

Love Of Maple Keeps This Family Sticking To 100-Year Tradition

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SYLVANIA (Bradford Co.) —

The sweet aroma of maple syrup often fills the air at the farm of Lawrence and Genevieve Roloson, whether it's early spring, when the sap is collected and boiled down to the thick, amber syrup, or throughout the year when the family is busy turning extra syrup into candy, cream, brittle or crumb.

Their maple products and syrup will again be part of the displays at the Farm Show to promote the products and educate people about Pennsylvania maple syrup. They also enter their products in the competition.

"Over the years, no matter where we are, someone will come along and say, 'Where out of Vermont did you get this Pennsylvania maple syrup? I didn't know Pennsylvania made maple syrup,'" said Lawrence, with a chuckle.

Pennsylvania is, in fact, one of the top producers of maple syrup in the United States.

The Rolosons have been exhibiting at the Farm Show since the early 1960s and have won numerous awards for their products.

"As far as our exhibiting of maple products in the farm show," said Lawrence, "we started by sending a little down in the association exhibit. And then if there was some (product) they didn't need for the exhibit, someone from the extension service would take that gallon or half gallon and enter it in the competition. That's how we started. After a year or two, we thought we might as well plan when we're making syrup, to make sure we save a sample of our good grade to enter in the competition."

In the 30 years since, the Rolosons have entered products in almost all the categories from syr-

up to sugar to baked goods made with maple products.

Besides entering products in the competition, the Rolosons also help with the Pennsylvania Maple Council's stands in the food court and around the large arena where show goers can buy maple cotton candy, maple syrup sundaes, and soft maple yogurt.

The sweet maple products start when sugar maple trees are tapped in late February. Sap is collected until early April.

All the sap from the family's 3,500-4,000 taps is boiled down to syrup immediately and stored in 30-gallon drums. The family also buys sap from another 3,000 taps to boil into syrup.

As orders come in throughout the year, the syrup is bottled or turned into products.

In recent years they've been only able to gather about 1/2 pint of sap per tap. In better years they have been able to gather over one quart per tap. The sap flows from the trees through rubber tubes, where it is collected in tanks. Then the Rolosons collect the sap and take it to their sugarhouse where it is boiled. Plain sap is about 2.5 percent sugar and it takes about 40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup.

"The fresher the sap, the fresher the syrup," said Lawrence. "We have three evaporators and we may make two or three different grades of syrup at one time."

Roloson blames the smaller harvest on a combination of factors.

"The weather hasn't been right," said Lawrence. "Some of it is, of course, from the stress on the maple trees. They don't have the sugar content that they should have. There's been a lot of pest damage from the gypsy moth and the pear thrip and the Elm Span-

worm. All these work on leaves, and if the tree isn't healthy, it won't produce like it did in the past."

To protect the trees, the Rolosons have cut down on the number of taps per tree.

"Some areas are shifting their load from one sugarbush to another. They might tap one sugarbush this year and another next year, giving the trees a chance to grow back," said Roloson. "We go along with what nature provides us."

Generally a tree should be 10-12 inches in diameter before it can be tapped once. That takes about 40 years of growth in a woodlot.

Like many maple producers in the Endless Mountains Maple Syrup Producers Association, the Rolosons are upholding a tradition started many, many years ago.

"The operation's been in the family for over 100 years," said Lawrence. "My great grandfather moved into the area in the 1880s and from there it's been a family affair for a good many years."

At first the family made only enough syrup for their own use and for neighbors. But when his father took over, he started making a little more to sell or barter for products they needed.

"They'd make up some maple sugar and sell it down at the local store for other kinds of things like other kinds of sugar or butter or flour or whatever they'd need," said Lawrence.

They didn't start selling the maple syrup itself until the 1930s.

"At that time, we'd buy tin cans at the local hardware for \$.15 each. Now they're up to \$1.75 each. And the syrup sold for \$.75 to \$1 per gallon. Now the price for a gallon is \$30 and up," he said.

Genevieve, Lawrence's wife of 50 years, admits that she had never had experience making maple syrup until she married him, but now is a skilled maple product maker.

"It takes about a gallon and a half of syrup to make eight pounds of candy," explained Genevieve. "There's a knack to (candy mak-



Genevieve and Lawrence Roloson enjoy bites of their homemade maple candy.

ing). No matter how long you've done it, you still don't do it right sometimes. I have made it anytime, rain or snow or whatever, and when it's a nice, clear day, it does make better candy."

Today the Rolosons sell their products to friends and neighbors and pedal their products at local flea markets and shows. They also sell to brokers at a wholesale price who resell the product at retail.

The syrup business was at one time a second career for the Rolosons who ran a 500-acre dairy farm. About three years ago they

sold their cows and gave up all but 120 acres.

In their lifetime of making syrup, the Rolosons have seen many changes.

"We've gone from buckets to pipeline and from the horses to the tractor to the tanks," he said.

They have also passed the tradition on to their children and grandchildren who all turn out to help at "sugarin' time."

"That's the only way the operation can carry on is to have the help turn out when it's needed," said Lawrence.

Scooper Bowl To Benefit Children With Cancer

HARRISBURG (Dauphin Co.) — The third annual Farm Show "Scooper Bowl" will be held Sunday, January 8, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., on the second level of the northeast building of the Pennsylvania Farm Show Complex.

The ice cream "Scooper Bowl" features an all-you-can-eat ice cream festival with entertainment by the Penn State Nittany Lion and a media ice cream making contest.

Proceeds from the event will benefit children with cancer and their families through the Four Diamonds Fund of the Hershey Medical Center. The cost to enter the "Scooper Bowl" will be \$3 for adults and \$2 for children. Advance tickets will be sold on Saturday of the show for \$2. Tickets are available by contacting the Four Diamonds Fund at (717) 531-6086.

"Scooper Bowl" will feature a variety of frozen dairy products including ice cream and novelties such as ice cream sandwiches. The one-time donation to enter the "Scooper Bowl" area allows visitors to enjoy all of the ice cream

they can eat.

The Four Diamonds Fund raises approximately 99 percent of their funds from community organizations and events. Annually, the Fund supports over 350 children with cancer.

Through these donations and other funding, the Fund provides one hundred percent coverage of hospital bills not covered by family insurance. Additional monies from the Fund are used to support programs at the Medical Center including children's cancer research.

The Fund was created to provide families with support for the tremendous financial burden during a child's hospitalization.

A special media ice cream making contest will be held at noon during the "Scooper Bowl." Participants will create their own recipes and then hand-crank their recipe.

Flavors for this year's contest include "Millersburg Malted Munchie," "WINK's Kitchen Sink Surprise" and "Big Scoop." In addition, media personalities' flavors will be made by a profes-

sional ice cream manufacturer so that "Scooper Bowl" visitors can choose their own favorites.

Pennsylvania ice cream companies will be donating their product and personnel for the event. Each company will have its own booth for product sampling. Participants include Coleman's Ice Cream, of Lancaster; Fike's Dairy, of Uniontown; Hershey Creamery Company, of Harrisburg; Jack & Jill Ice Cream Company, of Bensalem; and Turkey Hill Dairy Inc., of Conestoga.

Pennsylvania's ice cream industry is the second largest in the country. The abundant supply of fresh cream and milk makes Pennsylvania an excellent location for ice cream manufacturing.

Pennsylvania's Dairy Promotion Partners - the American Dairy Association and Dairy Council, Mid East UDIA, and Pennsylvania Dairy Promotion Program - have been collectively promoting dairy products on behalf of the state's dairy farmers since 1989.

For further information about the ice cream "Scooper Bowl" or the media ice cream making contest, call (717) 787-6903.



Genevieve Roloson prepares to pour the maple candy into molds. To make the candy, she heats the syrup to 30 degrees above the boiling point of water and then allows it to cool to about 185 degrees. Here the syrup flows from the stainless steel "pig" into a stainless steel bin, where it is stirred with an auger. When the syrup starts to lose its gloss, it is ready to pour into the rubber molds where it hardens.