

The official voice of Vermont sugar makers

VERMONT *Maple* SUGAR MAKERS' ASSOCIATION

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

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VERMONT SUGARHOUSE CERTIFICATION – HOW TO GET STARTED

BY ARNIE PIPER, VMSMA VICE CHAIR

The VMSMA Sugarhouse Certification Program has gotten off to a slow start and hasn't met our expectations. While we never envisioned sugar makers signing up in such numbers it would crash our website, we expected more interest. After talking with several sugar makers, we think there are several issues that are keeping sugar makers from signing up. I think these are the key issues.

- The process is too difficult, VMSMA expects wads of paperwork. I wouldn't even know how to get started.
- It is too expensive and time intensive to meet the standards.
- Why spend the money – how does being certified affect my bottom line?

For the purposes of this article, I will concentrate on issue number one. Hopefully after reading this article, you will have a better understanding of how to use the resources on the VMSMA website to build your standard operating procedures and the process of applying for the program.



THE SUGARHOUSE CERTIFICATION WEBSITE IS EASY TO FIND AND WORK THROUGH.

STEP 1: Go to the VMSMA website – www.vermontmaple.org

STEP 2: The banner at the top has several selections. Pick the tab all the way to the right, *For Sugarmakers*, hover over it and select *Sugarhouse Certification Program* at the bottom.

STEP 3: You are now in the section of the website for Sugarhouse Certification. There is a short video that gives some information on the why's of the program. It's worth spending a few minutes as it's professionally done.

STEP 4: Scroll down just a bit and click on the *Learn More* button. You are now in the information section of the website. This is where the meat of the program is located.

The first section is *How Does the Program Work?* There is a flowchart that helps to explain how the process will work. If you have any questions regarding the flowchart, please reach out to VMSMA's Executive Director, Allison Hope (allison@vermontmaple.org).

The second section is *Frequently Asked Questions*. We've anticipated that you'll have some questions about the Program. The Education Committee compiled a list of questions and answers, and we'll continue to add to it as we hear feedback from you. I highly recommend reading the questions and answers as hopefully it will clarify the process.

Continued on Page 2



Certification continued...

Following down the page, the next section is a chart that explains, *What Does Certification Cost?* The VMSMA Education Committee and VMSMA Board of Directors worked hard to try and make the price of Certification as fair and equitable for sugar makers. Costs are determined by the number of taps in your operation and taps from leased sugarbushes and purchased sap. Prices to be certified range from \$100 for 1 to 1,999 taps to \$950 for sugar makers with 50,000 taps and above. It's also important to remember that this is a two-year Certification.

The fourth section is the *Certification Checklist*. It consists of nine areas and is 13 pages long. The checklist focuses only on the manufacturing of pure maple syrup. It is intended to help organize materials and assess current food safety preparedness. It is an assessment tool to assist in the development of a plan for a specific sugarhouse to follow good food safety practices. Don't get intimidated by the size of the checklist. It repeats itself a few times as it was written to mirror the FDA's regulations. I recommend printing out the checklist and taking the opportunity to go through it in detail. I think when you read the checklist, you'll understand certification isn't as complicated as you may have thought.

The final section of resources includes the *Certification Resources and Appendices*. The VMSMA Education Committee compiled a list of resources that will be useful in completing the necessary documentation for Certification. Some of you will already have documentation and a sugarhouse operational manual, but the reality is most won't have one. This

will be the most difficult part of the process for many sugar makers as they might lack the computer or administrative skills to do this part.

If you're starting from scratch, or looking to compare your procedures to our templates, review our templates and other resources. The majority of our templates are available as Word documents so that you can download them or print them and edit them to fit the needs of your sugarhouse. They are arranged in the order of certification checklist to make it easier to find and copy. In many cases, you'll have to modify the standard operating procedures (SOP) in order to best describe your operation. There is also a list of appendices that in some cases you can use verbatim but for others you'll have to use the appendices as an example and make your own. There is no need to use a graphic design program to draw your sugarhouse layout or sugarbush layout. A simple sketch will do.

Once you're ready to apply for Certification, you can complete the two-page application and either email it to Allison Hope (allison@vermontmaple.org) or mail it to us at VMSMA (PO Box 83, Westford, VT 05494). There are a few other documents required such as a map sketch of the sugaring operation and a simple flowchart of sap to the finished product. We also require a couple of forms such as canning records, production records and water test results if required. Payment is required at the time of application. In order to participate, you must be a current VMSMA member.



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NOTES FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



SEASONS' CHANGING

BY EMMA MARVIN, VMSMA CHAIR

As Autumn begins, it sets off an internal alarm. There's a laundry list of things to do before the snow flies... and there's a sense that sugaring season is closer than we realize. As we put to bed the last tasks of summer and prepare for the winter months there are a few things you might consider adding to your list:

- Visit a sugarhouse while it's being certified by VMSMA. We're working on scheduling these types of events so folks can learn more about the certification process. If you're interested in hosting an event, please contact Cory (cory@vermontmaple.org) or Allison (allison@vermontmaple.org).
- Sign up for VMSMA's Holiday Gift Guide. The guide is marketed to maple fans near and far. It helps consumers get what they want quickly and easily, especially during the holiday season when maple is given as a gift to friends and family. Participation in the guide is free for VMSMA members! Make sure you add it to your holiday marketing plan. [More information on page 11...](#)
- Build your maple knowledge by saving the date for the annual Maple Schools. We're planning to host this year's school as a hybrid of in-person and virtual sessions, with three days held virtually during the week of December 6th and in-person on December 11th in Randolph. More information to come.

Finally, as we continue to navigate the uncertainties of COVID, it's important to be up to date with innovations, opportunities, and business related news. VMSMA is a resource for this as it relates to maple, consider signing up for our e-Newsletters too (add your email address to your member profile). With the leaves continuing to quickly change, here's to a robust check-list with lots of completed check-marks and a sense of preparedness for the seasons to come.

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COUNTY HIGHLIGHTS

CHITTENDEN COUNTY

As an ongoing series, we're highlighting Vermont's County Associations to connect sugar makers around the state. This time we're looking at Chittenden County with Paul Palmer, Chittenden County Director.

Chittenden County is Vermont's most populous county and most well-known as it contains the cities of Burlington and South Burlington. It was named after Vermont's first Governor and later U.S. Senator, Thomas Chittenden. The latest census estimates the population to be 164,306 and has one of Vermont's fastest growing municipalities. It is home to the University of Vermont, which is the largest university in the state with an approximate student body of 13,000. The UVM Medical Center is also in Burlington, the state's largest hospital with 560 beds and over 7000 employees and Vermont's only Level 1 Trauma Center. Global Foundries, located in Essex Junction, is considered the state's largest private employer with 15,000 employees. The Burlington International Airport is the largest airport in the State and shares its grounds with the Vermont Air National Guard. The Vermont Army National Guard is based at Camp Johnson in Colchester, just a short ride away.

The largest Fair in the State, the Champlain Valley Fair, is held at the end of August and beginning of September each year in Essex Junction. It boasts Fair attendance of over 120,000 during its 10 day run. In 2020, it was cancelled, as were many events, due to COVID-19. This year, the Fair returned, offering attendees an opportunity to experience concerts, fair rides on the midway, games, fair food, and most importantly Vermont's signature flavor, maple. The Chittenden County Maple Sugar Makers Association (CCMSMA) has operated a sugarhouse on the fairgrounds since 1974. The sugarhouse takes more than a hundred volunteers to operate and it offers customers everything maple! Some favorites include maple creemees, cream covered donuts, and maple cotton candy! Proctor Maple Research Center also operates an educational section in the sugarhouse to teach and answer questions fair-goers have regarding maple.

The Champlain Valley Fair is CCMSMA's only income producing event. The funds raised from the Fair are used for educational and promotional purposes, along with repairs and maintenance of the sugarhouse itself. Each Fall, the CCMSMA sends out a request for proposal to educational and research organizations looking for up to three years of partial grant funding for projects revolving around maple. Some recent projects to be granted funding include Old MacDonald's Farm (a scavenger hunt for kids at the Champlain Valley Fair which culminates in the recipient getting a maple creemee from the sugarhouse), Junior Iron Chef competitions, an invasive earthworm study, and most recently, a three year study by UVM Entomology about ticks in the sugarbushes of Vermont.

The Chittenden County Maple Sugar Makers had the honor of hosting Vermont's last Maplerama in July of 2019. The three-day event was full of tours to 15 maple related stops, a vendor trade show, plenty of great food, the recitation of a hysterical maple themed poem performed by Buzz Kuhns himself and lots of opportunity to network with fellow sugar makers from nine states and two provinces. Vermont Maple Ambassadors, Meriah Disorda and Austin Turco, were also in attendance for all three days, chatting with attendees and participating in tours. The culmination of the event was the banquet where we honored Dr. Tim Perkins of UVM's Proctor Maple Research Center, with the dedication of the Maplerama program for his years of research and dedication to the maple industry.

As we look forward to the rest of 2021 and a new sugaring season in 2022, we are all hopeful for a better year. Just as in many parts of our State, Chittenden County's overall production fell below the normal volume. Very little Golden syrup was made and the season was incredibly short. Let's hope that Mother Nature is kinder to us all next year.



MEET A SUGAR MAKER

As part of our series highlighting Members, we're sharing short interviews with Vermont's sugar makers, large and small, near and far. On September 1, 2021, Cory had a conversation with Shane Beattie of Temple Mountain Maples in Lancaster, New Hampshire.

CORY: Your member profile says you live in New Hampshire, but have a sugarhouse in Vermont. Can you elaborate on that unique situation?

SHANE: Of course. I was born in Burlington, but my family has lived in both Lancaster, New Hampshire and Lunenburg, Vermont forever and I live in Lancaster near my parents which is just over the Connecticut River from Lunenburg.

CORY: Can you tell me how you got into sugaring?

SHANE: Before I could drive, I used to help out Dave Fuller in Lancaster with his operation. That's where I really got interested in sugaring. Also, in my teens I helped out my Aunt and Uncle, MaryAnne and Amos Colby of Lunenburg sugar. As I got older, I was still interested in maple. When I turned 50, I really wanted to get into it for myself as well as my two sons. In the 1980s my Father and I purchased property in Lunenburg that had been previously logged. All that was left on the property was 12 inch and larger maples. Kind of like it was meant for us to sugar on. Fast forward to 2017 when we started, those trees are now bigger. In total, we have 350 acres to work with. At the start we had 3,200 taps. We arrived at that number with help from Dave Fuller. We bought his 4x14 evaporator and he said that we needed at least that many taps to feed it. Now, we have 6,100 taps and the property can likely support a total of 14,000 to 18,000 taps. I don't think I'll ever see that in my lifetime, but my sons might.

CORY: How was last season for you?

SHANE: We normally make between 975-1,100 gallons. Last season we made 1,030 gallons. A pretty decent year considering how other areas fared. Dave Fuller is a great resource for me and he couldn't tell me why we did so well in comparison to others. However, our syrup tasted much better than his, haha. Vermont makes better syrup than New Hampshire, haha.

CORY: Do you think your elevation or the direction of your sugarbush helped with your results?



Photo Credit Shane Beattie

SHANE: I'm not sure. We have a north face, a southeast face and a east facing sugarbush and it sits between 1,800 and 2,200 feet in elevation.

CORY: You mentioned that Dave Fuller in Lancaster is a resource for you. Is there a community of sugar makers in Lunenburg?

SHANE: Yes, there are a number of sugar makers in Lunenburg. A lot of them are of an older generation than me. A lot of Lunenburg folks use buckets, tubing and nothing else. They very much sugar in an old-fashioned way. We are more modernized with sap suckers and an RO machine. However, I don't think our syrup is any better because of the technology we have.

CORY: Do you have any plans for the future?

SHANE: Yes, down the road we'll likely market our syrup. Right now, we just sell in bulk. When I'm older and retired, I'll have more time to market our syrup to customers. I have a construction company and I just fit sugaring into my busy schedule when I can.

CORY: How would you market your syrup?

SHANE: I'd like to sell it at the Lancaster Farmers Market. They allow Vermont products to be sold there. Frankly, Lancaster and Lunenburg are kind of a split community. Lancaster supports Lunenburg with EMS and fire and people from Lunenburg support Lancaster by shopping at the grocery store, etc. Also, I'd like to get my syrup marketed at the Lunenburg Maple Festival. It has an old home days atmosphere.

CORY: Shane, thanks for the great interview. Have a great 2022 season!

SHANE: My pleasure, thanks!

If you'd like to be featured in this section in a future newsletter, please email Allison at allison@vermontmaple.org or Cory at cory@vermontmaple.org.

HOW TO CREATE A SUCCESSFUL EVENT — IT'S EASIER THAN YOU THINK

BY CORY AYOTTE, VMSMA COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR

Kenn Hastings of Bread Loaf View Farm in Cornwall knows a thing or two about hosting maple events. Earlier this fall he held two Maple Ice Cream Sunday events as part of Vermont Open Farm Week. In a phone interview, Kenn explained that event and his philosophy in planning other events throughout the year.

Kenn noted early on in our conversation that although every event is different, a lot of the same principles apply to the planning and execution of each event. Kenn harped that events need to be personable and assessable. Over the years, he's learned that he is a focal point of each event he hosts. People want to hear from him, the sugar maker. He makes a point to be as available as possible for his event goers. Kenn said "a lot of customers want to hear about the hands-on aspects of sugaring. They really like getting answers directly from the source".

We've all heard the saying, "you need to spend money, to make money". That applies to Kenn's events. Giving out samples of most if not all of your maple products is a key to making sales. During Maple Ice Cream Sundays, the ice cream is what brought people in, but the samples of his other products are what made the difference in his bottom line.

Kenn spent \$60 on ice cream and netted a profit of \$300 on what he charged for it. However, the other sales were over \$1,000 on just a couple of dollars' worth of ice cream. You can eat an ice cream cone fairly fast, but Kenn implemented several ways to keep his customers around. Kenn has an area dedicated to old maple items, kind of like a museum. That catches people's interest for a long time. Another way Kenn keeps folks around is by hosting a raffle. Everyone who came in the door for that event got a ticket and every 20 minutes or so they'd call a number and someone would win a prize. When someone won, they usually bought something else, too! Also, people need to try before they buy. Even though maple is familiar to Vermonters, it can certainly be new for

people from far off lands. Going back to Kenn's philosophy of always being available for his visitors, he finds that a lot of people make a unique connection to maple once they learn the process and how natural a product it is. When customers learn how natural the product is, they are more than happy to pay for it. For some, it brings clarity to why it costs what it does. Another point Kenn made was about honesty. "If I don't know the answer to a question, I find it is important and okay to either say you don't have the answer or to say "to the best of my knowledge". My customers can accept that, and really appreciate it".



Although each of Kenn's events is different, the preparation for it stays the same. The marketing of the events needs to be done early to give customers a chance to learn about your event and time to fit it into their schedule. Kenn says that he has a lot of success giving postcards and flyers to local restaurants and lodging properties. A lot of folks will come into those places and will ask what is going on locally. A lot of customers tell him that's how they find out about his events. For future events Kenn wants to start using local radio ads. He believes that an ad with his voice is very personable and will resonate with many because it will be more of an invite

versus a sales pitch that many are accustomed to hearing. Aside from marketing, Kenn puts a lot of work into the physical layout of his property. A lot of people are overwhelmed by a maple operation. He has a lot of picture diagrams that tell the story of maple. It gives people a good general sense of how maple goes from tap to syrup, and it saves Kenn a lot of time because he doesn't have to repeat the story a thousand times. Kenn believes the diagrams allow people to learn at their own pace which a lot of customers like. Right now, Kenn has 17 learning stations throughout his sugarbush. They cover everything from soil composition, to the animals that roam his sugarbush, and to the tapping of a tree. Kenn said that it's important to highlight as much as possible.

I asked Kenn, “what advice would you give a sugar maker who’s never hosted an event before?”. His first response was to not be intimidated, which sounds easier said than done. He said that Vermont maple has so much clout and people are really happy and curious when they visit a sugarhouse. Kenn also said it is important to be aware of your surroundings and what he meant by that was, take advantage and work with other businesses and tap into other happenings in your area. For example, Kenn always plans events around Middlebury College’s Parents Weekend. He gets a lot of visitors during that weekend. And that exposure for his business actually has trickled on years later. Kenn explained that a customer from New Jersey called him and said she was coming to visit



Kenn’s sugarhouse and asked if he would be around. When she visited Kenn asked her how she learned about his business. A friend of hers had visited during Parents Weekend several years ago. They gifted maple syrup to the customer from New Jersey. They were exposed to his brand from an outside source and now have become a loyal consumer. Right now, Kenn is working with a local apple orchard for The Maple 100. The last piece of advice Kenn gave is to give your customers what they want. Over time you’ll learn what your target group is and what they like. Kenn uses high-end glass with a wooden cap for his syrup because that’s what people were asking for. Kenn stated that regardless of what age group he targets, the events need to be fun, safe, and educational. If people have children with them, they need something to do. If the kids are bored, that family will leave in a matter of minutes. He has a kids play zone which is a high traffic area. Usually, one parent stays with the kid(s) and the other will be in the sugarhouse.

Kenn ended our conversation by stating that there will be nervousness and anxiety when you host your first event. That’s to be expected, but if you open yourself up to your customers, you’ll be surprised how easy hosting an event can be. Kenn said that Vermont sugar makers share and sell products that are unique to the world. Maple syrup is a natural product and people really love it.

The next event that VMSMA will sponsor is Maple Open House Weekend. We are planning to expand it to more than just one weekend. This is a fantastic way to sell your products and make new lifelong customers. More information and registration will be coming in the next month or so.



UPDATE ON GOVERNOR'S COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF VERMONT AGRICULTURE

BY DAVE MANCE, VMSMA SECRETARY

On February 19, 2021, Governor Scott issued Executive Order No. 03-21 establishing the Governor's Commission on the Future of Vermont Agriculture. This Executive Order charged the Commission with developing long and short-term strategies and specific action plans with measurable outcomes to ensure that Vermont remains a vibrant agricultural state into the future.

Dave Mance, VMSMA's Secretary, has been appointed to this Commission. Dave has sugared since the mid 1950's as a small and now mid-sized operation. He's also been a Bennington County Director to VMSMA for over 30 years.

Dave has attended the group's meeting and has an update on the Committee's work.

While traditionally sugaring was carried on as part of a diversified farming operation, there now seems to be three categories of maple operations:

1. The majority of producers have small and mid-sized operations and have another source of income – often their primary source - so are technically part-time sugar makers. Few of these producers are involved with other agricultural enterprises.
2. There are a number of mid and large size family operations for which maple is their sole or primary source of income. Some are involved with other agricultural enterprises.
3. Investors have established several large operations and these corporate sugar makers rely on hired help and managers to produce and market their products. While smallest in number they represent a significant number of overall taps and production.

A QUICK SUMMARY OF VERMONT MAPLE PRODUCTION.

- » **3,000** - The rough number of producers in Vermont
- » **13,500,00** - Taps in the United States in 2020
- » **6,150,00** - Taps in Vermont in 2020
- » **45.5%** - Vermont share of total United States taps in 2020
- » **4,372,000** - Gallons produced in the United States in 2020
- » **2,22,00** - Gallons produced in Vermont in 2020
- » **50.7%** - Vermont share of the total United State crop in 2020
- » **20%+/-** - The United States share of North American maple production. Quebec produces 70%+/- of the World's crop.
- » **1,940,000** - The number of taps of the largest 14 Vermont producers.
- » **31.5%** - Share of total Vermont taps by largest 14 producers (0.5% of total number of Vermont producers).
- » **24%** - Share of total United States taps by the largest 32 producers. Nationally, 8 of the largest 10 producers nationally are in Vermont.
- » **87%** - The estimated percentage of the Vermont maple crop that is sold in bulk (15, 30, 40 or 50 gallon drums).
- » **\$28/24.20** - The average price per gallon for Vermont syrup (overall and bulk) in 2019.
- » **\$32.20/\$23.70** - The average price per gallon for New York syrup (overall and bulk) in 2019

OPPORTUNITIES TO ENCOURAGE ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT IN MAPLE:

For smaller and beginning producers, access to capital is critical. In-woods infrastructure runs around \$15/tap and depreciates fully over 10-20 years. An investment of around \$150,000 is likely for a sugarhouse with RO and evaporator for 3,000 taps, so a total investment of \$200k is likely for that lower end of mid-size start up. Having access to a pool of money at lower than commercial rate loans and knowing how to access that pool, would assist in setting up or taking over a maple business.

Assistance in developing markets and value-added opportunities could potentially double the return on syrup for many mid-sized and smaller sugar makers who do not benefit from the economy of scale seen in larger operations. Creating opportunities to move beyond the neighborhood market through cooperative marketing, warehousing and distribution should benefit producers who are more adept at woods work than selling syrup.

OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ABOUT THE MAPLE INDUSTRY:

Vermont is home to three large and several mid-sized packers who buy bulk syrup and repackage in retail containers, shipping nationally and internationally. A number of large producers sell their entire crop in bulk, and most producers with more than 500 – 1,000 taps sell at least a portion of their crop as bulk syrup. The relatively low average price per gallon of Vermont syrup reflects the high percentage of syrup sold in bulk.

For the majority of Vermont producers, maple is not their sole income source, but represents an important and often significant percentage of their income.





Advances in reverse osmosis, evaporator and tubing vacuum technology have brought significant efficiencies to the maple industry over the past 25 years. These have enabled expansion and/or development of large operations and, for them, a reduction in the cost of production. As with dairy, the economy of scale increases with size. In 1990, a 5-7,000 tap operation was considered large. Today an average large operation is roughly ten times that size, and their lower cost of production maintains profitability with flat bulk prices. That said, a majority of Vermont's producers find it financially difficult to justify some investments in the latest technology until it becomes "time honored" or "standard of the industry".

In some cases, infrastructure (buildings, power, roads, cell service) limit the ability to modernize a sugaring operation. In other cases, poorly designed expansions have led to problems with mud season road conditions, and public access to and through sugarbushes. Striking a balance requires planning and communication among producers, stakeholders and local governing bodies.

The world market for maple is growing at 5-10% per year, and has been aided by the introduction of specialty syrup – bourbon barrel aged, infused and alcohol blended among others.

CHALLENGES TO THE INDUSTRY:

While Vermont dominates US production, Canada and specifically Quebec, sets the base value of maple as a commodity. Quebec requires producers to sell all bulk syrup to the "Federation" a commodity clearing house, which then sells to packers world-wide. The Federation establishes a base price, which in turn sets the market price in terms of commodity syrup.

While Vermont has name recognition; it produces far more syrup than it can use and sell locally. Bulk prices are therefore more in line with the commodity price of maple, than with a localized value-added price based on the Vermont name.

Because they sell nationally and internationally, packers must meet standards and reporting requirements that do not necessarily apply to smaller producers selling within Vermont and surrounding states. These standards are being codified by VMSMA in its Sugarhouse Certification Program, however meeting these standards may be difficult and/or costly for those producers who sell only a portion of their crop in bulk.

The need to have a multi-dimensional marketing platform to maintain sales, challenges smaller, family-based producers, who generally have other full or part-time employment. Fluency in the use of online resources is difficult for many older producers and made more challenging by the lack of rural access to high-speed internet.

Increasing in-state use and sales of maple would likely benefit small and medium size producers more than those who sell their crop in bulk and thus would improve sustainability of these operations. Increasing national and international sales should improve the demand for syrup as a commodity, the trickle-down effect will likely be less than for in-state or regional sales.

On-line sales of "Vermont" syrup are currently unregulated and while the Agency of Agriculture has an inspector working in-state, maintaining the quality and integrity of Vermont Maple through inspections of on-line sales is also important.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE INDUSTRY:

Vermont has the potential to significantly increase the in-state use of maple, through direct to consumer, restaurant and institutional use.

Lease payments have reached a level that encourages private landowners to consider entering into long term leases with maple producers, and as such there appears to be potential for more production. Concerns have been raised that rapid expansion may outstrip the increase in demand and result in an over-supply of Vermont maple.

The internet is both a challenge and an opportunity for producers to increase sales.

Maintaining a high standard of quality through education and uniform standards of production should help maintain the image of Vermont Maple.

GOALS TO SUPPORT THE MAPLE INDUSTRY:

Increase the consumption of maple within Vermont, through increased direct to consumer, restaurant and institutional sales. Capitalize on the interest in buying and eating local natural foods in these three categories of consumers.

Support VMSMA and work with the group to increase membership. VMSMA is a membership organization that represents the industry and is proactive in keeping abreast and ahead of regulatory and marketing challenges, thereby assisting the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets in supporting this sector of agriculture. Having a unified voice and information source for the industry benefits all producers, consumers and the State.

Increase access to high-speed internet. The internet provides an opportunity for producers to increase sales and to gain education on how to produce quality maple syrup.

Promote the Sugarhouse Certification Program. Maintaining a high standard of quality through education and uniform standards of production strengthens the image of Vermont Maple.

Tell the story of maple to Vermont visitors. This may be via a web site that tells stories online, kiosks to greet visitors at the Vermont welcome centers, promotional events like Maple Open House and the Maple 100, or services like Harvest Hosts that encourage visitors to stay at Vermont farms. Once visitors learn about maple, they will buy maple and often they will buy online after they return home.

VMSMA PACKAGING COMMITTEE UPDATE

BY JAMES BUCK, VMSMA MEMBER AT LARGE; PACKAGING COMMITTEE CHAIR



The newly established Packaging Committee has been created to address the frustrating container shortage that most sugar makers by now have experienced. The former Container Committee, which was responsible for managing the VMSMA branded containers, has been rebranded and augmented with the addition of some new members consisting of producers with a range in tap counts, container dealers, and industry members. Our goals include:

1. Thoroughly understand the syrup container supply chain and its players
2. Identify near-term packaging options for VMSMA members and distributors
3. Investigate other packaging options for future use

The container shortage appears to be widespread throughout the industry and we are working to identify the exact causes of the shortage so we can create short and long term solutions. The popular Sugarhill XL-coated plastic container might have the longest lead time and be the most targeted product in the packaging log jam, but it is not alone. Material and labor shortages on both sides of our international border are causing container shortages. Other factors could be at play too, so understanding the problem and its influences is the first logical step to creating a successful mitigation strategy.

The most immediate need at hand is getting containers into sugar makers' hands for the 2022 season. We recognize the risk to everyone's business and hobbies alike if syrup cannot be packaged, so we are prioritizing this need in front

of future container solutions for the time being. To that end, we have agreed that member feedback is critical to this process and we are actively communicating with members. By now, you should have received a survey from VMSMA requesting information about your needs, preferences, and opinions regarding syrup packaging. This is vital information so we can understand producer demographics affected by container issues, and gauge the willingness of sugar makers to adjust their packaging options and process while we sort out a more permanent solution.

To improve lead time and cost in the near term, some of our potential recommendations to help sugar makers this fall and into 2022 include:

- Where possible, move away from the XL-coated containers. Keep grade stability and your packaging process in mind as you navigate this change.
- When possible, purchase blank containers and apply VMSMA or private labels in-house.
- Diversify your syrup container types. Consider adding glass and metal containers to your offerings.
- Order early and in larger quantities.

There is plenty of work ahead of us to settle on formal plans for 2022 and beyond, but we are confident that between producer flexibility and our committee's diligence we'll be able to support the VMSMA members and the larger sugar maker community well. Please send us your ideas and comments at any time; we welcome the feedback.



VMSMA JOBS BOARD

DO YOU HAVE POSITIONS TO FILL FOR THE 2022 SEASON?

We've created a job board on the VMSMA website for Members to find new hires.

To list your job, please reach out to Cory Ayotte with information:
cory@vermontmaple.org or 802-786-9437



VMSMA HOLIDAY GIFT GUIDE

This holiday season, more consumers will be purchasing their gifts online and locally. We're creating an online winter holiday gift guide - sort of a "look book" of Vermont maple gifts. This will be a guide that folks can flip through online, with each interested sugar maker having a 1/2 page to share one holiday item with a picture, details, pricing and a link to your online store and purchasing information (as well as any promotions you're offering). We will also include a picture of your operation with your business details and a few sentences about you.

This year, we're offering a free listing to every interested VMSMA member sugar maker.

To be listed in the Guide, please fill out our Google form with your details.
<https://forms.gle/ma4AgdBhaRAKfBYA>

The deadline to be included is Friday, November 12th so we have time to format & create the guide.

QUESTIONS? Please reach out to Allison: allison@vermontmaple.org or Cory: cory@vermontmaple.org.



SAVE THE DATES

TUBING & SPOUT RECYCLING COLLECTION

NOVEMBER 6TH: 9AM-12PM @ S. WOODSTOCK FIREHOUSE

The Windsor County Maple Producers Association with assistance from the Northwest, Greater Upper Valley, and So. Windsor/Windham Counties Solid Waste Districts are hosting a tubing and spout recycling event.

Register with Mary McQuaig
802-353-3035 (cell)
802-457-3779 (landline) or
marymaple13@gmail.com

2021 MAPLE CONFERENCE WEEK

DECEMBER 8-11

This year we're planning a hybrid model with three days of online sessions (like last year) and a Saturday in-person event held in Randolph. More details to come.





Vermont Maple Sugar
Makers' Association
PO Box 83
Westford, VT 05494

UVM PROCTOR CENTER NEEDS YOUR HELP!

Have you attended a conference presentation done by someone from Proctor within the past three years? Perhaps you've read an article in The Maple News or Maple Syrup Digest about PMRC research. Maybe you've viewed a YouTube presentation on the PMRC webpage <https://tinyurl.com/Proctor-YouTube>? Or possibly you've had to settle an argument with your neighbor by looking up a topic on tapping or something else about sugaring on mapleresearch.org.

If any of these sound the least bit familiar, UVM invites you to return the favor by completing a short survey at: <https://tinyurl.com/PMRC-Survey1>

This very short (5-10 min) questionnaire is aimed at helping us gauge our effectiveness in conveying information to maple producers. It will be used to both report to granting agencies on the effectiveness of our work and to improve our outreach program to producers. The survey is completely anonymous – no personal information will be collected (other than which state/province you are from) unless you offer your contact info and ask us to get back to you about some question. Either way, we can guarantee that nobody from our group will contact you about your auto warranty expiring.

So...in short, you can help us to help you by helping us. It's really pretty simple if you think about it. But seriously, it is something we could really use your input on.

Thank you all in advance and we look forward to seeing everyone again at meetings (in person) soon.

- Dr. Tim Perkins
Director

- Dr. Abby van den Berg
Asst. Director

- Mark Isselhardt
Extension Maple Specialist

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