



## VERMONT MAPLE SUGAR MAKERS' ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 83, Westford VT 05494

Phone: 802-777-2667

[www.VermontMaple.org](http://www.VermontMaple.org)

**Draft**  
**ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES**  
**Zoom Conference Online**  
**July 13, 2021**

**Board Members present:** Sam Cutting; Jason Gagne; Emma Marvin; Dave Folino; Arnie Piper; Dave Mance; Peter Purinton; Jeff Disorda; Ed Smith; James Buck; Paul Palmer; Ted Young; Reid Richardson; Donna Young; Arnold Coombs; Jenna Baird

**Members present:** Cecile Branon; Kenn Hastings; Jacques Couture; Valerie Hastings; Jacob Powsner; Cody Armstrong; Jessica Judd; Ryan Marsh; Donald Gale; Dr. Abby van den Berg; Dr. Timothy Perkins; Peter Gregg; Jim Rowe; Sprague Huntington; Andy Aldrich; Douglas Worple; John Buck; Mary McCuaig; Chuck Bolton; Robert Baird; Garry & Eileen Trudell; Don & Wendy Tucker; Jim Davis; Pam Green; Dale Smith

**Staff present:** Allison Hope; Cory Ayotte

### **Motions**

- 1) A motion was made by Dave Mance to approve the 2020 meeting minutes. Ted Young seconded the motion. The motion was approved by all.
- 2) A second motion was made by Ed Smith to ratify the actions taken at the 2020 Annual Meeting (we did not have a quorum at that meeting). The motion was seconded by Jacques Couture. The motion was approved by all.
- 3) A motion was made by Dave Mance to approve the Treasurer's Report. The motion was seconded by James Buck. The motion was approved by all.
- 4) A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Dave Mance. The motion was seconded by Arnie Piper. The motion was approved by all.

The meeting was called to order by Chair Emma Marvin at 6:01pm. Before getting into the agenda topics, Emma acknowledged the hard work of the directors and the delegates. She continued by stating that they are the driving force of the Association and the voice of the members. Emma also gave gratitude to staff members, Allison Hope and Cory Ayotte, who have been nimble throughout the difficulties that have come with the pandemic. Finally, Emma wanted all in attendance to remember the individuals in the maple community who we lost in the past year. There was a moment of silence to remember those whom we have lost.

### **Approval of Past Meeting Minutes**

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### **Treasurer's Report**

Emma started by thanking former treasurer Mark Bigelow for his many years of service to the Association. He was critical in setting a solid foundation for the Association's budgeting processes and financial systems. Emma then thanked Jason Gagne for stepping into the role as treasurer. Jason Gagne reported that 2020 was a challenging year; the Association experienced financial hardship due to the pandemic and the cancellation of all fundraising events. In FY21, finances are looking stronger year to date. VMSMA received two PPP loans; one has already been forgiven (the loan was recognized in FY20 and forgiven in FY21) and we assume that the second one will be forgiven as well. Jason said it can be confusing to compare FY20 to current and prior year line items, as FY20 certainly didn't fit the typical narrative of most years, mainly because of the pandemic. James Buck asked if the \$26,000 loss stated in 2020 reflected the PPP loan? Jason said it does not. Because the PPP loan was forgiven in FY21 it had to be reflected in the current year's financials. If you apply the loan forgiveness to FY20, the Association only lost \$5,000. That number is remarkable because at one point the association was expecting to lose up to \$100,000.

A motion was made by Dave Mance to approve the Treasurer's Report. The motion was seconded by James Buck. The motion was approved by all.

### **VMSMA Year in Review & Year Ahead**

Allison Hope shared that this past year was unique. All Board of Directors' meetings were done via Zoom. In addition to sharing information on the pandemic and available loans and grants, we really worked to make sure that the Association was also applying for these grants. The Big E alone in a good year nets \$75,000, so the lack of any income from the Big E in 2020 was a serious hit to our financials. Luckily, some state grants helped fill the gap left by the Big E.

It was fun to look back at board reports and all the things we have all accomplished together this past year. Some highlights:

- We created a Maple Gratitude Program that donated maple syrup to local hospitals throughout the state.
- Cory and Allison completed improvements to the Association's social media and website to help with consumer engagement.

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- We added a jobs board to the website, which arose from the lack of in-person maple conferences in December 2020 where we would normally have a physical jobs board.
- We added a board and staff page to the website with a photo and bio for each person.
- We created a closed Facebook group for Association members; there are currently 50-60 members in that group. We use this group to share timely information about research, events and news stories with members.
- Cory did a lot of one of one work with members to help them with Facebook advertising and general social media questions (and he's still available to consult with members on these topics).
- We have continued creating quarterly printed newsletters and continued to publish a variety of sugar maker interviews. This past one included an interview with the new maple collective group, Tap O.N.E, in Burlington that included the next generation of some of our members.
- The Education Committee along with our former Quality Director, David Tremblay, have spent a lot of time creating and rolling out the Sugarhouse Certification Program. The program is ready for sugar makers to sign up, but we will also work to continuously update it based on feedback and new information. Allison is really excited to continue to share food safety standards with members on the Certification website. We want to make sure they're in an accessible format for everyone, so we're more than willing to mail paper copies to members who need them.
- We updated the nutrition facts panel for Association containers, effective July 1, based on federal rules.
- The Agency of Agriculture resumed maple retail inspections and Tucker Diego has shared that information during maple conferences and Board meetings.
- VMSMA continues to partner with The Agency of Ag on their annual "Maple 100" fall maple celebration (this year from September 15 – October 15). This is essentially an opportunity for sugar makers to host fall maple open houses (and other creative events). Partners for this event will include breweries, distilleries, cideries, restaurants, and other retail businesses. Given the pent up demand for travel and events, we expect plenty of tourists will be heading to Vermont in the fall.
- In October, we held 12 county meetings via zoom. We recorded them all and they are all on the website. Some were well attended and some had just a few people, but all had very productive conversations regarding what members need in different parts of the state.
- We had a good time with our week-long virtual Maple Conference Week in December. We held three sessions each day (9am, noon and 5pm) and no classes overlapped, which is often a criticism of the one day in person event. The recordings of those sessions are available on VMSMA's website.



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- A ReVTA grant allowed us to improve our Advanced Listings for members add more information and photos.
- In December 2020, we offered a member raffle for those who renewed their membership this year. Gift cards were generously donated from D&G, CDL and Lapierre.
- We are having a good year so far in 2021:
  - The Sugarhouse Certification Program has been launched and we have contracted with 4 Certifiers. Now that we're in "launch" and "education" phases of the program, we're working to sign up sugar makers and ensure they understand what is needed for successful Certification so this program can be self-sustaining in the long term.
  - We applied for "Congressionally Directed Spending" (CDS) through staff with Senator Leahy's office to get financial assistance with Sugarhouse Certification over the next five years. The request was threefold – assistance with staffing costs; assistance with the gap created by charging <4,000 tap sugar makers less for Certification than if costs the Association to offer it; and a matching grant program for smaller sugar makers who need to make operational improvements in order to be Certified. This CDS request made it to the next step in the process and we're waiting to hear what the budget allocations will be for all of the (many) requests that legislators have received.
  - We now have a Packaging Committee that is working on short-term and long-term solutions to timing and lack of containers from Hillside/Plastic Industries.
  - We were successfully in applying for a new Specialty Crop Block Grant through VAAMF focused on marketing Vermont Maple. That project and funding will begin this fall.
  - We're preparing for the Big E this year (after a year off last year). We just had our vendor meeting for the Big E and it appears that it should be a good year for customers and sales. Mike Christian, while no longer the onsite Booth Manager, is doing a lot of work behind the scenes to make sure we're ready for a successful season. Kenn Hastings and Meriah Disorda have joined the team to co-manage the booth this year.
  - VMSMA is looking to expand Maple Open House Weekend into two or more weekends this spring. We do a lot of marketing and we can get more out of it if we expand the event. Also, the season can really vary in different parts of the state and this gives sugar makers an option to participate when they feel it fits their sugaring schedule.
  - Mark Isselhardt, Cory and Allison are working on this year's Maple Conference. We are looking into a hybrid format with an online and in-person component and offering those again in December this year.



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### IMSI Update

Pam Green, IMSI Board Chair and VMSMA representative to IMSI, shared some updates on IMSI work.

- There is an IMSI/NAMSC Conference upcoming in October. It will be in Niagara Falls, New York and folks are encouraged to register. The Atlantic Corporation will be keynote speaker at the conference, which IMSI will use also as an opportunity for attendees to ask questions about their recent dashboard created through a grant with VAAF. Interested folks can register at [nysmaple.com](http://nysmaple.com).
- IMSI continues to provide support for grading schools. They will happen right after the conference.
- The next thing IMSI is working on is considering options for sustainable maple funding. She encourages that everyone check out what honey is doing by searching online for “Honey Driving Demand 2020”. Honey was ranked the #1 sweetener in the world. Why not maple? It is because the industry doesn't have sustainable funds to make it happen. Pam noted that VMSMA looked into this back in 2017/2018. IMSI is currently looking into grant programs which are hard to get at the federal level. IMSI is working with their consultant John Goldberg in Washington D.C. He is looking into what grants are available for maple.
- The Standard of Identity for maple has been written and is aligned with Canada.
- IMSI is moving forward with a new social media program, in partnership with Morning Ag Clips and an IMSI committee. IMSI is also continuing to update their website. Next year a consumer-facing website will be launched.
- Lastly, all IMSI meetings are open to all members. VMSMA members are members of IMSI and are encouraged to participate.

### VMSMA Annual Award Winners

Sam Cutting IV presented the Annual Maple Awards. He stated that each award has a long, proud heritage associated with them and that every single person who has received one in the past are legends in the industry, so those joining their ranks tonight should be very proud.

#### *Outstanding Sugar Maker Award: James Buck, Washington VT*

The VMSMA Board selects a Vermont sugar maker, individual, or family who sets a good example for other sugar makers to follow in cleanliness, food safety and production practices. In addition, nominees for this award help the maple industry by participating in county and statewide fairs to promote and educate future sugar makers and the general public on the benefits of pure Vermont maple syrup. This year, the Award was presented to James Buck.

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James has repeatedly demonstrated a strong commitment to the Vermont maple industry through his work at his family's sugarbush and also through his work with the Vermont Maple Sugar Makers Association and his county association. James represents the majority of VMSMA's membership; he combines a full-time job, balancing family responsibilities and a love of sugar making. James also represents a great number of newer sugar makers who have started from scratch. Like many sugar makers, he started sugaring on a very small scale in his backyard. And like many sugar makers, his operation and his commitment to maple has grown over the years. James and his father bought a chunk of land, cleared it, made their own lumber, and built their own sugarhouse. They are also concerned about the future of maple and have developed their sugarbush by continuing to thin and improve their woods for future generations.

### ***Vermont Maple Person of the Year: Mark Cannella, UVM Extension***

This award is presented to someone whose work benefits the entire maple industry and who may or may not be a sugar maker themselves. As a Farm Business Management Specialist with UVM Extension, Mark Cannella works with Vermont's farms to help develop fiscal management tools and data. Mark's work is invaluable to Vermont's maple producers as well as the entire industry and their associated lending institutions. He has attended and presented at many maple conferences to share his knowledge and research with producers and other industry experts. Although Mark is not currently a maple producer, he cut his teeth sugaring when he was actively involved in the Shelburne Farms sugaring operation.

### ***Sumner Williams Lifetime Achievement Award: Mark Isselhardt, UVM Extension***

This award is presented in memory of Sumner Williams, the Assistant Director of the UVM Proctor Maple Research Center. In honor of him, the VMSMA Board recognizes outstanding service and dedication to the Vermont maple industry. This year's recipient is Mark Isselhardt, Vermont's Maple Specialist with UVM Extension. Mark works in the research field of maple and has worked tirelessly to provide the tools and knowledge to producers from Vermont and beyond that really make a difference. His research on achieving high sap yields, managing healthy sugarbushes, and creating efficiencies in syrup production has been invaluable to the maple community. Mark goes above and beyond to share his expertise with producers as well as being readily available and open to talk all things maple with any sugar maker. He has also been a huge part of the success of VMSMA's Annual Maple Conferences.

### **Member Q & A**

- Jacques Couture shared that he's in northern Vermont and is sensing a lot of pent up demand for travel. He has noticed a lot more visitors to his business lately.
- Ruth Goodrich said that they've seen a lot of traffic lately, too. She asked if other producers are seeing any damage from gypsy moths. Jeff Dissorda said that the southern part of the

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Lake Champlain Valley has a lot of gypsy moths. Mark Isselhardt said that there are a lot of moths in the Champlain Valley and Franklin County. The moths haven't moved eastward much. Mainly their feed sources have been oak and beech trees. Jason Gagne said a lot of trees (non-maple) have been stripped, but some are beginning to regrow. Pam Green said they've noticed just defoliation in oaks in her part of Rutland County. They've had a lot of rain and therefore a lot of bloated caterpillars that never had a chance to turn into moths. Jacques Couture said that this is the driest summer he's seen in 50 some years. He's curious how his trees will make out with all of that. They haven't seen any moths to speak of.

- Peter Gregg asked if Maplerama will return next year. Allison answered that it isn't a conversation that VMSMA has had yet. Not all counties can handle the event, so we need to work with the counties that can do it. The VMSMA Marketing Committee will be working on this.
- Cecile Branon asked if there had been a lot of interest in the Sugarhouse Certification program. She is working toward getting ready to be Certified. Allison noted that she's in good company in terms of folks getting ready. She added that Jim Judd and Donna Young in Morgan were the first sugar house to be Certified and that we currently have one other in progress, as well as a plan for a training Certification for Certifiers to participate in.
- Dr. Tim Perkins circled back to Jacques' question and noted that it's always hard to predict the season. Typically, drought and insects can lead to a tough season. Parts of the state have been in a drought for several years.
- Emma reminded members that staff and board are always available for feedback and questions. Folks should reach out as needed to anyone with VMSMA with any questions or thoughts!

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Dave Mance. The motion was seconded by Arnie Piper. The motion was approved by all.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:24pm.