



MINUTES AND HIGHLIGHTS - International Maple Syrup Institute (IMSI) Board of Directors Meeting Video Conference, July 10, 2020

IMSI BOARD OF DIRECTORS MINUTES - ZOOM MEETING JULY 10, 2020, 09:00 TO 11:00

PRESENT

Fred Ahrens, *Ohio Maple Producers*; **Steve Andersen** – *Andersen’s Maple Syrup*; **Brian Bainborough** – OMSPA; **Bruce Bascom**, *Bascom Maple Farms*; **Nicolas Bell** – LB Maple Treat, **Mark Bigelow** - *Maple Grove Farms*; **Nathan Bissel** – Bissell Maple Farm; **Ray Bonenberg** - *IMSI Past President*; **David Campbell** - *IMSI Treasurer*; **Mark Cannella** – *University of Vermont Extension*; **Jacques Couture** - *Couture’s Maple Shop*; **Mylène Denicolai** - *Producteurs et productrices acéricoles du Québec (PPAQ)* - **Daniel Dufour** - *Conseil de l’industrie de l’érable*; **Martin Désilets** - *Dominion & Grimm*; **Mike Farrell** – *The Forest Farmers*; **Pamela Green** – *President, IMSI*; **John Goldberg** – *The Normandy Group*; **Mark Harran** - *IMSI Past President*; **Allison Hope** – *Vermont Sugar Makers Association*; **Mark Isselhardt** - *University of Vermont*; **David Lalanne** - *CDL*; **Jean Lamontagne** - *IMSI Executive Director*; **Rick Lavergne** - *Citadelle Cooperative*; **Lyle Merrifield** - *Maine MSPA*, **Lyle Merle** - *New York State MSPA*; **Kylie Knieriem** – *The Normandy Group*; **Dave Kemp** – *New Hampshire Maple Producer’s Association*; **David Marvin** - *Butternut Mountain Farm*; **Emma Marvin** - *Butternut Mountain Farm*; **Richard Norman** - *Norman’s Sugar House*; **Mary Jeanne Packer**; *Mapleland Farms*; **Martin Pelletier** – *Centre ACER*; **Andy Schmidt** – *Winsor Hill Sugar House*; **Steve Selby** - *AEC Specialty Products*; **Helen Thomas** – *New York State Maple Producers*; **S; Abby van den Berg**, *University of Vermont*; **Adam Wild** - *Cornell University*, **Tom Zaffis** – *1st Vice-President IMSI & Turkey Hill Sugarbush*.

REGRETS

Yves Bois - *Centre ACER*; **Phillippe Breton** – *Lapierre Equipment*; **Eric Côté** - *L.B. Maple Treat Lantic*; **John Garwood** – *Market and Consumer Researcher*; **Mike Girard** – *Massachusetts*; **Katheryn Hopkins** - *University of Maine, Coop Extension*; **Louise Poitras** - *New Brunswick MSPA*; **Jeff Smith**, *Leader Evaporator* **Simon Trépanier** – *Producteurs et productrices acéricoles du Québec (PPAQ)*

IMSI meeting 0900 July 10, 2020

CALL TO ORDER: A video conference board meeting of the International Maple Syrup Institute was held on July 10, 2020. The meeting convened at 0900 by President Pam Green. A roll call was carried out.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Videoconference Board Meeting, May 8, 2020. ***A motion to approve minutes by Ray Bonenberg seconded by Mike Farrell carried.***

IMSI PRESIDENT OPENING REMARKS – Pam Green noted the ongoing business challenges presented by COVID-19, especially to small local producers. She emphasized the need to adapt such as bolstering online presence and sales. With this new reality, the suggestion was made that IMSI conduct a survey of its members to understand the evolving business context of its members to align with their needs. All agreed this would be a good way to learn about the state of the maple business and foreseeable challenges & opportunities.



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TREASURER'S REPORT - IMSI treasurers Dave Campbell reported that bank balances in good shape. An online payment system has been set up for convenience to pay membership dues as per motion May 8, 2020. ED Jean Lamontagne has advised the TD bank that the IMSI would like to change some account parameters, for example, the IMSI would like to have access to e-banking and one signatory needs to be changed. The bank has yet to respond.

RETENTION OF GOVERNMENT RELATIONS CONSULTING SERVICES (U. S.) - The IMSI retained the services of John Goldberg of the Normandy Group in Washington D.C. to monitor and lobby U.S. Federal Agencies and Congress, the U.S. legislative body as well as maintaining working relations with elected representatives and staff on Capitol Hill. The Normandy Group will inform the IMSI of pending regulations and other Federal Agency activities that could pose a problem or present opportunities for the maple industry and will assist the IMSI in projects where their expertise is pertinent such as the added sugar issue and standards. The complexity of government regulations and potential impacts are deemed to require monitoring oversight. It is important that the industry is aware of regulatory and legislative changes that could affect the way we do business. *We are currently monitoring several regulatory proposals such as food safety regulations on the farm site, environmental legislation such as disposal of permeate and wash fluids, dietary proposals such as decreasing the recommended calories in the diet derived from sugar, all of which could affect the sales, marketing and operations of every producer large and small. This service will help the IMSI be proactive and protect the interests of all industry producers (large, medium, and small) and packers and equipment manufacturers.*

CANADIAN LABELLING UPDATES – Jean Lamontagne advised that he is looking into the current regulatory initiatives by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency and Health Canada. They issued guidance for a revised back panel nutrition labelling in 2016 that specifies daily value for sugars. Additionally, Health Canada is proposing to require a front-of-package nutrition symbol on pre-packaged foods that meet or exceed certain levels (thresholds) for saturated fat, sugars and/or sodium. More information to come.

STATE OF THE BUSINESS

CROP REPORT - Québec Maple Syrup Producers and the Maple Industry Council announced a new production at more than 175 million pounds¹ of maple syrup for all of Québec with an average yield of 3.59 pounds per tap. The pandemic had an impact on processes and methods, but the syrup kept on flowing. An additional 2.3 million taps were added in the last two years for a total of about 49 million taps. A chilly April could explain why this season was so bountiful.

¹ See https://ppaq.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/20200601_CMP_Maple_Harvest_2020.pdf for press release and <http://ppaq.ca/en/a-new-record-breaking-maple-syrup-harvest-despite-the-pandemic/> for PPAQ website.



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COVID-19 REPERCUSSIONS ON THE INDUSTRY & RECOVERY PLANS - Daniel Dufour commented the *CIE* members' sales were up substantially in retail channels.

Nicolas Bell of *The Maple Treat* commented that sales were up but with the pandemic resurgence, buyers are hesitant to forecast confidently, so production planning remains somewhat problematic. Maple production plants remain vigilant, with safety measures in place and rigorously adhered to. With reference to consumption, Nicolas noted that sales are increasing not just because of pantry stock-up, sales are well above replacement level because in-home consumption has increased substantially.

Ray Bonenberg mentioned that for small and individual producers, the pandemic is causing lost sales and operating difficulties. Most associations are trying to help their members through this situation. Some additional support would be needed, notably in offsetting traditional sales channel weakness with online sales. Jean Lamontagne mentioned that some members are experiencing a significant surge in online sales and that online sales momentum will continue even when the pandemic is under control because consumers are now conditioned to buy online and a portion brick & mortar retail stores are going out of business or otherwise inaccessible.

Helen Thomas mentioned that the Spring events were missed, and a fall event, "Fall in Love with Maple" is in the works but with the pandemic resurgence, there may be constraints. Mike Farrell mentioned that a virtual campaign has value for example #fallinlovewithmaple combined with online sales initiatives and other retail and farm door initiatives.

COVID-19 FINANCIAL IMPACT ON INSTITUTIONS, GOVERNMENTS & GRANTS - Helen Thomas mentioned that funding from New York Department of Agriculture and Markets is on hold. Additionally, all commodity reimbursements are on hold. This poses a problem for the NYSMPA because money was spent on the promise of these reimbursements. 2021 support from Ag & Markets has been reduced with some possibility of further cuts.

Ray Bonenberg mentioned that OMSPA applied for a grant to help members with e-commerce skills. Ray is awaiting response from the members regarding this program.

Optimizing Industry Meetings & Communication due COVID-19 restrictions

Folks mentioned that they were hoping to meet in person in Burlington in October as planned, but that does not seem to be possible given the persistence of the pandemic. Jean Lamontagne mentioned that the consensus among businesses such as airlines and convention centers foresee a slow recovery. They expect that a segment of people will forgo travel, preferring virtual meetings even when things open more. *In the future, in-person meetings will likely be required to provide simultaneous, high quality online access.*

MAPLE SYRUP STANDARD OF IDENTITY (SOI) - Helen Thomas mentioned that the expert scientific panel had completed its commentaries and a first draft of the proposed SOI was approved by the panel. The



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panel's comments are recorded in the SOI Analysis Document where comparisons between jurisdictions are outlined and discussed to gain a full understanding of the variations and eventually help with petitions to harmonize the various SOIs. The next step is to consult with business sectors (producers, packers, and equipment manufacturers), amend if required and then present to the IMSI board of directors. After that, a consultation will begin with the FDA and communication with other jurisdictions. Helen, Jean, and John Goldberg met to discuss the process going forward and redact a draft of the petition to the FDA.

UPDATE & DISCUSSION ON FDA 'SUGAR' DIETARY GUIDELINES - John Goldberg opened the discussion mentioning that the current the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee is recommending that dietary guidelines lower the recommended calories derived from sugar in the diet from 10% to 6% of the total recommend daily calories. Although now in preliminary stages of discussion, such a change would have consequences for sweeteners. For maple syrup, 10% represents 50 grams of sugar. If the recommended calories change to 6%, that represents 30 grams of sugar. Based on a serving size of 24 grams, the daily value of sugars would go from 48% to about 80%. Thus, the DV% of sugar on a bottle of maple syrup would indicate 80%.

This ties in with an ongoing IMSI topic; reducing the serving size. At the time, the reason for considering changing the serving size was to reduce the calorie count that will be in enlarged print on the new NFP. *Now, with the added possibility of a reduction in recommended percentage calories from sugar and the corresponding increase in daily value on the horizon, reducing the serving size is even more compelling.*

John Goldberg and Emma Marvin slipped in the topic of changing the serving size with the FDA at an October in Washington that was mostly about the sugar added issue. Serving size changes can be done if they are backed-up by very specifically conducted research and supporting data that confirms that the new serving size accurately reflects current usage. This would require some resources and time however some foods have petitioned successfully, and notably, *honey* is currently petitioning to reduce its serving size.

INDUSTRY REPORT & NIELSEN MARKET TRACK & HOMESCAN

Mark Cannella mentioned that he is evaluating how to proceed with a Maple Industry Report. Such a report would provide an overview of the maple industry, markets and market share, industry sectors, geographic area, employment statistics, historical and current trends & outlook, leading companies, SWOT analysis, competitive landscape, industry data (size, value, sales, ratios, exports), key economic indicators, industry achievements such as new innovations and contribution to social-economic development and environmental protection.

This proposal was discussed in Duluth (Oct. 2019), an industry report would be useful to promote the industry to the general public, to promote investment and lobby governments for funding and other forms of support and demonstrate the economic and social contribution in producing regions.



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SCIENCE, TECH, EDUCATION & TRAINING UPDATE - University of Vermont, Cornell University, University of Maine, Centre Acer, University of Rhode Island.

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT -

[UVM Extension Agricultural Business Website](#) University of Vermont maple specialists will host a series of online webinars focused on business decision making and forestry practices. Learn about the best practices to integrate business management and sugarbush management for a thriving maple enterprise that targets profits and forest health. Topics will include: sugarbush leases and rental rates, tapping practices to optimize yield, tubing systems, tapping red maples, business entity set-up, sap-only enterprises and more. Presenters will include Abby van den Berg (Research Associate Professor), Mark Isselhardt (Maple Specialist), Mark Cannella (Extension Associate Professor), Chris Lindgren (Forest Business Coordinator), attorneys, foresters, and industry specialists.

UVM Extension begins on August 5th.

Register - <https://www.uvm.edu/extension/agriculture/maple/bizmodules/node/7322>

Info - https://blog.uvm.edu/farmvia/files/2020/07/Maple-Development-Series-2020_promo-flyer.pdf

CORNELL UNIVERSITY - Adam Wild informed the group that 2020 tap hole sanitation trial results coming in next maple news.

Adam's group experimented with 1/4" fittings in 3/16" tubing tested on 500 taps which was impractical (difficulty installing fittings, vacuum leaks). Will continue investigating ways to prevent plugging in 3/16" tubing, *there is a clear benefit of gravity vacuum for small producers*. Modified ladder system designed for flat sugarbushes tested with positive results. Further testing planned.

New Product Development - New guidance for maple beer, wine, kombucha and soda production now available at www.Cornellmaple.com

Ongoing - four alternative methods for maple sugar production researched - including intense-flavored sugar from high-invert, very dark syrups and pure sucrose from off-flavored syrups. Complete results to be published soon.

Education - Working on developing interactive electronic educational tools to replace our standard in-person regional workshops. Watch for announcements in August.



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NEXT IMSI MEETINGS

It was suggested that we continue having 2-hour meetings and recommended that we hold a separate meeting for the AGM. The next board meeting will be Friday, September 25th. The AGM will be held Thursday, October 22 and a board meeting will be held December 10th to close the year.

OLD/NEW BUSINESS Participants were invited to speak up about any old or new business that requires discussion. No comments.

MEETING ADJOURNED At 1100 motion to adjourn by Ray Bonenberg seconded by Daniel Dufour.

For more information, contact the writer:

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