

VMSMA Sugarhouse Certification Program Frequently Asked Questions

1. How often will I need to be certified?

The program requires a bi-annual inspection unless the following occurs: (1) a change of ownership of the operation, (2) change of management of the operation, or (3) significant changes to the production process such as a new R/O, new evaporator, or (4) significant change to the process in which you gather sap such as: add a new sugarbush to your operation that would require you to truck sap or build a pump station. We suggest you call the Quality Director at VMSMA and they would tell you if you'd need another inspection.

2. Will you be certifying sugarhouses only in the sugaring season or also during the non-sugaring months?

In order to meet demand, we anticipate we will be certifying sugarhouses year-round. The Program requires a review of your written documentation of sugarhouse procedures, logs, and records; this review will allow the certification of the sugarhouse in the off season.

3. What maple products are covered in the Program?

The VMSMA Sugarhouse Certification Program only covers pure maple products - maple syrup, maple sugar, maple cream, and maple candy. Any maple product that introduces an ingredient to the process is not covered.

4. Is the Sugarhouse Certification Program mandatory for all sugarhouses?

Yes *and* no! It is mandatory that you follow the state and federal rules and regulations on which the Program is based. Participating in the Program to achieve certification is voluntary. So, yes, it is voluntary to become Certified... but what we are certifying is that the *required* food safety standards are being followed based on the VMSMA interpretation of how the Food Safety Modernization Act should apply to maple. However, being Certified is not a guarantee of compliance or the equivalent of a federal inspection (or an organic inspection).

The Certification is voluntary, the rules of the Program are mandatory; our version helps you cover all the bases and gives you a marketing tool to prove it.

5. Will my packer require me to be Certified under this Program?

It will be up to your individual packer if they will use this Program to replace their current mechanism for inspecting/qualifying your sugarhouse. If your packer requires Certification, then they will let you know you need to enroll.

6. By participating in this program, will I receive a discount on my insurance policy?

VMSMA has been working with several different insurance carriers to make this a possibility. While we don't have specific discount information from any insurance providers, you should contact your provider to make them aware you are participating and ask about any additional discounts.

7. Do I need to be Certified to sell my syrup wholesale to a grocery store, gift shop or restaurant?

Some retailers require a third-party inspection, but not all of them do. However, grocery chains increasingly need to trace food back to its production source, so if your retailers don't currently require Certification, they may in the future.

8. Will Vermont's Department of Agriculture, Food and Markets (VAAFMM) require me to be Certified if I sell syrup at my farm stand, farmer's markets, craft shows or similar events?

No, not at this time, but remember that the Certification checklist is based on state and federal food safety laws which you are required to follow. You should be familiar with [Vermont's maple laws](#) (Title 6, Chapter 32) as well as the [VAAFMM maple product regulations](#).

9. Do I need a water test for my sugarhouse to be Certified?

If you have a spring or well, you will be required to have an annual water inspection to be Certified.

10. I don't have running water in my sugarhouse and I use permeate for all my cleaning. Is this allowed?

For Certification, the use of permeate will only be allowed when there is a policy in place to assure the water is suitable for cleaning; this includes storage time, tank cleaning, and disposal.

11. I heard rumors that the Sugarhouse Certification Program will only allow certain types of PVC in the sugarhouse. What types of PVC will be allowed?

Only food grade PVC will be allowed in your sugarhouse in this Program. PVC that lists on the pipe “DWV” or “drain, waste, vent” is not allowed. This type of PVC has not been tested for use with sap and may leach off plasticizers, may not be made from virgin materials, and often the inside of this PVC is rougher which can make it problematic for cleaning.

12. Do I need to have a cement floor with drains in my sugarhouse in order to meet the standards of the Program?

No, you don’t need a cement floor, but you do need to have a floor that is washable.

13. If my sugarhouse has equipment that might contain lead, what is the highest reading (%) I can receive on a lead test and still be Certified?

VMSMA will not be Certifying any sugarhouse that has equipment containing lead (so the percent allowed is 0%). The solution will be to eliminate any equipment that might contain any trace of lead such as brass fittings and valves, and galvanized buckets and tanks. We understand some of the new brass is stamped “LF” for lead free and that will be allowed.

14. Do I have to have a bathroom with flush toilets in order to be Certified?

No, you can meet the requirements for bathroom facilities in a number of ways. You can rent a port-a-let from a sanitation company for the season, have an outhouse, or use bathroom facilities in your home if it is a reasonable distance from the sugarhouse. Obviously, any of these facilities would have to be located a safe distance from the sugarhouse and be kept clean.