

The official voice of Vermont sugarmakers

VERMONT *Maple* SUGAR MAKERS ASSOCIATION

Committed to the promotion and protection of the branding of Vermont maple products since 1893.

**Industry Steps
Up Protections**

Page 2

**2019 Annual
Meeting**

Page 4

**Ongoing Projects
Brief**

Page 6

Maplerama

Back Cover

VERMONT MAPLE STUDENTS: NEW OPPORTUNITIES & RESOURCES

BY MARK ISSELHARDT, UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT EXTENSION MAPLE SPECIALIST

The first ever FFA career development event (CDE) focused exclusively on maple production was held at Shelburne Farms in Shelburne, Vermont in May 2019. A CDE is essentially a competition that is designed to test skill development and prepare students for careers in the particular area of focus and results are often included in student's resume. There are CDE's for many topics including: public speaking, dairy science and forestry for example. The maple CDE was designed through a collaboration between Vermont high school agriculture/natural resources instructors, UVM Extension Maple Specialist Mark Isselhardt and UVM Graduate student/Shelburne Farms employee Lynn Wolfe.

The event consisted of an individual competition and team event. The individual competition included four separate

stations (maple tool and material identification, syrup grading, tapping skills and general knowledge). There was also a team event that required groups of students to correctly identify tools and fittings needed to connect a lateral line to a tree and test that it would conduct sap. The event was a success with 45 students competing on teams from eight Vermont high schools. One thing was clear after the competition was over, tests were grading and awards handed out; the students know a lot about maple but all can know more.

Some schools have comprehensive maple programs through which students are exposed to all aspects of the sugaring process whereas others may only cover the basics over a few weeks of the school year. In hopes of allowing more students to be prepped for the next CDE, Lynn Wolfe

developed a document entitled "Maple: A Sap to Syrup Guide, A Manual for Career and Technical Centers of Vermont." This manual is roughly 130 pages and is informed from some of the latest research in the maple industry. The manual includes chapters such as Tree Physiology, Sugarbush Management, Tapping, Sap Collection, Syrup Production, Syrup Grading, Value-added Products, Marketing and Business Planning and Climate Change. There are six appendices including a five-page tool and materials photo guide.

This project was motivated in part by an acknowledgment that the Vermont maple industry has experienced a dramatic period of growth in the last 15 years. There are more opportunities now for students to graduate high school and start their own operation or join an existing operation than ever before. There has also been a tremendous work in both maple research and products used for maple production and yet not all the newest information makes it to the high school level. While the manual was written with the high school student as the target audience, it will be a valuable resource for anyone looking to gain knowledge about maple production and will be a useful tool for training new employees of existing maple operations. A digital version of the manual will be available on the UVM Extension maple program website



A maple student at work





AGENCY STEPS UP MAPLE ACTIVITIES TO HELP INCREASE AWARENESS & PROTECT INDUSTRY

EXCERPT FROM DECEMBER'S AGRIVIEW

The Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets is investing substantial resources from our Consumer Protection and Agricultural Development Teams to work on protecting and promoting the Maple Industry in the Green Mountains. To help the Agency develop this work, the Agency would like to introduce Tucker Diego to our maple friends, with a short question and answer session.

Q: WHAT ARE YOUR NEW RESPONSIBILITIES TO SUPPORT THE MAPLE SUGAR INDUSTRY?

Tucker: Part of my role as an Agricultural Production Specialist with the Agency's Food Safety & Consumer Protection Division is to ensure the Vermont maple laws are being followed. The maple laws have been established in Vermont statutes for many years now and are focused on ensuring that consumers receive high quality maple syrup that meets grade A standards for color, favor, clarity, and density. The maple regulations also help ensure that maple products are produced in a safe way and that maple remains a healthy and safe choice for consumers.

WHAT KIND OF TRAINING HAVE YOU DONE TO GET READY FOR THIS?

I grew up on a farm, but not a sugarbush, so I've had to do a fair bit of research and training to prepare for this part of the job. I was fortunate to work alongside the Agency's previous maple expert, Henry Marckres, who many readers might know firsthand. With over 30 years of experience, Henry is a wealth of knowledge and helped train me on the techniques for grading maple syrup. I recently completed the two-day maple grading school held at the Proctor Maple Research Center in Jericho where I was able to practice grading a wide range of syrups with some of the best experts in the Northeast. The UVM Extension staff at the Proctor Center have been a great resource as I learn more about the world of maple.

WHAT WILL YOU BE LOOKING FOR WHEN INSPECTING MAPLE?

My role primarily involves checking maple products at retail stores to ensure they meet grade A standards. This means opening and sampling a small selection of maple syrup in the store to check for color, favor, clarity, and density. Each characteristic is tested separately and requires special equipment, and in the case of flavor, trained taste buds. Density is measured by a refractometer or hydrometer, color is assessed using a color comparator device and by light transmittance, clarity is assessed visually, and flavor must be tasted to ensure it meets the correct grade and doesn't contain off-favors. I also check maple product labeling requirements.

WHEN WILL INSPECTIONS BEGIN?

Periodic inspections of maple products in retail stores will begin in January 2020.

WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT THE MAPLE LAWS SINCE TAKING ON THIS NEW DUTY?

The maple laws are designed to help ensure consumers receive a high quality and safe product. This in turn helps maintain the reputation of Vermont maple products that are such highly sought after.



▲ Agricultural Production Specialist, Tucker Diego

WILL YOU BE DOING MAPLE PROMOTION?

Along with new roles for staff in the Agency's Food Safety & Consumer Protection Division, several staff from the Agricultural Development Division are working to increase maple industry outreach and promotion. Several grants were recently awarded to the team to implement market research and a multi-tiered marketing campaign that will include social media, PR, and agritourism initiatives. The program is focused on highlighting the many ways maple can be consumed, the diverse range of innovative, value-added products that showcase maple as an ingredient, and broadening the target audiences for marketing of maple to include the food service professional and the conscious consumer.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE WAY TO ENJOY MAPLE?

I love maple in just about any form, whether on snow, in a creemee, or on waffles. I also love to substitute normal sugar with maple syrup in baking and cooking. It tastes great and is a good way to incorporate a local ingredient.

*You can reach Tucker at the Agency
by phone at 802.622.4412 OR
by email, Tucker.Diego@vermont.gov*



2019 ANNUAL MEETING

BY CORY AYOTTE, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR, VMSMA

The 2019 Annual Meeting was held at The Essex Resort in Essex, Vermont on July 18th. At the beginning of the meeting, Chair Pam Green asked members to hold a moment of silence for two sugarmakers, Brian Stowe and Don Dolliver, who had recently passed away. Pam then announced that she was stepping down as Chair of VMSMA. Governor Phil Scott spoke briefly at the meeting and thanked all sugarmakers for their hard work this past sugaring season. He was proud that Vermont again was the top producing state in the nation.

Executive Director Amanda Voyer reported on the year in review and future programs. The 2018 Big E was a down year in total sales. A couple hot and humid days affected operations. However, expenses were down and after the fair, a \$50,000 check went to VMSMA, the largest revenue check to date. Maple Open House Weekend was quite successful. 140 sugarmakers participated in the weekend. The January maple conferences in Brattleboro and Hyde Park were well attended and provided a lot of educational opportunities. VMSMA is working with NOFA on a 2-3 year grant project aimed to get maple into every Vermont school. The VMSMA mobile sugarhouse was sold to the Addison County Sugar Makers' Association for \$6,000. The Agency of Agriculture has been working with VMSMA on a water quality study. Ten sugarhouses provided 500 different samples. Results from the study are still coming in. A new Free-Trial Membership program was introduced. 60 sugarmakers were

signed up at the time of the Annual Meeting. It's likely the program will be offered in 2020. A new 4th edition maple cookbook was printed. It incorporates some of the best recipes from past cookbooks as well as some new ones. The VMSMA Marketing Committee updated The Vermont Maple Times and that has been reprinted. Amanda Voyer worked with the company Eternity to develop VMSMA's online store which is now live.

Pam Green reported that the VMSMA Bylaws were revised based on member comments. The Governance Committee worked on it for two years. A revised edition has been approved by the BOD and was posted on the VMSMA website.

Alyson Eastman, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture & Laura Ginsberg, AAFM reported that engineer Pat Fry left his position. Stone Environmental is analyzing the data that Pat collected. Once the data is finalized, the findings will be sent to VMSMA. The Agency will be conducting a study next season on field applications for pan wash. They received an USDA Acer grant - \$500,000 grant for 3 years that will work on PR, a social media campaign, brand strategy work, an agriculture tourism bill, and domestic and international markets.

Pam Green reported that she is the VMSMA delegate to IMSI and the IMSI First Vice President representing the United States. The FDA has extended the deadline to 2021 on the nutrition facts panel. IMSI continues to monitor the added sugar issue, the changes in

the nutritional facts panel and other issues through a third party. IMSI is pressuring the USDA and FDA to redefine maple syrup preserving its definition as a pure and natural produce. This new definition will facilitate entrance into CODEX which will define maple syrup internationally and establish its place of origin.

Joe Frost from FMSA explained which sugarmakers have to register with the FDA. Maple operations can also fall into farms or farm mix facility categories. There is a lot of grey area if one needs to register. Every case depends on certain items. It's best to get in contact with the FDA to find out if you need to register.

The meeting ended with the presentation of the annual awards. This year's annual awards recipients were: Sugar Maker of the Year Award - Peter Purinton; Maple Person of the Year - Brad Gillilan; Sumner Williams Award - Don Dolliver and Brian Stowe





GATHER AROUND MAPLE

BY EMMA MARVIN, VMSMA CHAIR

Cold weather – is maple season. Well, it’s maple *eating* season. Piles of pancakes. Stacks of waffles. Pots of oatmeal. These traditional breakfast foods warm hearts and souls across the country. As we gather with friends and family to honor this season, we see maple make its way onto our tables for meals beyond breakfast. Glazing the turkey roasting in the oven. Hiding as the secret 'spice' in the cranberry sauce simmering on the stove. It's the anchor to temptation's chain that tugs us to the maple pecan pie on the cooling rack. Just one more taste. Maple graces our food with flavor that’s wholesome and comforting – as part of the menu at any part of the day. So, in this winter season, I hope your tables are full of good food (maple sweetened, to suit your tastes) and surrounded by family and friends. May the season be prosperous and merry – and filled with plenty of sweet memories. And, may you find moments for reconnection and regeneration... and preparation for the maple sugaring season ahead!

2019 BIG E RECAP

BY CORY AYOTTE, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR, VMSMA

VMSMA Big E Manager Mike Christian reported that this year’s Big E was a great success. He attributed the success to two major factors. One, the weather at the fair was remarkable (only five hours of rain during the whole fair). Two, the Maine building did not have a maple booth this year. VMSMA saw an increase of approximately \$20,000 in revenue between this year and 2018. Maple cream doughnuts, which were re-introduced to the booth last year were very popular with customers. On average, the booth was selling 15 dozen doughnuts a day midweek and 25 dozen a day on weekends. Cotton candy and maple candy did well. There were no humid days which lead to favorable candy making conditions. VMSMA roughly doubled the sales of container maple sugar compared to 2018. Maple syrup was so popular that a total of 60 cases of maple syrup had to be brought down to the Big E at various points. Mike is already beginning to plan next year’s Big E. If you’re interested in volunteering, please reach out to Mike Christian: Mike.Christian@greenmountain-power.com or Cory Ayotte: cory@vermontmaple.org



Left to Right: Barb Phelps, one of the many Big E volunteers, Maple candy is made on-site at the Big E, The Purinton brothers showing off the sweet stuff.

YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Executive Committee

Chair, Emma Marvin
Vice Chair - Arnie Piper
Secretary - Dave Mance
Treasurer - Mark Bigelow
At Large - Jason Gagne

Staff

Communications Director,
Cory Ayotte
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Arnold Coombs | Coombs Family Farms, Brattleboro, VT

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Mark Bigelow | Maple Grove Farms of VT, St. Johnsbury, VT

Emma Marvin | Butternut Mt. Farms, Morrisville, VT

Peter Purinton | Huntington, VT

Kerry Sedutto | The Sugarman, Hardwick, VT





OTHER ON-GOING VMSMA PROJECTS

BY ARNIE PIPER, VICE CHAIR, VMSMA

MAPLE IN EVERY SCHOOL

VMSMA continues to coordinate with NOFA-VT on the Maple in Every School Project. VMSMA and NOFA-VT developed a test program for Bennington, Lamoille, Orleans, and Washington counties. They've also worked with Shelburne Farms to develop easy to use educational materials for sugarmakers for school visits and hosting school groups at your sugarhouse. The educational package contains videos, handouts, and short guidelines for interacting with students in the classroom and sugarhouse. These will all be available soon. For more information contact Helen Rortvedt at NOFA-VT: helen@nofavt.org.

BIRD FRIENDLY MAPLE PROJECT

Vermont Audubon Society's Bird Friendly Maple Project is an award-winning program that is helping sugarmakers and foresters understand how important biological and structural diversity in the woods is important to the health of Vermont's birds but also for your sugarbush. A visit to their website demonstrates the wealth of educational tools available to sugarmakers and forest owners. The Bird Friendly Maple Project has a label available to participating sugarmakers to place on their containers recognizing their support to this program. The number of maple producers grows substantially each year as sugarmakers enroll and become certified in the program. For more information on this outstanding program go to Vt.Audubon.org/maple.

COORDINATING WATER QUALITY ISSUES WITH AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND MARKETS (AAFM)

Pat Fry, Water Quality Engineer from AAFM visited several sugarhouses in Addison, Chittenden, Lamoille, and Washington counties during the 2019 sugaring season. He took countless samples of R/O wash water, rinse water, and permeate as well as samples of pan wash water. Samples were tested in the state laboratory. The purpose of the sampling was to gather enough scientific information to determine how much and types of waste is discharged from sugarhouses into our environment. VMSMA has asked to see a copy of the report as well as the recommendations for best management practices. It's hoped the report will be ready prior to this coming sugaring season.

NEW REQUIREMENT IN CURRENT USE: REPORTING ON SUGARING ACTIVITY

BY KEITH THOMPSON

The Vermont Current Use program helps to conserve the state's working landscape and rural character by keeping forestland ownership affordable, connecting landowners to their land, and helping landowners protect the health of their forests. It also ensures that parcels enrolled in the forestland category contribute to the forest economy through active management. Since its inception nearly 40 years ago, the Current Use program has enrolled over 15,000 forested parcels covering nearly 2 million acres of forestland. These forests all contribute valuable benefits to Vermonters, including clean air and water, wildlife habitat, forest products, maple syrup, fall foliage, tourism, and outdoor recreation.

To help track the forest management occurring on enrolled forestland and the program's outcomes, landowners report on their management activity through the Forest Management Activity Report (FMAR) form. For years, this form has included a section for reporting of harvested timber volumes yet has never included a component to track tapping activity. Without specific information on the tapping that is occurring on enrolled forestland (where, when and how much), the Current Use program suffers from a blind spot. To track this important management activity, the FMAR form was changed in 2018 to require the reporting of taps. A couple details about the new requirement include:

- **Tapping that occurred this year, 2019, will need to be reported on a Forest Management Activity Report, due February 1, 2020.**
- **Once taps are reported, where tap counts are stable, annual reporting of tapping activity is not always required. Specifics are available on the instructions for the form on the Forests, Parks and Recreation website at the end of this article.**

Reporting through FMARs is an essential component of the program which helps to ensure compliance with management plans, maintain integrity of the program, and demonstrate the good work that the program does for Vermont and Vermonters.

Questions about these requirements should be directed to your county forester. The forms and instructions are available on the Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation website at <https://fpr.vermont.gov/forest/managing-your-woodlands/use-value-appraisal>



HMC ADVERTISING PARTNERS WITH VMSMA

BY CARRIE PLUNKETT, MARKETING TEAM, HMC

HMC is a full-service agency in Richmond, Vermont. For over 30 years we have helped successful, well-known Vermont brands and state-wide initiatives. Over the past decade our work has created demand for our services by clients throughout New England. As Vermonters, we recognize not only the major significance that maple syrup has in our state's economy, we know that it is an integral part of our history and culture, our stories, and our very own identity here at home and around the world. We are partnering with VMSMA on developing the strategy and messaging around the new certification program, and have already started to dig in to our research. Over the next few months, we will be working closely with the VMSMA Board to develop a marketing and communications strategy for the program, and will then be developing the messaging and tactics to communicate it effectively to sugarmakers across the state. We look forward to making different happen for Vermont Maple.

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SOCIAL MEDIA CONTEST WITH @THEFEEDFEED

BY LAUREN MASSERIA, SENIOR MARKET DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST, AGENCY OF AGRICULTURE, FOOD, AND MARKETS

As part of a larger project, the Vermont Agency of Agriculture has teamed up with the feedfeed (@thefeedfeed) to promote Vermont maple to their 1.6 million followers! The feedfeed curates content shared by home cooks, chefs, and bloggers into easily digestible and inspiring categories that reflect trends from kitchens around the world. The feedfeed has also grown to be a place where food producers and suppliers, big and small, can get the profound respect and recognition they deserve for growing and harvesting food that is safe, nourishing, and sustainable. Through a competitive process, the Agency of Agriculture identified the feedfeed as a group with parallel goals and an effect method to tell a broader story of maple. The partnership with the feedfeed will run through 2021 and includes a number of components:

- 1** The feedfeed is hosting a social media contest to encourage their audience to create recipes using maple products. The theme of the contest is "Everything but Pancakes" to spur the use of maple as an ingredient. The contest closed on November 25th. The creator of the best recipe will win a trip to Vermont for sugaring season in March!
- 2** In March of 2020, the feedfeed will bring five social media content creators to Vermont for a maple focused tour. The itinerary of this tour has not yet been finalized, but once it is, we will share this out to the broader group. The goal of this tour is to educate the content creators by having them experience Vermont and maple first-hand. The tour will include maple focused meals, a visit to one or more sugarhouses, and time in the sugarbush. Outcomes from this event will include social media posts and stories, which we will ask the industry to reshare on their personal/business accounts to increase the number of people seeing this important message.
- 3** Finally, the feedfeed will continue to post about maple on a quarterly basis through September of 2021.

If you have any questions about the promotional partnership, please reach out to Lauren Masseria at lauren.masseria@vermont.gov

MAPLERAMA: BACK AND BETTER THAN EVER!

BY PAUL PALMER, CCMSMA PRESIDENT

The Chittenden County Sugar Makers were proud to host Maplerama 2019 at the Whitcomb Barn in Essex, VT, July 18-20th. The event showcased 15 sugar house tours around the county over two days where the 140 attendees had a chance to learn about boiling high brix sap, making candy and confections, and retailing maple products, just to name a few. We were thrilled to have the Vermont Maple Ambassadors, Austin Turco and Meriah Disorda with us for the entire event. At the Barn, attendees had the opportunity to talk with 25 vendors.

The Maplerama banquet, held Friday night, was a steamy evening spent with friends, both new and old. Before the main event got started, we paid respects to two very dedicated sugar makers who lost their lives this year, Brian Stowe and Don Dolliver. It is a sobering fact that even though sugaring is fairly safe, there are hazards that can be mitigated. While everyone was finishing a tasty meal, Buzz Khuns took the stage and performed his hilarious rendition of a sugaring poem to delight the crowd. Dr. Timothy Perkins was honored with the 2019 Maplerama Tour book dedication for his lifelong service and dedication to the maple industry. The Ray Foulds Outstanding Young Sugar Maker Award was presented to Ben Wilcox of Amber Ridge Maple in Underhill. To conclude the evening, the maple contest winners were announced.

Our very warm Maplerama wrapped up after Saturday morning tours with a wonderful pig roast and maple cree-mees before wishing all well and safe travels home.



Inside the Whitcomb Barn

2019 MAPLE CONTEST WINNERS

BEST OF CLASS

Golden with Delicate Taste & Amber with Rich Taste

Whirlwind Maple,
Hinesburg, VT

Maple Sugar Candy & Maple Cream

Couture's Maple Shop,
Westfield, VT

Dark with Robust Taste

Paul's Sugarhouse,
Williamsburg, MA

Maple Sugar

Sugarbush Hill Maple Farm,
Huntsville, Ontario

Very Dark with Strong Taste

Emerick's Maple,
Hyndman, PA

BEST OF SHOW

Paul's Sugarhouse,
Williamsburg, MA



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