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Episode Transcript

[00:00:02] **Speaker A:** Tis the season. Pumpkins, Pumpkins everywhere. If you're unsure of what to do with your pumpkins that have long outstayed their welcome on your porch, front yard, or your stoop, please stay tuned. We'll talk about options for giving them to farms and sanctuaries and why you shouldn't just chuck them into the woods. We welcome guest Jennifer Seifert of Pumpkins for Pigs, and we get into all the details.

[00:00:28] **Speaker B:** Let's start by telling us who you are, what Pumpkins for Pigs is all about, and how it got started.

[00:00:36] **Speaker C:** Yeah, so my name is Jennifer Seifert, and I live in Northern Virginia. And I have an IT change management background. Organizational change, organizational transformations. And so that's from a professional side. I grew up in and around farming areas, not on a farm or anything like that. And I'm just a huge animal lover, so, you know, I might pet your dog before I talk to you. So. And how it started was every year I was buying pumpkins like everybody else, and I decorate my front step and it looks great. And then, you know, I go out and buy a wreath, and I'm thinking, okay, well, a little early. It's fine. And then Thanksgiving comes. I'm like, okay, and what am I going to do with this exactly? Because it's not molded. Assuming it's still cold. It's not molded, and it's fine. And I can't eat it. Like, I did the research. Is it something I can eat? No. Jack O'LANTERNS are its own special breed. Special breed. And. Yeah. And they're grown specifically for decoration. So 2 billion of them are grown every year in this country. 1.6 will be bought or otherwise gone to market, and most of those will end up in the landfill. And so I didn't know all of those numbers at the time, but I went out to one of our farmers and I bought some eggs one afternoon, and I talked to him and I said, like, I just don't have any other ideas. Like, I can't. Where am I going to take them? And I was really thinking he was going to tell me there was a compost pile or something, and he said, no, bring them by. My animals would love them, and the chickens will eat them, the cattle will eat them. And he had a pretty, you know, probably 10 acres or so. So nothing huge.

[00:02:14] **Speaker B:** Yeah. Was that supposed to. Did you know that they ate them at that point, or.

[00:02:18] **Speaker C:** No, No. I mean, we know that pigs eat everything.

[00:02:21] **Speaker B:** Right?

[00:02:22] **Speaker C:** Old adage. Right. But. And that's the thing, is that this has been such A learning journey over. This is our eighth season. So every, every season, every year, almost every day is a learning lesson. And so, you know, the pig part, I got that. I didn't know. Okay, well, cattle will eat them and goats will eat them and sheep will eat them. Depending upon what type of sheep you have, some of them are a little persnickety. Chickens love them. They'll just devour the insides. They won't eat the outside, but they absolutely devour them. I had no idea that you could just feed chickens scraps similar to how you're doing it with pigs. So it's been a really interesting journey to learn all of these things as I go.

[00:03:02] **Speaker B:** That's wonderful. And you know, I got an education being on your site because I said, oh, I didn't realize that you could donate all this, all these different items to all these sanctuaries and farms. In 2018, it said you had what, 70? And now you're up to 600 participating farms across the United States. Explain how you got that to how you spread the word and how you got the message out about what you were doing.

[00:03:32] **Speaker C:** Yeah, so I started out by. So I went home and I went and looked and I called everybody that was on the farmers market list and then the fall farm tour list, and I said, would you be willing to try this out? And so I ended up with, I think it was eight or nine farms here in Loudoun County. And then I had an animal sanctuary just over the border in Maryland. And so we doubled each year. And I was kind of surprised. It's a super busy period of time in the year. Are people really going to do it and is it going to hold? And then the pandemic happened and of course everyone's wondering what's going to hold. It's still an outdoor activity. People could get away. And I was putting the information out on various social media outlets and a homesteader took us and dropped us our information into a few homesteader groups. And I had over 70 new registrants overnight in a 24 hour period. I about lost my mind because I was like, oh, crap.

[00:04:22] **Speaker B:** Wow, that's amazing.

[00:04:23] **Speaker C:** And so it just kept, you know, that's that word of mouth. And so it just kept going from there. And then we had some media outlets like Find Us and they did a local media spot. I didn't even know about it. I still don't really know how that happened. That's the one you see on the front of our page.

[00:04:42] **Speaker B:** Yeah, yeah.

[00:04:43] **Speaker C:** And National Geographic picked us up. I'm like, oh, my gosh, we're famous. Like, legitimacy. NPR picked us up. AP picked us up. IHeartRadio actually was one of the biggest surprises because they picked us up first, and it just sort of exploded from there.

[00:04:58] **Speaker B:** Amazing.

[00:04:59] **Speaker C:** Yeah. And so we just kept adding. We added a couple of programs because of the. What was happening in the world. And so we added the Backyard Extras program because people were built, you know, during the pandemic, everyone had these big gardens, and they didn't have an office to take them to. So.

[00:05:15] **Speaker B:** Yeah, explain that program a little bit. When I was investigating the pumpkin program, I saw that as well, and I think that's something fantastic, too, for people to know about.

[00:05:25] **Speaker C:** Yes. And I've since learned that if you have a Master gardeners program near you, they will actually help you coordinate getting it to a farm as well.

[00:05:33] **Speaker B:** Great.

[00:05:34] **Speaker C:** And I didn't know that at the time, but, yes, the intent was, hey, you have more than you can use. And, I mean, I always think of how many zucchinis are sitting out of people's driveways and tomatoes, and they're all viable, but you may literally just not be able to can them all or whatever it is that you need to do with them. And so that gives you another option. It's nutritious. It's as fresh as it gets. It's, you know, it doesn't have any of the chemicals and stuff on it. It's a really, really quality feed. And if you don't have a food pantry to give it to or someone like that, which they. They'll take everything that you can give them,

especially as they've had a significant increase in need over the last year. That is a really excellent outlet for folks.

[00:06:17] **Speaker B:** That's wonderful. While we're on that topic, have you heard or do you have a favorite success story that you'd like to highlight or a collaboration with a certain farm that you think I kind of gave you a special moment.

[00:06:34] **Speaker C:** There's always, like, I love talking to them to find out how they're using them, and. But I think the one that sticks with me is, you know, we add items to our acceptance list based on the need, and we. My biggest concern is mold and rot, and I don't want any of that. We want to be additive. We don't want to create more work for them. And I had a. An animal sanctuary. I don't know if there might have been a rescue, but they had gotten in a number of horses that had come in from an undesirable situation. They were very malnourished and underweight. And they said, hey, where do you know where we could find pastries and bread? We just need to get weight on them in addition to us getting all the nutrients and other things. But we've got to do something to get some weight on them. And on the one hand, for me, it was just heartbreaking to know that this was happening. On the other hand, I thought, but this gives us another place to be helpful. And bread and pastries are one of the hardest things to recycle because there's such a narrow window for them. And I've since learned it's the most wasted food in the world, not just here. And anytime that we can find that intersection of win, win, win, I'm down for it. So that story has stuck with me and I think it's a reminder of the resilience. And you never know until you ask. And you just don't know who's going to ask you that question.

[00:07:57] **Speaker B:** That's so right. And I feel like there's a lot of consum. They're not sure what they can give or they're not sure. A lot of people kind of know about the pumpkins, like you said, like, goats eat anything. And we have goats that help us eat weeds over here on the farm. So we know that pretty well. But I don't think a lot of people would know that there are other things that they can donate or you know how to donate things or. So I think that's super important that you're covering all these different aspects for people because I think it's honestly just an education thing for so many folks, like, oh, I can do that. I can give this to a farm that's going to use it and do something great with it.

[00:08:41] **Speaker C:** I think step one is right. I think you're exactly right. Step one is I have options. And I didn't know I had those options.

[00:08:47] **Speaker B:** Right. Right. So let's get to the New Jersey part. So I was a little bummed because I was like, there's got to be. We are the Garden State, as you know, so they can listen. Okay. We also have lots of farms that have livestock, too. So not just farming. So tell our listeners and folks who follow us on Insta and everywhere else, how can they. We do have lots of farms who follow us. So tell us. Tell them how they can easily do this and how much time it might take to set up. Is there a lot of labor into it or is it pretty straightforward?

[00:09:27] **Speaker C:** Yep. So first step is register with us. That's the easy part, it'll take you about five or so minutes. So you go to pumpkinsforpigs.org you click the link at the top that says register to receive or register for donations, and you'll fill out that form. That form comes to us, we vet it, we make certain that you are who you say you are, and then we'll add you to the site. New this year, we're enabling donation sites to own their profile. And what that means is you create your user ID and password, and then let's say you're a small homestead. You've reached a point where you said, hey, I can't take anymore. I don't have any more storage. You can go in there, remove all the items you're accepting and just put in. We are stuffed. And that way you can manage it, but you're not removed from the site, and then you can add yourself back in.

[00:10:16] **Speaker B:** I love that.

[00:10:17] **Speaker C:** So that gives you more autonomy, and that was something we wanted to do. It's not as smooth as I would like it to be, but the functionality is there, and it gives them the experience, the ability to do that. So that would be. Step one is to register the second part. And as part of that registration, you can decide, I want food. You know, I want the pantry extras. I want this program, I want that program, and you can decide what those are. The second part of it is we try to encourage hoas and other groups to coordinate collections. And so what we like to do is to say, if you have an HOA that's near, you reach out to them. If there's an HOA management group or you happen to know someone in some of these large neighborhoods that are being built, coordinate with them a collection. And so we have, you know, all the sort of operational side of it that we can help you get through that process. And if there's someone who's willing to champion it in that HOA or that church or scouting group or corporation even, because corporations use a lot of pumpkins to decorate their buildings. Even now, there's so many opportunities. I mean, we've even had a zoo that reached out to us that said, hey, you know, we have more than we can feed. You know, what can we do with them? So there. There's so many options, and we're here to help you figure out wherever it is that you need that help and.

[00:11:34] **Speaker B:** How long is the process to, you know, after they fill out the form, what goes. What happens next is it. You help them with the next thing, which is maybe connecting with Their community or.

[00:11:47] **Speaker C:** Yeah. So in the past, what we've done is tried to highlight every single one of them on our, on our social media and that just became unsustainable. So we, so this is the first year. We're not doing that. But what we do now is we have an icon that says, this is the first year. And so one of the things we'll be doing this year is to say, hey, look at our new donation site. Show them some extra love and appreciation and make an extra effort to support them this year. Because this is their first year. I think it's, you know, it's a two part system. Right. Everyone has a process, they're in a receiving mode. They've decided you can drop them off, you can do it this way, you can do it that way. I'm at a farmer's market, you can give it to us at that time, whatever that looks like. They've set those parameters. The next goal is to get the public, you and I, who have these items to say, yep, I'm going to take an extra few minutes out of my day and drive them out there and drop them off. And by the way, I've decided, I don't think it's worth it to just do it for the four that I have. Let me do it for my cul de sac, Let me do it for, you know, three streets in my neighborhood, whatever that looks like. And then we help you figure out how to do that collection. So we help you advertise it, to coordinate it, to get it transported, all this. We help you figure out how you're going to get all of those accomplished, how you're going to set a fundraiser, all of those things.

[00:13:07] **Speaker B:** And there's no cost to them to do this at this time.

[00:13:11] **Speaker C:** There is no cost. That's correct. We're going to have to figure that out soon, though, because we're not getting enough financial donations coming in to offset those costs. And so we'll have to figure out what that looks like in the future.

[00:13:22] **Speaker B:** And I'm glad you mentioned that because there are volunteer opportunities that you mentioned. There's donations that people can make to support your efforts. That's also on pumpkinsforpigs.org so we all. We have Brookside Farm and Patchwork Pastures are two New Jersey farms that are currently participating. It's interesting. So the Christmas tree. So we're not talking. So we're talking about pumpkins right now. And you're.

[00:13:50] **Speaker C:** Yes.

[00:13:51] **Speaker B:** And the name of the organization is Pumpkins for Pigs, but there is There are so many different things. So I'm seeing, you know, kiddie pools for ducks, Christmas trees and wreaths for, I'm assuming, goats and others. And. Okay. And then hay, straw, bread that's not moldy like you said, pumpkins, gourds, fruits, vegetables. And each location you said, could they can determine what they need, if it's more pumpkins, if they have more pigs or whatever the case may be. And that's up to them.

[00:14:26] **Speaker C:** That's up to them, yes. Yes. And they. And you know, I think in visiting one of the farms, that's how I found out that the kiddie pools were of value because I had a chance to talk to them. And they, and they. And I saw them in the yard. They said you could use those. She's like, oh, absolutely. I said, people throw them out all the time. They're 10 bucks.

[00:14:43] **Speaker B:** They're relatively.

[00:14:44] **Speaker C:** Or however much they are now, and they're relatively inexpensive. And people toss them right at Labor Day. So that seems silly. There's more use for them.

[00:14:53] **Speaker B:** Who knew they could be so valuable, those \$10 kiddie pools, right, Exactly.

[00:14:58] **Speaker C:** Yeah. And the thing of it is trying to keep. I saw her trying to keep those things clean. I mean, she just needed a couple spares just so that she could rotate them right.

[00:15:07] **Speaker B:** While she was cleaning the other.

[00:15:09] **Speaker C:** The other ones, yes. And the goats, you know, that was something else that came out of the first year was just that, you know, you have to be careful that they aren't sprayed. So that's the one thing I would want to make certain that folks understand is that if you are getting a big box store tree, there's a probably, you know, whether it's Costco or Home Depot or whatever, there's a pretty high probability that it has been sprayed in some way. So you need to ask. Those are chemicals that would not be good for the goats. Some individuals are using them there. I had one that said they submerged them in a pond to create an aquatic environment. So we want to keep that water as clean as possible. So if you're going to go out and pick, pick up a tree this year, drop your pumpkins off somewhere along the way, pick up your tree, then you know that it's locally bought and you're supporting a local business, and then you know that it's clean and you can give it back.

[00:15:54] **Speaker B:** Great, great information on every level all the way through Christmas and into the new year. Well, thank you so much, Jennifer, for coming on the show today. And I think we feel like, I certainly feel like I've gotten an education and hopefully we can get some more Jersey farms on board and get the word out.

[00:16:14] **Speaker C:** That would be fantastic. I welcome them and cheers to a great donation season.

[00:16:19] **Speaker B:** Cheers.

[00:16:22] **Speaker A:** To register your farm or sanctuary or just to donate, visit pumpkinsforpigs.org thanks for visiting with us on Green Jersey.

[00:16:32] **Speaker B:** We'll see you next time.