

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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VMSMA SECURES IMPORTANT GRANT FUNDING TO BENEFIT SUGAR MAKERS

BY ALLISON HOPE, VMSMA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Behind the scenes, the VMSMA staff and Board have been busy working on grant applications since last summer. On behalf of our hundreds of members, we're proud to share with you that VMSMA has been awarded three new grants, two through Vermont's Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets and one through Senator Leahy's office and the federal budget. We're sharing some information on each grant below and, as work on each project commences, we'll share more detailed information.

VMSMA MAPLE PASSPORT

Specialty Crop Block Grant**for Producers' Associations: \$20,000**

Over the last year, the VMSMA Marketing Committee has been meeting to create a "Maple Passport" to enhance statewide maple advertising and tourism. This Passport is intended to tie together a variety of maple tourism activities throughout the seasons in Vermont - Maple Open House, Open Farm Week, the Maple 100, etc. - and encourage farm visits year round. VMSMA will be working with Place Creative in Burlington to create the passport and counter signage for participating sugar makers later this summer. We'll also be working with our web developers to add value with various online components of the program and make it easier to update the information. Once these items are in place, we'll reach out to members to share the materials, explain all of the details and sign up those who are interested! We envision a small fee (likely around \$50/year) to make this program self-sustaining once the grant funding has been used.



VMSMA CONTAINER LABELING MACHINE

Specialty Crop Block Grant: \$28,000

The VMSMA Packaging Committee has been meeting regularly this past year to continue to make headway on access to plastic maple containers. While the main goal has been to decrease the timeline, from order to delivery, of VMSMA-branded maple containers, the Committee has been working on more far-reaching goals at the same time. Part of this work will be achieved through the Association's successful grant application for the purchase of a large labeling machine that will work with the labels currently used on VMSMA-branded containers. For the interim, we owe a debt of gratitude to the Purintons! VMSMA has ordered two truckloads of containers since the wintertime; these containers were delivered to and labeled by the Purintons. While this short-term solution has shortened the timeline from 52+ weeks to about 12 weeks, it is a short-term solution. As part of this grant project, VMSMA will be working closely with a warehouse in Vermont to receive and label containers and fulfill orders for VMSMA dealers. This grant project will begin in the fall, so we'll share more details later this summer. We're excited for the short and long-term opportunities that the labeling machine and the local partnership will offer!



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Grant Funding continued...

VMSMA SUGARHOUSE CERTIFICATION

Federal earmark: \$637,000 (over five years)

Last, but by no means least, VMSMA is proud to announce that they have secured \$637,000 in federal funding to support the Sugarhouse Certification Program. This funding and the resulting Program updates will be a huge benefit for Vermont maple for years to come.

As you know all too well, the Vermont maple industry is a vital economic engine that circulates hundreds of millions of dollars locally and promotes tourism on a broad scale. Last summer, we launched our Sugarhouse Certification Program to invest in technical education and expertise for all of Vermont's maple producers. Our goal is to collaborate with maple producers to ensure that the entire industry continues to make consistently high-quality products that comply with state and federal food safety regulations.

In the spring of 2021, Senator Leahy announced the return of congressionally-directed spending items. At that time, VMSMA applied for federal funding to enable its Sugarhouse Certification Program to become self-sustaining and benefit small and large sugar makers statewide. We are pleased to announce that the Federal FY22 Omnibus Appropriations Bill included the requested funding. We're extremely grateful to Senator Leahy and his staff, and Vermont's entire Congressional delegation, who worked on a tight timeline last year to ensure they understood our project and had the information they needed to help Senator Leahy prioritize hundreds of funding requests.

This federal funding will ensure a path to success and sustainability for VMSMA's Sugarhouse Certification Program. Federal funding will make a tangible, long-term contribution to how the Certification Program most directly benefits Vermont's maple producers. Among other benefits, this funding will allow for the creation of a matching grant program for maple producers to upgrade equipment based on the results of onsite Certification work. (You've probably heard us talking about this as a goal for the last year!)

Vermont's maple producers provide immense value to our working landscape and our economy. This federal funding will help ensure the long-term viability of Vermont being the nation's leader in the production of high-quality pure maple syrup.



NOTES FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



HOW BEAUTIFUL CHANGE CAN TRULY BE

BY EMMA MARVIN, VMSMA CHAIR

American author Tracy McMillan says, "Spring: A lovely reminder of how beautiful change can truly be." It is this beauty that we get to so intimately see each year. As sugar makers we see the nuances, the subtleties. We see the buds, the birds, the frost. We see the harbingers of spring.

It is this beauty that we embrace (and sometimes lament). It is this fickle change that we try so hard to capture with the maple harvest.

As the world reawakens post pandemic we seek to embrace the fickle changes. The welcome return of familiar traditions - sugar houses across the state opened their doors for not one, but two Maple Open House Weekends allowing more participation from producers and maple fans (given the robust turnout, folks were clearly thrilled to be able to greet spring with a trip to their local sugar house). The need for new patterns and processes - by way of example the VMSMA's container committee has implemented a temporary solution to get VMSMA jugs to dealers (and thus producers) more quickly. It builds on long-time relationships in new ways. These are the steps, or stutter-steps, of a cautious emerging of "normalcy."

These subtle signs bring hope and optimism. When combined with a season where we've captured more of the fickle changes of spring than not - mother nature appears to have smiled on us this year (with ideal weather, sap flows, and sweetness). It's easier to see the beauty of change.

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PROCTOR MAPLE RESEARCH CENTER TURNS 75

BY MARK ISSELHARDT, UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT EXTENSION MAPLE SPECIALIST

University of Vermont is celebrating the 75th anniversary of the initiation of research at the Proctor Maple Research Center. The Center is located on the western slopes of Mount Mansfield in Underhill Center, previously the Harvey Farm, has been the site of pioneering research since the founding seventy-five years ago. The 230-acre property was donated by then Vermont Governor Mortimer Proctor to the University. While important research had been done at UVM on the topic of maple production dating back to at least the late 1800's, a dedicated facility for the express purpose of maple research did not exist. According to a press account in 1946 the gift was "to provide suitable location and facilities for research in sugar maple tree growing and the teaching of maple production..." (Burlington Free Press 1946). The stated mission of the Proctor Center is research, demonstration and education related to the production of pure maple syrup. The research has always included both a basic and applied focus, meaning that knowledge gained through investigations increases scientific understanding of the core processes that influence maple production but also how that knowledge can be harnessed by maple producers to improve the yield, quality and sustainability of their operations.



Two significant driving forces in the establishment of the Proctor Maple Research Farm (as it was then known) were UVM Botany Professors Dr. James Marvin and Dr. Fred Taylor. Building on the research of C.H. Jones and others, Marvin and Taylor's pioneering early work investigated some of the key elements of successful maple production including: sap flow, sap sweetness as well as testing some of the first plastic tubing systems. They saw the research as needing to be rooted in the practical issues related to syrup production so not long after its founding, a new sugarhouse was constructed alongside the original lab building. What has followed in the intervening years has been a series of devoted and gifted researchers, educators, practitioners and others who have maintained careful focus on issues relevant to not only science but the maple industry in Vermont and beyond. Dr. Mariafranca Morselli was a botanist and microbiologist whose work made significant advancements in areas of sap quality and detection of syrup adulteration as well as anatomy and physiology of sugar maples. Dr. Fred Laing served as Director of PMRF and oversaw work to further refine the use of plastic tubing for the collection of sap, adoption of vacuum technology to boost yields and the development of the "dropline" that reduced losses associated with trees drawing sap back during the freezing stage of sap flow.

Many more researchers, technicians, students and others have played a role in the rich history of the Proctor Maple Research Center. Sumner Williams served as Assistant Director and played a critical role in the design and rebuilding of the PMRC lab following the fire that destroyed the old





Left to right - Dr. Tim Perkins, Mark Isselhardt, Brenden Hayes, Dr. Abby van den Berg, Wade Bosley and Jed Abair

lab. As the PMRC sugar maker, Sumner made sure research included real world issues and provided solutions the entire maple industry could use. Dr. Abby van den Berg, Research Professor and Assistant Director at PMRC, has produced a significant body of work over her 20-year+ career that touches every aspect of modern maple syrup production and helped to find answers to many long held questions including; what is the impact of RO technology on maple syrup quality, do modern sap extraction techniques impact the health and growth of sugar maples and even gaining a better understanding as to the forces that impact fall color. Dr. Timothy Perkins has provided significantly to the mission during his long tenure as Director of PMRC. From work on the physiological ecology of maple forests, lead contamination of syrup, editor of North American Maple Syrup Producers Manual, research into achieving and maintaining sustainable high sap yields to inventing equipment such as the patented Check Valve spout. Dr. Perkins' leadership during a full third of its existence, has further cemented PMRC as a leader in maple research and educational outreach.

At the 2022 Vermont Governor's Tree Tapping ceremony held at PMRC this spring, Dr. Leslie Parise, Dean of the UVM College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, stated "We are proud of our long history in maple research, demonstration and outreach at the University of Vermont and pioneering contributions of UVM maple scientists. We look forward to continuing to better understand the most pressing issues facing Vermont maple producers and advancing the science to address them."



Photos: UVM Extension



VMSMA PACKAGING COMMITTEE UPDATE

BY JAMES BUCK, PACKAGING COMMITTEE CHAIR

Since last fall the VMSMA Packaging Committee, with help from the Executive Committee, has been diligently establishing a process to refill the VMSMA plastic container pipeline. After identifying the most significant hurdles with our container supplier, we shifted the scope of their supply to simply blank non-XL coated containers and found a temporary solution to apply VMSMA labels. The Purinton Family in Huntington offered to provide labeling services to get us back up and running, and we are happy to report that the lead time for dealers has been reduced from anywhere between 40 weeks and unknown, to about 12 weeks. We are extremely thankful and grateful for the help of the Purintons which has allowed us to demonstrate the effectiveness of a new process. This serves as a terrific example on which to base our medium- and long-term solution(s), and transform the container supply chain into a more productive revenue stream for the association.

So where do we go from here? Challenges still exist, and new ones are approaching. We understand that producers are still short on containers and impacts to everyone's businesses are still prevalent. The next phase of work for the committee is to establish a robust container purchasing, labeling, and logistics operation. We have signed a letter of intent with a 3rd party group whose facility and location are a good fit for our needs. In parallel, we have applied for grant funding to invest in machinery which will allow us to maintain more ownership in the container supply chain. We should be hearing new about this opportunity very soon. In addition to these initiatives, we are exploring alternate container options to diversify our supply chain in the future.

VMSMA is committed to providing value-added support and guidance for its members, and we encourage members to continue providing feedback as we navigate 2022 and beyond.





2022 VERMONT MAPLE CAREER DEVELOPMENT EVENT

BY MARK ISSELHARDT, UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT EXTENSION MAPLE SPECIALIST



Shelburne Farms and University of Vermont Extension are pleased to announce that on May 19th, high school students from around the state gathered at Vermont Technical College in conjunction with the Vermont FFA annual conference to compete in the 2022 Vermont Maple Career Development Event (CDE). Most of the participants are enrolled in one of the Vermont's regional career and technical education centers. Some schools have fully integrated maple programs that includes hands on experience with everything from sugarbush management, sap collection, syrup production and even marketing of maple products. Other schools may have a maple unit as part of their diversified agriculture and forestry curriculum. This will be the third CDE to focus solely on issues related to maple production. The inaugural CDE held in 2019 at Shelburne Farms included more than fifty students from eight schools. That event was a result of graduate student Lynn Wolfe and her masters work in Ecological Planning. The COVID pandemic prevented in-person events in 2020 and the CDE was modified in 2021 to allow for remote competition. The maple CDE tests student knowledge of maple syrup production from tree identification to syrup grading. The purpose of the Maple CDE is to show the wide range of research based knowledge and skills required to achieve high yields of sap and to produce high quality syrup. The maple industry in Vermont has grown more than threefold in the last twenty years. This growth in an already established industry shows that individuals can join successful businesses or start their own. Finding quality individual to help run maple operations is consistently given as one of the limits on growth for existing businesses. Students who understand the latest research on sap and syrup production will be better prepared and effective sugar makers and bring this traditional product into the next generation.

Students in the CDE will compete in both individual events and an optional team event. The topics covered will include 1) tools and materials, 2) syrup grading, 3) tapping skills, 4) multiple choice general knowledge, and 5) a team event. The tools and materials section will require students to know how to identify the name and use of a variety of tools related to sap and syrup production. The syrup grading portion will require students to correctly grade several samples of syrup and determine if they meet the standard for pure maple syrup in terms of color, clarity, density and flavor. The tapping skills section will ask students to determine if proper tapping guidelines have been followed on a select number of trees. The general knowledge section will test students' knowledge of maple production from tree identification to marketing and "maple math". Finally, the team event will require groups of students to work together to meet a challenge related to maple sap and syrup. In 2019 the team event challenged students to correctly install a lateral line that would conduct water.

New for 2022 will be an optional maple contest where students can submit syrup produced as part of their school program. Entries will be judged based on the four standards; color, clarity, density and flavor and in accordance with current Vermont maple regulations.

The knowledge and skills needed to do well in the CDE provide students with an excellent foundation if they choose to pursue a career in maple, either as an owner/operator or with one of the many maple operations in Vermont.

Educational materials are available for anyone to access at the UVM Extension Maple page: www.uvm.edu/extension/agriculture/maple-career-education



Photos: UVM Extension



MEET A SUGAR MAKER: MARY JANE & MARIO FRADETTE

As part of our series highlighting Members, we're sharing interviews with Vermont's sugar makers, large and small, near and far. On April 22, 2022, Cory had a conversation with Mary Jane and Mario Fradette in East Hardwick, VT.

CORY: How's the season going? Are you wrapped up?

MARIO: We're still going. The season has been going well, best ever.

CORY: Best season because of volume made? Or because of sugar content?

MARIO: All of the above. The sugar content started low and then we were at 2.5%, 2.6% for about three weeks. Now we're going back down. Our production is up six drums on our best record. Today is it for us. It will be the last boil.

CORY: That's great to hear. It seems that most producers fared equally as well. Moving on to my next question, this is one I like to ask everyone. How did you get into sugar making?

MARIO: In 1959 my Father moved our family to the United States from Quebec. When he bought the farm the sugar house was burnt down. In 1960 he built his first sugarhouse when I was six years old. When I was in high school, I used to skip school to gather sap and I loved it!

CORY: An unfinished portion of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail runs next to your property. That's expected to be finished this year?

MARIO: That is correct. I was told by a contractor that this section of trail will be done in May.

CORY: With the trail being completed soon, are you excited to have people traveling by the sugarhouse? Are you expecting traffic to the business?

MARIO: At this point it is hard to say. I'm assuming we will get some traffic, we just haven't experienced it yet, so we'll see what happens.

CORY: If you do receive some traffic, do you plan on having one of your Grandkids make a maple stand on the side of the trail?

MARY JANE: We've talked about that a couple of times with the Grandchildren. However, our biggest issue in the



summertime is we also have 130 blueberry bushes and the Grandchildren tend those for us.

CORY: For the blueberries, do you do any Farmer's Markets?

MARY JANE: I retail some of them and the rest are pick your own. The rail trail will actually go right by the blueberry bushes.

CORY: Do you have any stories of when the rail line was active?

MARIO: There's about a 5% incline to get up to the sugar-house, so in the fall they always had an extra engine on the train because there were too many leaves on the tracks and



trains would spin. You could hear those trains, it was unbelievable. A couple of other times the train actually detached going up and actually went all the way all the way back to Greensboro Bend. How nobody got killed is beyond me. There was a derailment another time right next to the sugarhouse with cars full of grain. My Dad got the grain for free if he cleaned off the tracks. We had to bag it as little kids. The railroad back then had maintenance to the fence and once the cows got out on the tracks. They used a special whistle for them and one night my Dad woke us up and said the cows were on the tracks and we got up to the tracks and three cows had died. That was back in the 60s. Once I was tapping, and my Dad was in his 70s, he wanted to see how I was doing so he drove into the center of the tracks with his three-wheeler and the train came along and the engineer blew the horn. I heard it and knew what was going on because my Dad said he was going to come up and see me. I ran down on my snowshoes to find the train stopped and my Dad's three-wheeler thrown 30 feet down the embankment, luckily Dad was okay, laughing like heck. That was the end of the three-wheeler!

CORY: When I toured your sugarhouse in the past, I remember that you had some unique items near the evaporator, do you mind elaborating on those?

MARY JANE: The mural that's on the wall in front of the evaporator is something that our three girls did for Mario as a birthday gift. They came up and painted it with their recollection of how sugaring was when Mario was a little boy with horses and the gathering of buckets. The girls were 12, 11, and 8 when they painted it.

MARIO: They made me set up the stage for them, but they wouldn't tell me what they were doing. It is very precious.

CORY: You also have a red chair above the evaporator. What's the story behind that?

MARIO: My Dad was a farmer his whole life and he loved the color red. The rocking chair was something that he fixed up and painted red. It was his chair in the sugarhouse when he retired and he would sit and watch me boil. After he passed I retired the chair because I didn't want it to get broken.

MARY JANE: So we retired it to a place that no one could sit on it. It's up in the rafters and it's a part of our story, which we highlight in our brochures. So his Dad still watches us.

CORY: Sticking with the family theme, you have a lot of family connections in your sugarbush, right?

MARY JANE: Yes, the old roads that they use to take the horses on are named after one of the Grandchildren. Like Lillian Lane, Nick's Notch, and Becca's Boulevard. Partially the reason for naming the roads was that Mario knew the

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roads backwards and forwards and he'd send me to go fix a saddle at the top of the hill, and he say "if you look right, there's this big tree with a big crook in it and there's a saddle right below and you have to fix it." I would get all discom-bobulated. I was a banker, so I didn't travel the woods as much as he did. Now after naming the roads I can do them with my eyes shut.

MARIO: I had my picture taken with the Grandchildren when they were babies when we put the signs up.

MARY JANE: Throughout the years we made them take photos with the signs as they've grown.

MARIO: Now they come up with their friends and show off their roads.

MARY JANE: And actually there's another painting at Jaden's Junction which our Granddaughter Grace made. She wanted to paint a mural for when the snow machines went by, she wanted them to know that the little building was part of the sugarhouse. She made that three years ago and now she wants to repaint it now that she's learned more in art class.

MARIO: VTrans actually called me last week because of the work on the rail trail and they were impressed with it. They think people will be looking for this as people learn about it.

CORY: During my last visit you told me that a tree on your property went down to Rockefeller Center?

MARIO: In 1977, a local Xmas tree buyer knocked on our door. We lived in Hardwick village then, he was interested in our 50 foot spruce tree. They offered us \$250 for the tree, and I told them they had to replant the tree which they did. Then the tree went down to Rockefeller Center.

MARY JANE: They invited us to go to the lighting, but I had just had our Daughter Julie in the beginning of October so we opted not to go. Which is too bad, we should have gone in hindsight.

MARIO: Well, we didn't think anything of it. We did go years later to see another tree. That was the only time I've been to New York City and I never want to go back. It was awful, haha.

MARY JANE: We like the woods.

CORY: For the future, do you have any plans for the operation?



MARIO: I'm building an addition on the back of the sugarhouse for storage. My Daughter and Son-in-law purchased land that's adjacent to mine in Greensboro because we have two different sites. Now we'll have three. They're planning on adding 4,000 to 6,000 taps and eventually will take over the operation.

MARY JANE: When we put on the addition we're going to make a special room for me to do canning and to make maple sugar so that it is separate from the living quarters of the sugarhouse.

MARIO: I'm going to be 69, what am I supposed to slow down, haha. I want to keep doing it as long as I can and as long as I'm healthy. I love it.

MARY JANE: We want it to stay in the family, so Marie and Bob are the ones interested and have been leasing our sugar woods in Greensboro and bringing the sap to us. They lease the trees and we pay for the sap. It increases their income, it increases ours and eventually it will be all of theirs. And our dream is that hopefully their children will take it over from them.

MARIO: We have no plans to sell it to anyone outside of the family.

CORY: I don't have anything else. Is there anything else I should know?

MARIO: We're very comfortable here, our living space is 25 feet from the arch. Not too many sugarhouses are set up like that.

MARY JANE: It's our camp. Mario has spent many nights here.

MARIO: I've only been home once in the last three weeks and I'm a quarter of a mile away. I wash the RO at night. It's a great set up.

CORY: Yes, I can imagine so. It sounds like a perfect setup.

MARIO: Yes, and actually you see this a lot in Quebec. All my friends there have some sort of kitchen set up, etc. At first I thought they were all nuts.

MARY JANE: And now Mario is one of the nuts.

CORY: Thanks for the great interview!

MARY JANE AND MARIO: Of course, thank you!

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.



RECIPES

MAPLE DREAM BARS

HOWRIGAN FAMILY FARMS
FAIRFIELD, VT

Yields 7 Servings

- 2 sticks of butter
 - 3 cups flour
 - ¾ cup chopped nuts
 - 8 ounces cream cheese
 - 2 cups confectioners' sugar
 - 3 eggs
 - 3 cups pure Vermont maple syrup
 - Whipped cream
1. Melt butter and add 2 cups of flour and chopped nuts. Spread in large pan and bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes. Let it cool.
 2. Melt cream cheese and add confectioners' sugar. Spread over first layer.
 3. Mix together eggs, 1 cup flour and 1 cup maple syrup. Continue mixing and add 2 more cups maple syrup. Cook in double boiler until thick. Cool and pour over second layer. Top with whipped cream.

MAPLE APPLE BRIE SOUP

MAPLE HILL FARM
BARTON, VT

- 1 tablespoon oil
 - 1 medium onion, diced
 - 3 cloves garlic, chopped
 - 1 teaspoon thyme, chopped (or ½ teaspoon dried thyme)
 - 2 cups chicken broth or vegetable broth
 - 2 cups apple cider
 - 4 large apples, peeled, cored and diced
 - 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
 - 3 tablespoons maple syrup (or brown sugar)
 - 1 ½ cup aged/sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
 - 10 ounces brie, sliced
 - salt and pepper to taste
1. Heat the oil in a pan over medium-high heat, add the onions and cook until tender, about 3-5 minutes.
 2. Add the garlic and thyme and cook until fragrant, about a minute.
 3. Add the broth, cider and apples, bring to a boil, reduce the heat and simmer until the apples are tender, about 20 minutes.
 4. Add the vanilla, maple syrup, cheddar and brie and cook until the cheese has melted, about 5 minutes.
 5. Emulsify or Puree the soup in a blender and optionally strain any bits of brie rind that may remain before seasoning with salt and pepper before enjoying!

We're always looking for maple recipes! We love sharing maple recipes from members in these newsletters, on social media, and online. If you have a recipe you'd like to share, please send them along with photos to cory@vermontmaple.org.



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

SAVE THE DATES

VMSMA ANNUAL MEETING JULY 16, 2022

More Details to Come



BIG E VOLUNTEERS

VMSMA is Looking for Help!

- Passionate Sugar Makers
 - Great Customer Service Skills
 - Several Manager Roles Available
 - Premium Maple Candy Supplier Needed
(VMSMA would take candy to Big E)
-

To sign up, contact
Cory Ayotte at cory@vermontmaple.org

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