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2018-2019 Officers:

President: Keith Heasley
 Vice President: Chad Trent
 Secretary: Rachel Taylor
 Treasurer: Adam Taylor

Message From Our President



Hello WVMSPA members. I hope our 2020 syrup season is off to a good start. The association has been involved in numerous activities to help promote maple syrup production in West Virginia in the past year and I wanted to inform you about some of these activities and ask for any feedback which you may have.

In the first half of last year, a number of research proposals from the academics came across my desk. As President of the WVMSPA (and a former academic researcher) I helped edit, wrote letters of support, and offered WVMSPA collaboration for a number of these projects:

- 1) "Increasing production and income of U.S. maple producers through the increased use of red maple as a crop tree", Dr. Abby van den Berg, University of Vermont.
- 2) "Sugarbush Management and Control of Insects and Pathogens", Dr. Jamie Schuler, West Virginia University.
- 3) "Leveraging Education and Research to Promote Maple Syrup Production across Ohio Pennsylvania and West Virginia", Dr. Sayeed Mehmood, Ohio State University, Penn State University and Future Generations University.
- 4) "Sweet Opportunities: Tapping West Virginia's Maple Resource", Luke C. Taylor-Ide, Future Generations University.
- 5) "Re-designing Centrifugal Devices for Maple and Walnut Syrup Clarification", Dr. Mike Rechlin, Future Generations University.

I hope to have an update on the progress of these research projects at the upcoming annual meeting on May 2, 2020. Please put the date on your calendar.

The WV state fair was held August 8th – 17th. The cotton candy sales at the fair have always been a big money raiser for the association, accounting for half of the annual income, and this year was no different with income of \$2,606. A big debt of gratitude is owed to the members who donated their time and energy to manage the booth and operate the cotton candy machine during the fair. In particular, Brandon Daniels is owed a special thanks for organizing the association participation.

In the last few months, the WVMSPA has been working with The MESH company on a marketing analysis of maple syrup sales in the Appalachian region. This work is close to getting finished and I hope you can provide your help and input if contacted.

The Mountain State Maple Days are coming this year on February 22nd and March 21st, and the WVMSPA is taking the lead on organizing and promoting Maple Days. This is a tremendous amount of work to support all of the sugar houses in the state. Thankfully, our own webmaster, Tina Barton, and Karen Milnes from Future Generations have stepped up and helped get sugar houses and other businesses registered on the WVMSPA.org website, and have been pushing advertising.

I hope you had happy holidays and that you have a fun, productive maple syrup season. Also, please do not hesitate to contact me with any comments, criticisms or suggestions

Sincerely,



Keith A. Heasley
2019-20 President, WV Maple Syrup Producers Association
keith.heasley@mail.wvu.edu
304-216-9136

1859

A Vintage Year for Maple Syrup

Mike Rechlin and Paul Ronk



People often ask, “how long can you keep a bottle of maple syrup and it still be good?” We know that honey has been found in 3,000-year old Egyptian burial tombs, and it’s still edible. But, as far as we know, the Egyptians were not making maple syrup so, for an answer, we have to look elsewhere.

This past fall West Virginia producer Paul Ronk was making a delivery to a local gas station that carries his syrup. After the drop-off the owner said he had something for him and came back with a bottle labeled Maple syrup, and the date 1859. Eighteen fifty-nine, that was 161 years ago, and may just be a record when it comes to old maple syrup. That

was the year Paul’s family pioneered their homestead, where Paul still lives and taps trees, in Augusta County Virginia, now Lincoln County West Virginia. It was the year John Brown made his raid on Harper’s Ferry, a lead-up to the Civil war, and the resultant



founding of West Virginia. And, one could presume, it was a good sap flow year.

But, having 161-year old maple syrup does not answer that question of “how long can you keep a bottle of maple syrup and it still be good?” Well, against the good advice of most everyone we asked, Paul and I decided to find out. After all, very old wine is a delicacy, maybe it’s the same for maple syrup? Using a turkey baster syringe, we extracted a small quantity of liquid through the cork. The first few drops went on a refractometer. With a brix of 70 degrees we figured it was food safe. Then it was time for the taste. The syrup was sweet, but had a



flavor indicating it was made from sour sap. Whoever made it had not read the research reports on sanitation. The taste, interesting enough, was not maple. In fact, it tasted a whole lot like birch syrup. It had a fruity flavor with a bitterness. As you can see in the photo, the syrup is really black. But it did not have a burned flavor.

After the taste-test Paul sealed the extraction hole with wax. He has his vintage 1859 syrup in a protective display case, ready to take it with him to fairs and festivals, should anyone ask him “How long can you keep a bottle of maple syrup, and it still be good?” Well, Paul and I are glad to report on the question of it still being good by borrowing a line from Monty Python and the Holy Grail, “not dead yet.”

Mountain State Maple Days

Tina Barton



Mountain State Maple Days will be bigger than ever in 2020. The dates are February 22 and March 21. Not only do we have all the farms from 2019 signed up, but we have some new participants. Two of them are in Gilmer County, as we attempt to reach out to a whole new area of the state. WVMSPA member Kristopher Marsh (Country Roads Maple), with Future Generations University (Karen Milnes and Mike Rechlin), are working with Glenville State College to introduce a maple program to their forestry department.

The February Maple Day coincides with the 16th Annual West Virginia Small Farms Conference, which will be February 19 to 22 in Charleston, and the corresponding Winter Blues Farmers Market on the 22nd. While this makes it difficult for the participating sugarhouse owners to attend the conference and the farmers market, Luke Taylor-Ide is hosting a table at the

conference for Future Generations and has offered to share it with WVMSPA. Also, there will be a “field trip” to a member farm, Hill ‘n Hollow (Chad Trent) as part of the conference, so we are making the best of a rather unfortunate situation.

Tina Metzger, executive director of New Biz Launch Pad (Eastern WV Community and Technical College Foundation, Institute for Rural Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (IREED)) has been coordinating with the maple producers and businesses of the Potomac Highlands to continue to make Maple Days a popular destination there. The Potomac Highlands certainly had the best publicity last year, so we are trying to learn from this and reach out to the other Convention and Visitors Bureaus across the state to garner support the event. We are most grateful for the support of Future Generations University, especially Karen Milnes, who has contacted a lot of business owner and CVBs and drafted press releases to ensure successful events.

To see the participating farms and other businesses and events, go to our website, www.wvmspa.org and click on the Maple Days tab. Last minute registrations are accepted but will probably only be advertised through our website at this late date. The registration form is also under the Maple Days tab.

WVMSPA Website Update

Tina Barton, WVMSPA Webmaster

Big changes have come to our website, www.wvmspa.org. For one thing, you can now fill out the WVMSPA membership form and pay membership dues on line. To pay on-line, go to www.wvmspa.org and click on the “Join On Line” tab. This takes you to our new “Members Only” site which is a new perk of paid membership. When you pay on line, you are automatically added to the Members Only site. You will receive an email to confirm, which you need to click in order to get a username and password.

You can still join by mail, or even if you join on line, you can pay by check. If you pay by check, but also want to be added to the Members Only site, please email me at webmaster@wvmspa.org and I will send you a username and password. You can easily switch back and forth between the Members Only Site and our open WVMSPA home page.

The Members Only Site (www.members.wvmspa.org) currently contains the “Classified Ads” section and a Resource section. So far, the Resource section has a page about how to get registered with the FDA to sell your syrup products. It will also eventually contain the most recent newsletter. As a new newsletter comes out, we will rotate the old one to the open site. I look forward to receiving your feedback on this site, and hope you will send some ideas for content. For example, do you have plans for DIY maple equipment that you only want to share with members of the association? Do you have resources to share, or talents to offer, only among friends? Email me at webmaster@wvmspa.org.

We have also separated out “Maple in the Classroom” into its own site. It is still easy to find from our webpage, but it looks a lot nicer, and it can be supported by the coordinators of

that program, with the WVMSPA webmaster's assistance. The site is www.classroom.wvmspa.org.

The Sap is Rising in Virginia, and it's not all Maple

Tom Hammett, College of Natural Resources and Environment, Virginia Tech

Making syrup – as a new producer, where do I begin or as an experienced producer, how can I best expand my sap collection operation? These were two of the many questions addressed during the “Tree Sap Workshop: Focusing on Maple and Black Walnut Syrup” held November 15-16, 2019 at the Catawba Sustainability Center, Catawba, Virginia. Over twenty attended including landowners new to sap and syrup production, other landowners experienced in maple syrup production, as well as specialists from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

The workshop goals included: covering the basics of sap and syrup production (for Sugar Maple, Black Walnut, and other species) through hands-on field exercises; discussion engaging interested landowners with specialists on sap collection, syrup production and marketing; insights into value added markets; and the formation of a state tree sap producers association.

The workshop started with Catawba farm manager, Adam Taylor, who introduced the activities of the Catawba Sustainability Center and gave a guided tour of the Center's farm operations. The tour included visits to the Black Walnut tapping area, specialty crops planting and agroforestry sites, and non-timber forest products understory planting. Tom Hammett introduced the Virginia Tree Sap Program (funded through a VA Dept of Ag Specialty Crop Block Grant), value added marketing opportunities, and plans for year two of the project. Tom discussed how the Virginia Tech program is helping landowners and farmers begin or expand



Kate Fotos giving a talk on sap collection methods at Ned Savage's sugar bush near during the Catawba workshop

tree sap production, and the formation of a Virginia tree sap producers' association. Next, Mike Rechlin, WV Maple Commodity Specialist with Future Generations University, engaged the group with a presentation on “Why make maple syrup in VA and WV”.

The second day included short presentations on tree sap project activities including the maple in the school program, and landowner mentoring activities. Next, we traveled to Ned Savage's sugar bush in nearby Craig County where Kate Fotos, maple technician with Future Generations, led us through a fieldwork session titled

“Maple Tapping and Sap Collection: Buckets to Tubing systems”. We had a working lunch gathering suggestions and input from the participants on how the Virginia Tech Tree Sap

Program and the Catawba Sustainability Center can best help producers. An afternoon session titled “Sap to Syrup” by Mike Rechlin included making black walnut syrup, the field practices, and the current research program to find ways expand sap production, and the potential of making syrup from other species. Lastly, Tom Hammett reviewed project plans for next year during a session entitled “Where do we go from here?”.

The day ended with a syrup tasting session and very productive discussion. Syrups tasted included those made from black walnut, sycamore, and birch - all made from West Virginia sap. A major benefit of this workshop was the development of plans for expanded research in production and utilization of Black Walnut and other tree saps, and the expanded collaboration between the Catawba Sustainability Center, the Virginia Tech tree sap program, and Future Generations University. This was the second event in the Tree Sap Program 2019 workshop series. The first was in Highland County in September, and the third workshop was November 22 and 23 in St. Paul, VA.

Tom Hammett of the College of Natural Resources and Environment, Virginia Tech is the director of the project entitled “Expanding Livelihood Options for Virginia Landowners through Tree Syrup Production”. For more information on the tree sap program and the association, you may contact Tom at himal@vt.edu or send him a text to cell 540-250-6741.

2019 Maple Sap Collection & Syrup Processing Certificate Course Residential Weekend - Nov 1-3, 2019

Karen Milnes

Despite an ominous outlook at the beginning of the week, the Pendleton County weather couldn't have been better for the third residential weekend of Future Generations University's Maple Syrup Certificate Course. The maples displayed their full Fall glory against clear blue November skies, and each morning presented itself with a twinkling of frost on the ground. Starting in 2017, with support from the One Foundation and in partnership with the West Virginia Department of Veterans Assistance and the West Virginia Department of Agriculture, the course has recruited students interested in tapping into one of the region's most abundant resources. Maple syruping is a cultural tradition in the Central Appalachians that had, more or less fallen out of favor as the food system was industrialized, and the availability of inexpensive sweeteners like corn syrup and white refined sugar increased. Some remember, and some are surprised to find out that maple syrup can, in fact, be made this far South; but a new wave of innovative technologies and a resurgence of interest in the health benefits and self-sufficient mentality have contributed to a growing interest in the industry.



Class of 2019 participants and instructors

Aimed at preparing Appalachian residents to start their own sugaring operations, the Maple Sap Collection & Syrup Processing course covered the spectrum from backyard collecting and boiling to large-scale 5,000 taps operations. Students traveled from as far away as North Carolina to take part in the three day intensive residential, and plan to spread their knowledge beyond the reaches of Appalachia.

Kristin Swoszowski-Tran, who made her way down from Pennsylvania said, "I'm

looking forward to taking what I've learned with me as I start my fledgling operation in the mountains of northern New Mexico."

Each morning began with classroom time, covering topics as wide-ranging as woodlot assessment for maple syrup potential, to sugar structure and concentration of sap versus syrup. The afternoons were filled with hands-on tutorials at various local farms and sugar shacks in the West Virginia Maple Syrup Producers Association (WVMSPA). Friday afternoon, participants put in sample plots and assessed the woods at Sweetwater Farm in Sugar Grove, WV for maple syruping potential: learning to calculate estimates of tubing and equipment needs and what to expect during the season. Students ran lateral lines that operate on natural vacuum and attached drops at M&S Maple Farm on Saturday in Upper Tract, WV. A tour of the sugar shack and evaporating process, led by owner/operators Mark and Sarah Kimble, culminated in candy and bourbon and rye barrel-aged syrup tasting. And Sunday, after a morning of grading and identifying off-flavors in maple syrup, the group made the trek to Cool Hollow Maple Farm in Sugar Grove, where owner/operator Ricky Harper demonstrated what a larger-scale operation that uses artificial vacuum can look like. Overall, the mood was jovial and participants were pleased with the course and eager to go home and apply what they had learned, "I really enjoyed the class!" Kristin commented, "Not only was the course well-designed in terms of orchestrating on-site visits with maple producers, but the relevant text dovetailed with the field experiences in a way that reinforced my learning by actually doing. The hands-on component really stood out for me when I was making choices about how and where to learn about maple sap and syrup production." But it's not over: later in November, the online sessions of the course will commence and students will gain membership into the WVMSPA. These will cover more tree science, the regulatory environment, and planning a maple business; with guest teachers Cindy Martel from the West Virginia Department of Ag and Tom Hammett from Virginia Tech's Center for Forest Products Marketing and Management staff. All in all, the course ran smoothly, the weather was perfect, and students left with a better understanding of the hard work and sweet rewards of running a maple syrup business.

A “Grade A” Standard for Sustainability

Mike Rechlin and Missy Moyers-Jarrells

Laurel Fork Sapsuckers sugar camp in Highland County, Virginia, set a goal in 2017 to become an educational center where people can come to learn the mutually enhancing benefits of sustainable forest management and increased sap production for the making of maple syrup. Owner Ronnie Moyers is a logger with a reputation for doing careful work and an intense curiosity for how his work impacts the landscape. It is that curiosity that in 2002 led Ronnie, to thin part of his sugaring stand and leave a similar adjacent stand un-thinned. As he puts it “just to see what would happen.” What he saw was expanded crowns and larger diameters on the



Jamie Schuler leads the group in a field exercise to demonstrate an overstocked forest and the decisions involved when deciding which trees to harvest to increase spacing for sugar maple growth

thinned stand. He also saw more sunlight on the forest floor promoting the growth of marketable herbs, such as elderberry and ginseng, and improved habitat for a variety of wildlife species.

The sapsucking side of the business is a family affair with Ronnie, his wife Sandy, daughter Missy, son-in-law Joe, and grandkids all playing a role. Their interest in sharing what they were learning led to the designation of their operation as a Forest Management for sap production study and outreach area. “This is a great opportunity for

Central Appalachia to gain knowledge on forest health that will continue to move the industry forward” commented Jason Grossman of H2O Innovation. Research and extension activities were initiated with funding through collaboration on a WVDA 2017 ACER access grant and through collaboration on a VDACS Specialty Crop Block Grant with Virginia Tech. The weekend of September 13th Laurel Fork Sapsuckers hosted a Tree Farm tour and dinner allowing interested landowners to look at various projects currently being implemented as well as to learn more about cost share opportunities and by enrolling in the Tree Farm program. This event was sponsored by Virginia Tree Farm Foundation to congratulate Ronnie and Sandy, Moyers Tree Farm for being awarded Virginia’s 2019 Tree Farm of the Year. After the tour Virginia Tree Farm President, John Matel commented that “The tour was very organized and included many unique talking points, maple syrup production, apple orchard restoration, American chestnut identification, golden winged warbler habitat and native red spruce regeneration.”



Mike Rechlin leads a discussion on off flavor maple syrup and the possible scenarios that may lead to these tastes

The Saturday workshop continued on that forest management theme with Jamie Schuler from West Virginia University taking participants through the steps of analyzing the sap potential of their woodlot and how a forester would determine what trees to remove to increase tree growth and the sugar content of the sap. Participants “perked up their ears” when they heard Jamie comment that thinning a stand like this could easily pay for the tubing installation.

Mike Rechlin, Maple Commodity Specialist with Future Generations University, led the afternoon session on producing quality maple syrup. Christoph Herby commented “These workshops are perfect for someone who is new to the maple business. They add another layer to the foundational knowledge to move beyond backyard sugaring.”

Maple Syrup Producers Gather in Southwest Virginia

Phil Meeks, Extension Agent for Agriculture & Natural Resources
(276) 328-6194
pmeeks@vt.edu

The terrain of Appalachia is often considered a barrier to agricultural production, but speakers at the November 23 Southwest Virginia Tree Syrup School in St. Paul emphasized how steep wooded slopes benefit sap collection.

A total of 28 producers and industry supporters gathered at the Oxbow Center to hear presentations on sap collection, processing of syrup, management of tubing, business expansion and complementary opportunities such as forest botanicals. A discussion on the benefits of a statewide tree syrup association focused on how such an organization could influence regulations and markets.

“Southwestern Virginia has an abundant tappable resource of maple, walnut and sycamore,” said Mike Rechlin, keynote presenter at the event and author of *Maple Syrup: An Introduction to the Science of a Forest Treasure*, “as well as the ‘untapped’ markets of the south. Developing a sugaring industry in the region can contribute to the economic revitalization of Appalachian family farms.”

The workshop was supported in part by a grant from the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services to the Virginia Tech Tree Sap Program. Tom Hammett of Virginia Tech, another of the speakers and the project director for the program said that “while several of the attendees were new to tapping there is much to learn from the heritage of “sugaring” in Wise and surrounding counties. Learning how to tap, the equipment needed, and how to package (bottle) syrup and other products is important to revitalizing this once important activity in the region. We see important synergies on the landscape with producing botanicals (i.e., medicinal and dietary supplements) and other non-timber forest products along with syrup products. We hope that forming a producers association can help support landowner and makers of sap products and help others learn to how to best produce and market value added syrup products from Wise and nearby areas.”

Attendees at the second annual event came from Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee and Kentucky. Those interested in learning how they can produce syrup or other non-timber forest products on their lands should contact Virginia Cooperative Extension at (276) 328-6194.

Maple Research and Education in West Virginia

Mike Rechlin

As the industry and the interest in maple have grown in our state, so has educational and research initiatives to support that growth. In addition to the Maple in the Classroom program being run by Experience Learning, programs at the Collegiate level have also grown. Joining the Sugarbush Management and Maple Syrup Production course offered by Jamie Schuler at WVU, and the Maple Sap Collection and Syrup Processing certificate course by Future Generations University, two new WV academic institutions are busy tapping trees.

West Virginia University Potomac State College started tapping three years ago. After a year of mentoring by Eddie (deceased) and Karen Hartman with Indian Water Maple, last



Potomac State Sugarhouse

season Potomac State added maple syrup making to their farm program. Under the direction of Cory Armstrong, Director of the Sustainable Agriculture and Entrepreneurship Program, and Agriculture Instructor Bobby Cheves, the College bought a CDL 2x8 evaporator and tapped 500 trees. Students and faculty made 100 gallons of syrup last season. This past year, their “Pure Maple Syrup Production” program won first place, and a \$1,000 prize, at WVU’s second annual IdeaHub competition.

In recognition of their support for Potomac State maple, the College dedicated their sugar house to Eddie and Karen Hartman. Eddie’s enthusiasm lives on in the students learning about maple at Potomac State.

This season Glenville State will join the WV colleges tapping trees. They started a pilot program last sap season. This year new faculty member Nabil Nasser is taking the lead in getting his students out in the woods to tap trees. At his invitation, Future Generations sent a team to Glenville to do a program on maple for his students and discuss expansion possibilities. Over a luncheon meeting with Forestry Faculty members Nabil Nasser, Brian Perkins, Jesse King (WV Dept of Forestry), and Forestry Department Chair Rico Gazal, we discussed educational and research opportunities. Glenville will be working with Kristopher Marsh, Country Roads Maple, who will be boiling the sap they collect this year.

Following the 2018 Southern Research Symposium, research activity in the State has moved into full gear. A number of research needs were identified at the Symposium, and our academic institutions have stepped forward to look for answers. Given our climate variabilities, sanitation is a major concern. Jamie Schuler at WVU has ongoing studies looking at retapping and the West Virginia innovation in sap collection; “Bumping your taps.” He is also into the second year of a study looking at sap yields using 5/16 - inch droplines with 3/16 -inch laterals (see last issue of this newsletter for preliminary results).

Mike Rechin at Future Generations University has focused on tapping alternative species. Last season his research team successfully made syrup from walnut, sycamore, and black birch. This season, given the availability of the species and the economics, he is focusing on tapping black walnut trees. Studies are being

conducted on the proper time to tap, the effectiveness of vacuum in increasing sap flow, and the use of small diaphragm pumps to draw a vacuum. Working with the Robert C Byrd Institute of Advanced Manufacturing, the FG team is testing a walnut specific 7/16-inch tap to accommodate the thick bark on the tree and developing an inexpensive and energy efficient backyard evaporator based on “rocket stove” principles.

Our academic institutions have also been successful at attracting research funds. In the latest round of USDA ACER Access grants WVU submitted a successful proposal, as did Future Generations in a collaborative effort with Ohio State and Penn State. Both of those programs are described in separate articles in this newsletter. The walnut research is being supported by a USDA NE SARE grant.



Tapping trees at Glenville State College

2019 ACER Access funding continues to support West Virginia Maple

Luke Taylor-Ide

Future Generations University, partnering with Ohio State University and Penn State was awarded a 2019 USDA ACER Access grant to promote sap and syrup production in the southerly tier of maple producing states. The Future Generations “Sweet Opportunities” team will be developing a comprehensive program to promote the sustainable management of maple forest resources for sap production and increase maple syrup production across West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. By working to better understand the current syrup industry’s structure and through educational programs aimed at landowners, resource professionals, and policy makers, we expect to expand syrup production and markets to enhance rural economies in our region.

The ACER Access funding is linked to a three-part plan to promote maple syrup production in Appalachia. The program will initially survey existing production practices, market outlets, and sales to establish a baseline understanding of the industry. This will lead to an outreach strategy aimed at enhancing production and promoting the long-term sustainability of the industry. As the project moves forward, the team will be hosting educational programs for current and future producers and developing online training tools to teach best practices. Additionally, they will evaluate the economic impacts of the maple industry on rural economies. Future Generations University will be continuing to work closely with the West Virginia Maple Syrup Producers Association on this part of the greater Sweet Opportunities Program.

Beginning in 1992, the Future Generations family of organizations has promoted research, learning, and action for inclusive and sustainable change worldwide. Today, the University's accredited Master's Degree program boasts alumni in 40 different countries, as well as being involved in a wide variety of community development projects worldwide. The University also continues to support a number of research projects that promote local social change.

Back Again, by Popular Demand...

Southern Syrup Research Symposium II: Making it work in the Southern Tier

Mike Rechlin

In 2018 we held the first Southern Syrup Research Symposium to focus research on the problems and opportunities of making maple syrup in the southern tier of maple producing states of West Virginia, Virginia, Maryland, Kentucky, and the southerly portions of Pennsylvania and Ohio. In the last two years our knowledge of sap and syrup production applicable to these regions has grown. Join us this coming **June 19th and 20th at WVU, Morgantown**, to learn and to share sap collection and syrup processing innovations that will keep the sap flowing and the industry growing.



Featured speakers include:

Les Ober, Ohio State Maple extensionist, offering a Friday workshop on grading and syrup quality

Abby van den Berg, Proctor Maple Research Center, talking about her new research including tapping red maples

Aaron Wightman, Cornell Maple Program, talking about research on air injection techniques to improve syrup flavor

Jamie Schuler, West Virginia University, talking on sugarbush management to increase sap yield and sweetness.

The program includes a Friday social, “The Spirit(s) of Maple” – with tasting. Concurrent afternoon sessions on research being done in West Virginia, a “Cooking with Steve” session on value added processing, and a **launch** of the Future Generations University/Robert C. Byrd Institute designed **Rocket Sap Evaporator**.

So, the count-down begins: 5,4,3,2, 1 **REGISTER NOW** on the WVMSPA website. (A complete schedule is available on the WBMSPA website)

Sustaining the Central Appalachian Maple Syrup Industry through Integrated Forest Management Education Programming

Jamie Schuler

I am excited to report that WVU has secured another USDA-funded ACER grant to support the maple syrup industry in the Central Appalachian region.

Over the last five years, a tremendous amount of traction has been generated by the various maple programs offered in and around WV. These excellent programs, targeting new, existing and hopefully future producers, have focused largely on maple sap collection, processing, and the production of quality syrup and syrup products. Our new grant funding will further support the maple syrup industry by developing programs that focus on maintaining the availability, health, and productivity of our natural resource—the maple trees and their supporting forested ecosystems.

My colleagues (Dave McGill, Matthew Kasson, and Jingxin Wang) and I are focusing our research and educational programs on three areas outlined below.

1. Provide landowners assistance in assessing the potential of their forests for maple sap production and develop technical guidelines to ensure their proper management.

Our intent is to provide an assessment (inventory) of various maple-dominated forests throughout the region, including those that are currently being tapped and those that might be tapped in the future. These data will provide the basis for characterizing

our forests—species composition, stem density (potential taps/ac), tree size, crowding, and diameter growth rates. These metrics will then be used to compare our Appalachian forests to the “typical” maple forests of New England.

We will then develop a manual describing best management practices for developing, maintaining, and improving maple forests in the central Appalachians. Several sugarbush management manuals and guidelines have been published since the early 1900s (e.g., Cope 1946; Smith and Gibbs 1970; Lancaster et al. 1974; Morrow 1976; Voorhis 1986; Houston et al. 1990; Coons 1992; Heiligmann et al. 2006). Despite the availability of this information, much of it is dated or not consistent with current knowledge or challenges. For example, most do not address exotic species, changing climate patterns, changing species compositions, changing markets, and multiple-use considerations.

Of the more recent guidelines and extension publications focusing on sugarbush management (e.g., Smallidge 2016), most, and understandably so, were developed for maple forest types in New England and Canada. The central Appalachian forests are functionally and compositionally different, and require regionally specific management techniques and protocols. Data from our assessments will be used to support this.

2. Assess the current incidence of disease and pests in maple forests and develop a technical manual for forest health monitoring for landowners and professionals.

A second technical manual will be produced to highlight forest health concerns in maple forests. This manual will provide information on specific pests and pathogens and outline ways landowners can detect, report, and manage them. Impacts from pests and pathogens are among the greatest concerns among sugarmakers, or at least should be. Although maples are a resilient tree species, as indicated by its growing abundance, the detrimental effects of insects and pathogens should not be taken lightly. One only has to think about American beech, ash, eastern hemlock, and American chestnut to be reminded of how impactful some of these can be on our ecosystems.

The incidence of insects and pathogens has not been well examined in southern maple forests. Recent maple declines in the more northern climates have been linked to factors such as repeated insect attacks, foliage, stem, and root diseases, and droughts and/or excessive rains, late frosts, non-native species. As a complement to the forest inventory work already mentioned, our disease and pest experts will evaluate the same forests to provide critical baseline data in order to (1) detect future changes in forest health, and (2) understand major pests and pathogens currently present.

3. Provide knowledge and training for land managers and loggers that are interested in working with landowners to establish/manage sugarbushes.

We will train professionals to identify and understand the sugarbush potential of the forests they are working in. Decisions that foresters make in marking trees for harvesting and the trees loggers choose to fell when cutting timber for landowners influence the long-term potential of sap production on those properties. Given the

historical and current emphasis on timber management compared to sugaring, very few foresters/loggers in our region have any formal training related to managing forests for sap production. We intend to provide this training and incentivize it by maintaining a “Trained” list that will be hosted on the Southern Syrup Research Institute’s website at West Virginia University, which will allow landowners that are interested in managing their maple resource to connect with professionals with supplemental training.

The success of this program is going to partly depend on your support. We are looking to landowners that are willing to participate in our focus areas described above. Some members have already replied to an earlier postcard asking for participation. Thank you! For others that might be interested (or know someone that might be interested) in having your property evaluated free of charge, please contact me via email at Jamie.schuler@mail.wvu.edu. All data and information collected will be kept confidential. We plan to begin the field assessments in the summer. I wish you all the best of luck this season. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Limited Liability Legislation for Agritourism

Tina Barton

See our website (<https://wvmspa.org/limited-liability-legislation-for-agritourism/>, or look under the Resources Tab) for the full wording of liability legislation under “TITLE 61, LEGISLATIVE RULE WEST VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, SERIES 37 – AGRITOURISM”. All sugarhouses participating in Maple Days or other demos should post a notice in large font (such as found at the above web page) that reads as follows:

NOTICE

Under West Virginia law, there may be limited liability for an injury to or death of a participant in an agritourism activity conducted at this agritourism business if the injury or death results from the inherent risks of the agritourism activity. Inherent risks of agritourism activities include, among others, risks of injury inherent to landscape, terrain, equipment, and animals, as well as the potential for you to act in a negligent manner that may contribute to your injury or death. You are assuming the risk of participating in this agritourism activity.

At the Annual Meeting last May, there was also a discussion about coming up with uniform Sugarhouse rules. This would include things like “Don’t touch any equipment without permission; Don’t go wandering off without permission; No running in the sugarhouse; No horse-play in the Sugarhouse; No putting fingers in the syrup.” Okay, I’m making this up. But really, think about what rules you want, and post them. Then share them with webmaster@wvmspa.org. Next year, perhaps we can come up with a uniform sign, and maybe have it printed for you.

Here’s to a great maple year, and fun and successful Maple Days!

Paid advertisement:

Daniels Maple Products

Serving All of WV & VA



We carry a large selection of WV Jugs, 3/16” & 5/16” tubing, mainline, mainline fittings and many other in-stock supplies. We ship anywhere and can order any size reverse osmosis, evaporator, tank or other manufactured items. Please give us the opportunity to serve you.

1747 Morris Branch Road, Dawson, WV 25976
(304) 575-7266 wvmapler@suddenlink.net

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FutureGenerationsUniversity
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West Virginia Maple Syrup Producers Association
Membership Application 2019 (revised 10/2018)

Purpose:

“The purpose of the West Virginia Maple Syrup Producers Association is to promote, educate, and research the maple and other tree syrup as well as value-added syrup products throughout West Virginia.”

Membership:

“Membership is open to persons interested in maple or firms engaged in any phase of producing, processing and/or marketing maple syrup, and/or tree syrups and value-added products of maple syrup and other tree syrups.”

We invite you to join with us as we learn and promote our industry.

Name: _____

Farm/sugarhouse name: _____

Membership category (check one):

_____ West Virginia members. (With full voting rights).

_____ Associate and Honorary members. This category is for friends from other states who want to join our organization. (Without voting rights)

_____ I give permission for my contact information to be shared with paid members.

_____ I do not give my permission to share my contact information with paid members

Address:

Phone number:

cell:

Email address:

Annual dues: \$25 includes

- Maple Syrup Digest Subscription
- Biannual Newsletter
- Workshops on relevant sugaring topics
- Participation in WV annual maple weekend

Complete application and submit with your annual dues of \$25 by May 2, 2020
(make checks payable to WVMSPA)

TO: Keith Heasley, 2988 Compressor Station Rd Bruceton Mills, WV 26525

West Virginia Maple Syrup Association
100 530 Greenbank Road
Arborvale, WV 24915