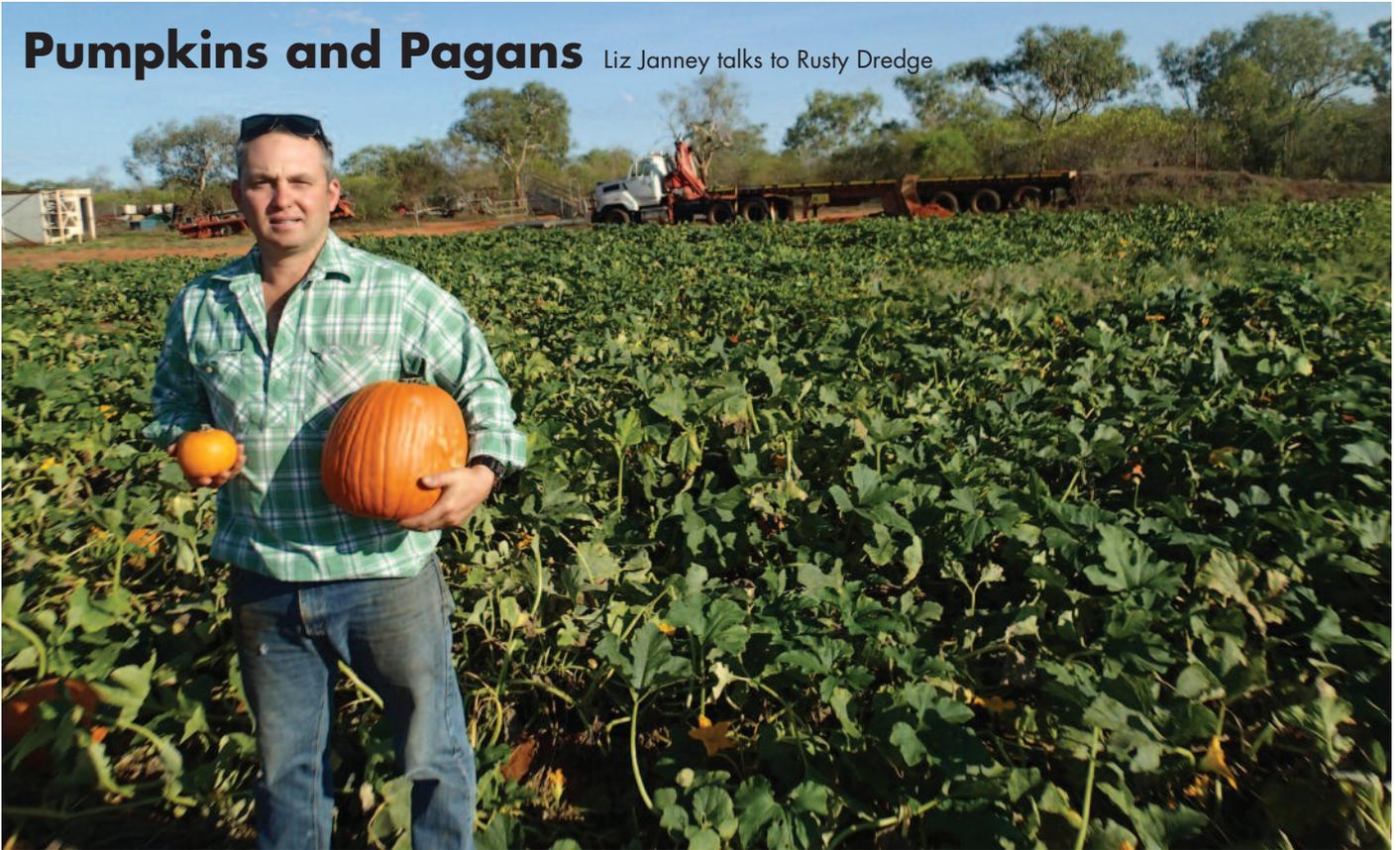


Pumpkins and Pagans

Liz Janney talks to Rusty Dredge



I went to meet Rusty Dredge who starting growing Jack-o-Lantern pumpkins 7 years ago at his property called Ginmore just a little passed 12 Mile. In 2016 he harvested 15,000 for our local Australian market plus he is dipping his toes into the overseas market!!!! I didn't know that besides Christmas and Easter that Halloween is the next biggest confectionary/event splurge that the world makes. These pumpkins are beautiful round and very orange all being grown for the Halloween festival. It's a worldwide craze and Broome is part of it.

This is Rusty's story

I spent some time on cattle stations in the north, from Halls Creek down. In 1995 we went through Broome and thought it was an okay place but we continued our journey down to Perth. After a while I decided to go back to my roots in the cattle industry..

When I bought this block it was a mango farm but I decided that crops would be more beneficial. Seven years ago I was approached by a lady who had developed the seed for the 'halloween pumpkin" in Queensland. So we started with a very small trial of 1,000 seeds.

I didn't know much about Halloween and I started doing some research. The actual ceremony comes from Ireland and not America and is one of the oldest holidays celebrated. It is all to do with pagans scaring away demons. The history of halloween is conflicting but very interesting.

2016 has been our biggest harvest yet. It is all to do with timing and weather. These pumpkins grow well above the 26th parallel. We have to be careful their size is consistent and they don't become too big which can happen. I think we are too kind to them. In Australia there are only 3 growers of the Jack-o-Lantern pumpkins. We plant the seeds in June and it takes from 90 to 100 days to maturity. Harvest time which starts in mid September is frenetic as we are at the mercy of the retailers as they want the pumpkins by a certain date and need to be delivered to the shops on time. They require a certain size, colour and shape so any rejects go to the cattle yards as feed.

Once they are cut from the vine which is early in the morning, we leave them for a couple of hours to bleed, then they need to be collected that day and shipped from Broome pretty quickly. They are trucked to Perth and to Adelaide plus we have some little "Jacks" going to Singapore for a trial.

Each year it keeps growing and I feel that there is a market for the little “Jacks” in restaurants as decoration and gourmet product. We have about 16 workers who help with the harvest and they come from all over the world and various professions – we have had german biologist, ski instructors, arborists. Facebook and Gumtree are the places that seem to work for us to find our workers – they are all foreign, we don’t seem to have Australian backpackers.

At Ginmore Farm we also grow jap pumpkins, watermelons, squash, zucchini, cabbage, lettuce, chillies, tomatoes, asparagus and this is all for the local market. We started selling this year at the Broome Courthouse Markets and the feedback has been really positive – people love our fresh produce.

We are always looking for new markets, plus sometimes someone might have a failed crop and we can fill the gap. It is all about timing and seeing what the marketplace requires. We are into exploring new ventures and are in the process of trialling asparagus. There is always something new to learn as to what will grow above the 26th parallel.

Rusty’s tip: When you pull the seeds out of the pumpkin roast them and put a bit of chilli and garlic and they are a great snack!

Recipe for Pumpkin Pie by Kelly McConkey

- 3 eggs beaten
- 400g cooked pumpkin
- 1 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup golden syrup
- 1/3 cup melted butter
- 1 tsp vanilla
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp nutmeg
- 2 x savoury pie shells
- 1 cup pecans

In blender combine pumpkin, eggs, sugar, syrup, butter, vanilla, cinnamon and nutmeg. Pour into pie shells. Arrange pecans. Bake in moderate oven for 45 minutes. Serve with big dollop of cream. Very delicious.

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