

## **Farmers Celebrating Real Maple Syrup**

### **Phyllis Couture**

Pure Maple syrup. Real Maple syrup. The first crop of the new year for the Northeast United States, including New York. Nothing compares with this sweetener provided by our Sugar Maple trees and Mother Nature. Yes, it is sugar, BUT it is natural sugar and also provides calcium and potassium and is fat (and gluten) free. From back yard, wood fired evaporators to large gas or electric fired completely automated evaporators, making maple syrup is a tradition of spring

I am old enough to remember horse drawn “sap sleds”, metal buckets, hours spent going from tree to tree to gather the sap, the steam filled “sugar shanty”, and the hours of waiting for that golden syrup to be ready for tasting on homemade bread. My grandparents waited until February to wash the buckets, tap the trees, and boil the sap. As they were also dairy farmers, this activity not only filled the winter months before spring planting, but also provided much needed cash income.

Much as we like to reminisce, we need to be aware that much has changed since the 1930’s. We are more concerned about conservation, energy, nutrition, labor costs, and climate. What has not changed is the value of families working together, the desire to use local and natural foods, and the fact that maple syrup is the first crop of the season.

In 2020, many producers tapped their trees in December 2019, and were ready for the first run when the January temperatures were above freezing and the stored sugar in the trees flowed up the trunks. Instead of buckets, the sap is carried to the evaporator by plastic tubing, often monitored by computer leak detection systems. To conserve energy, and save time, much of the water is first removed through reverse osmosis or other reduction methods before moving to the heat of the evaporator where the remaining water is boiled off. It takes about 40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of pure maple syrup.

Maple syrup was first made by native Americans. Today maple production is unique to the Northeastern states and Canada – where the sugar maple trees flourish. Vermont is the top US producer, followed closely by New York.

New York maple producers invite your family to connect with tradition by visiting a local maple farm on the last two weekends of March. You will see families working together, view traditional and modern methods, taste pure maple products and many foods using maple, and enjoy the great outdoors. Join our families celebrating a tradition of spring.