



# VERMONT MAPLE SUGAR MAKERS' ASSOCIATION

189 VERMONT ROUTE 15, JERICHO, VT 05465

PHONE: 802-858-9444

WWW.VERMONTMAPLE.ORG

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING MINUTES

Three Stallion Inn, Randolph, VT

May 9, 2017

PRESENT: Pam Green, Jason Gagne, Arnold Coombs, Ira Marvin, Brad Gillilan, Dave Folino, Rick Kobik, Mike Emerson, Sam Cutting, Kerry Sedutto, Emma Marvin, Arnie Piper, Donna Young, James Buck, Jason McFarland, Mark Bigelow, Don Bourdon

Staff Present: Matt Gordon, Amanda Voyer

The meeting was called to order at 9:11 am by Board Chair, Pam Green.

**Minutes:** Don Bourdon moved that the minutes for the January 31, 2017 meeting be approved, Emma Marvin seconded. Motion approved.

**Financial Report:** Matt Gordon reported that the Financials will be available at the Annual Meeting on May 20th. Pam recognized Mark Bigelow and Matt Gordon for their efforts in cleaning up the financials.

**Update & Discussion on Federal Regulations:** Roger Brown, Matt Gordon, Emma Marvin, Sam Cutting and Tim Perkins will be going to Washington D.C. for the "Taste of Vermont".

Roger Brown reported 3 meetings will take place while they are there, one with the FDA to discuss the added sugar question. There is a hope with changes in the federal government that there may be a new look at the added sugar labeling questions.

The USDA meeting will be focused on ACER Access regarding research, promotion, education, marketing, natural resources and sustainability of land use. Roger noted Tim Perkins' attendance will be very valuable as he has been plugged into these topics for the past 10 years. Roger will be representing the Association in supporting Proctor as a recipient of grant funding.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting will take place with a group of congregational staffers to give them a briefing of maple issues and where things currently are. In 2017, some of the focus will be on addressing the Farm Bill programs that effect the industry.

There was some discussion with the group around organic marketing orders paying 1/10 of 1% with sales over \$250,000. We already missed the formal comment timeframe which was April 19<sup>th</sup>.



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**Season Report:** Kerry Sedutto, from The Sugarman of Vermont reported good quality syrup, good flavor, a lot of dark syrup, great season. This was the 1<sup>st</sup> year they did not take on any new producers. Emma Marvin, from Butternut reported quality syrup with volume not quite as large as last year but very close. Another big crop state-wide. Arnold Coombs from Bascom reported a very good year. Sam Cutting from Dakin Farm reported that the season was similar between those who tapped early and those who tapped 6 weeks later as their season extended through April where the early tappers ended a little earlier. Those who didn't tap until late February had lower production.

- Windsor county did well, a lot of Amber and good quality, just a little behind last year which was a record year for them.
- Lamoille county reported for those who tapped for early production, the season stretched from January to mid-April with some reporting best season ever. Syrup was a little darker than usual mostly Amber and Dark, with little Golden.
- Orleans county did well, with the western part doing better than last year. They only made light syrup and no dark in the east which was unusual.
- Washington county had average to above average yields with a lot of light syrup made. Cold bushes didn't do as well, but overall good quality.
- Caledonia county reported those who tapped early had a decent crop. Colder bushes had a below average year, but overall county reported average to above average crop with good quality, mostly dark syrup.
- Orange county had a year similar to last year with a high percentage of Golden.
- Rutland county had a great crop with higher sugar content. Elevation and face-specific determined sugar content. Higher elevation typically had higher sugar content, but less sap. Not a lot of Golden was made, but a lot of beautiful Amber with no off-flavors being reported. There was also a lot of good quality Dark and even Very Dark. Tapping started early. Feb 18<sup>th</sup> was first boil for Pam Green, 3 weeks earlier for them than usual.
- Franklin county reported that for those who tapped in early January, yields were above last year. The majority of syrup made was Amber. Some producers, the big ones, made Golden.
- Windham county was above average with a lot of Amber and Dark.
- Addison county reported that for those who had woods up in the hills, it was slightly above average. Mostly Amber and Dark, not a lot of Golden.
- Bennington county in general had an average year. Sap sweetness was way down. A lot more Dark Robust and very little Golden. Quality was good.



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A lot of sugarmakers added taps. Ohio reported a poor year, while parts of Michigan and southern New England were also down. US crop may come in about the same as last year +/- 5%.

Quebec is talking about whether or not polycarbonate can be used in sap collection. It is important to be vigilant & aware, tasting and smelling product making sure bad tasting product doesn't make it into commerce.

**Pricing:** Discussion was held on tariffs, marketing orders, and farmer cooperatives. Matt Gordon has been fielding calls on concerns of dropping price, should we look at tariffs for Canadian syrup coming into the US or have VMSMA to set a price? What can the organization do if anything? What is the communication strategy for this, what do members need to know and how do we educate them on the differences between how the Federation runs and how the Association does?

Discussion was held on how the Canadian market has stabilized the price. Canadian syrup is not our competition. Canada commits \$5 million to marketing maple syrup with \$1 million dedicated specifically to generic maple advertising. Rhode Island is currently doing research on health benefits of maple syrup that Canada has poured funding into. The Association would not be smart to pursue a tariff, it would be a waste of time and a legislative track not worth pursuing.

It would be worth having a discussion regarding marketing orders with our Secretary of Ag and current congregational delegation. If we collected \$0.01 per pound, it would total \$175,000 - and \$0.05 per pound would total \$875,000. There would be a marketing board that would be set up. It would require creating a new legal entity. The funds would be controlled by that entity, for example, "Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Marketing Orders" not VMSMA, and would be strictly regulated by federal regulations with some funds collected going towards administrative expenses.

Collection for retail syrup would be taken per container and collection for bulk syrup would be taken at the packer's location. Brad Gillilan made a motion to form a committee focused on a marketing order implementation plan that would then present the plan to the board. Mike Emmerson seconded the motion. Further discussion involved a concern from the packers on the board as to how effective marketing orders would be, how it would be managed, and how it would ultimately be used. That \$0.05 could have an impact on being competitive in the open marketplace against other sugars. James Buck amended the motion to keep information within the committee until proper information is disseminated. Mike Emmerson seconded. One opposed. Motion passed. Pam Green, Arnie Piper, James Buck and Jason Gagne volunteered for the committee.

**Partnerships Proposal:** Matt Gordon presented a proposal to seek partnerships from those businesses who have a vested interest in Vermont maple, to become partners. Matt agreed to amend, tighten and modify the original proposal. Discussion was held on having two board members serve as a sounding board. The revision will be sent out for a vote to approve.

**VMSMA Committees:** Discussion was held on creating committee assignments and roles for the committees. All Board members would be assigned to a committee and all committees should report back on their work accomplished so agenda for board meeting isn't run fully by Matt Gordon & Pam Green.



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**Membership Report:** Membership currently is down by approximately 100 members this year compared to this same time last year. We will send out one more written request for renewals to members who have not yet renewed. Discussion was held on having a table top display for attracting members at equipment manufacturers.

**Website Proposals:** RFPs were sent out to 6 different local web design firms. Matt will follow-up with proposals giving recommendation on May 20<sup>th</sup>. Our website is currently not mobile responsive and we are missing out on SEO indicators, indicating the website needs work and investment.

**Maple Digest:** Dave Folino made a motion to have Matt Gordon request that the Maple Digest honor the \$4 per subscription payment we've paid in the past, otherwise we will need to pay the increased \$8 fee per subscription they are charging us for this year. Rick Kobik seconded. Motion passed. Don Bourdon made a motion to have Brad Gillilan serve as our NAMSC delegate. Mark Bigelow seconded. Motion passed.

Don Bourdon made a motion to have Pam Green remain as the IMSI delegate for VMSMA, Emma Marvin seconded. Motion passed.

**Other Business:** A ballot and nominations for Annual Meeting awards was passed to the group.

**Old Business.** "Maple in Every School" final proposal was submitted and we are waiting to hear back on receiving funding for a 2-year project. The 1<sup>st</sup> year will be a pilot program in Bennington, Lamoille and Orleans counties. Stipends would be provided to sugarmakers for providing education in the schools or hosting schools in sugarhouses. The request for funding is \$50,000. VMSMA would have to contribute to project. NOFA and Shelburne Farms are partners.

Don Bordon made a motion to adjourn. Emma Marvin seconded. Motion passed.