

Sample And Purchase Maple Syrup At Farm Show

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 (Bradford Co.) — As you wander through the maple exhibit at the Pennsylvania Farm Show, you're not far from the place where some of nature's sweet syrup can be purchased or sampled. In fact, some people make it a point to visit the exhibit every year to stock up on the thick, rich substance.

The Pennsylvania Maple Syrup Council has been sponsoring a booth at the Pennsylvania Farm Show since 1966, according to Lawrence and Genevieve Roloson, who have made the January jaunt to work in the booth every year since then.

"At a meeting, (the Pennsylvania Maple Syrup Council) decided that they would like to promote the industry and they thought a good way to do it was to get into a farm show, so they rented space and each of the five associations was to furnish a quantity of maple product," noted Roloson.

For the first 20 years, the council actively handed out samples of maple cream. Lately, because of manpower shortages, the council does not actively offer samples, although if you ask at the booth, representatives will be glad to let you have a taste.

"As part of our promotion, and to try to get people to try something different, we give out maple cream or maple butter samples. That's nothing but maple syrup that has been boiled a little longer. You can use it on toast like a spread. We would give samples of this on a stick and people would ask, 'What is this, face cream? or What do we do with this?' It's amazing to watch them taste it. Some of the people have never had it before. Once they've tasted it, they come back year after year for more," said Ada Hess, who with her husband Bob tap about 1,000 trees in Dimock, Susquehanna County. The Hess's have been making and selling maple syrup for 35 years.

"When we started farming, we got into it as a family project. It's still a family project," said Ada.

You can also have a taste of the maple products in the food court where volunteers dish up soft serve maple yogurt, maple sundaes, maple cotton candy, and maple-coated peanuts.

"For about the past 10 years, we've been running a booth at two spots, our regular one in the main exhibition building and the one at the food court," said Roloson.

The Roloson's home maple operation is also run by family members. They man their 3,500 taps and accept sap from other producers in the area. Then they set to work boiling the sap down until most of the water is evaporated and the syrup becomes just the right thickness. On average it takes about 40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of maple syrup.

The taps go out about the 10th of February.

"When the snow starts to melt, it's time to tap the trees," said Roloson, who has been involved in his family's operation since he was two years old. He is now 79.

The same procedure is followed on the farm of Jim and Dora Tice in Mainesburg, Tioga County. Every spring, they put out about 3,000 taps.

"We bought a neighboring property from where I was born," said Jim Tice, "and we've been making syrup for about 20 years at the present location. Before that it was a

home-use type of operation."

The Tice's especially enjoy making maple cotton candy, which they sell at fairs across the state as well as the Pennsylvania Farm Show.

"We sell quite a lot of cotton candy," noted Tice. "We give out samples everywhere we go and that really sells it. It's all natural. We take the maple crumb sugar made from dark amber syrup and blend it with white sugar. Then it's just a matter of pouring the mix into the machine. The machine melts it and spins it out as cotton candy."

One of the main promotion goals of the Pennsylvania Maple Syrup Council was to let Pennsylvania people know that Pennsylvania is a big maple syrup producer.

"We've had people come up to the booth and ask, 'Where in Vermont did you get your maple syrup?' or 'I didn't know that Pennsylvania produces maple syrup!'" said Roloson.

According to the most recent statistics from the National Agricultural Statistics Service, Pennsylvania ranks 7th with 67,000 gallons produced in 1999. By far, in the United States, Vermont is the biggest producer of syrup with 370,000 gallons produced in 1999. Other top states include New York, Maine, Ohio, Wisconsin, and Michigan.

Besides promotion, the various maple associations also work together to form grading standards for the syrup and to make sure that only pure maple syrup is labeled as such.

"When we say pure maple syrup," said Hess, "That's exactly what it is. There's nothing else in it."

Universities are also involved in ongoing research to develop the "sweetest trees" or the trees with the highest sugar content in their sap and to study the minerals naturally found in the syrup.

New technology is also being developed that takes some of the leg work out of the maple business. Lawrence Roloson's earliest memories of making maple syrup were of a big iron kettle hung outside over a stack of firewood.

"We would collect the sap in buckets and carry it to the kettles. Then, after it boiled down a little, we'd take it into the house to finish it," Roloson said.

Soon, more and more producers moved to a sugar house where the syrup could be boiled in long, shallow evaporating pans, although the sap was still largely collected in buckets. From there, producers started attaching plastic tubes to the spiles and collecting the sap in a central location. The pipeline, as it is called, saves a lot of time and effort.

Other technologies that are being developed is a process called reverse osmosis, where some of the water is taken out of the sap before it gets to the evaporator. Some producers also preheat their sap in coils that are placed over the boiling pan, saving time and energy.

After the sap is boiled down, it is canned and labeled and ready to sell.

In case you think maple syrup is just for pancakes, think again. All producers say that maple syrup, and maple crumb sugar, add flavor and sweetness to just about any dish from baked apples to baked beans to cookies. Genevieve Roloson is a big promoter of maple and has included two recipes for everyone to try.

MAPLE SYRUP COOKIES

- 1 cup maple syrup
- 1 egg
- ½ cup shortening
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 2 cups flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 cup chopped nut meats or chocolate chips.

Cream together maple syrup, egg and shortening, add dry ingredients, and mix well. Drop on cookie sheets and bake at 350 degrees for 10-12 minutes.

MAPLE OATMEAL BARS

- ½ cup softened shortening
- ½ cup granulated sugar
- ½ cup maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 egg
- ¾ cup flour
- ¾ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ cup chopped walnuts
- 1 cup quick cooking oatmeal

Cream together shortening, sugar and egg, and blend in maple syrup and vanilla. Sift flour with baking soda and salt. Combine with nuts and oatmeal and add to batter. Place in a 9x9 inch greased baking pan. Bake at 350 degrees for 35 minutes. Cut into bars when still warm. Makes about 12-16 bars.



Lawrence and Genevieve Roloson stand by a variety of containers that they use for maple syrup. The Rolosons have been involved with the booth at the Pennsylvania Farm Show from the start and will volunteer their time this year as well.



Since 1966, Pennsylvania Maple products have been represented at the Farm Show. Here Ada Hess and Lawrence Roloson man the booth with the help of two Maple Sweethearts.

Ag Scholarship Applicants Wanted

ST. LOUIS, Mo. — The Commitment to Agriculture scholarship program is seeking applicants for \$1,500 scholarships to be awarded to 100 high school seniors planning to continue their education in agriculture.

The program, which is sponsored by the American Farm Bureau® Foundation for Agriculture and Monsanto Company, is for high school seniors from families actively engaged in production agriculture.

Applicants must be planning to attend, beginning in the fall of 2000, an accredited vocational/technical institute, community college or four-year

college or university that offers an academic major in a field related to agriculture. In addition, applicants must be planning a career in agriculture.

"Supporting education in agriculture is important to the future of American farming," said Marsha Purcell of the Foundation for Agriculture. "Tomorrow's agriculture leaders will be among the students helped with this program."

In its first year in 1999, the Commitment to Agriculture program awarded 50 scholarships to students in 28 states. The 2000 program was expanded to 100 scholarships for students in all 50 states.

The scholarship program is supported by royalties received

from settlements involving piracy of patented biotech seed, including Roundup Ready® soybeans, cotton and canola, and Bollgard® cotton.

Successful applicants must exhibit a scholastic ability to succeed in a higher education setting and a strong interest in an agricultural career. The one-time scholarship awards are good for one year.

Scholarship applicants are available at Farm Bureau offices, agricultural supply retailers, on-line at www.agfoundation.org and www.farm-source.com or by calling 615-320-3149. The application deadline is Apr. 1, 2000. Applicants will be notified of scholarship results by May 15, 2000