

Patrick-Murray Administration Kicks Off Maple Month

DEERFIELD - March 5, 2010 - Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR) Commissioner Scott Soares joined with farmers and local officials today to honor an annual rite of spring with the ceremonial tapping of a sugar maple tree to kick-off the Bay State's maple sugaring season.

Heralding the onset of the growing season, maple sugaring is the Commonwealth's first agricultural harvest of the year. More than 300 Massachusetts maple producers annually produce about 50,000 gallons of maple syrup worth almost \$3 million. The income from the maple sugaring industry, which employs more than 1,000 workers and preserves over 8,000 acres of Massachusetts woodlands, supports the operations of many dairy farms. Of the 11 major maple producing states in the U.S., Massachusetts ranks eighth.

"Maple sugaring represents yet another of the many diverse facets of Massachusetts agriculture," said DAR Commissioner Scott Soares. "Visiting our local sugar shacks is a great agri-tourism activity that the whole family can savor."

"Local farms producing locally grown products are growing substantially in Massachusetts and, this time of year, the maple sugaring industry offers so many opportunities to taste and savor one of the state's greatest products, maple sugar," said Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) Executive Director Betsy Wall.

Approximately 60,000 tourists spend more than \$1.5 million during the sugaring season at maple farms as well as restaurants, bed-and-breakfasts, country inns and other attractions in farm communities.

"Sugar makers around Massachusetts are looking forward to the season," said Ed Parker, president of the Massachusetts Maple Producers Association. "We're all proud to be continuing a craft that has been part of Massachusetts for hundreds of years. We encourage people to visit their local sugarhouses to see how it's done and taste the best maple syrup made!"

Participants also marked the event with a ceremonial reading of Governor Deval Patrick's proclamation declaring March Massachusetts Maple Month.

A series of cold nights and warm days is required to get the sap of sugar maple trees moving. Once maple sap is harvested, farmers boil it down in evaporators to produce the syrup that is prized as a topping for pancakes and waffles, and as an ingredient in a wide array of recipes. Massachusetts Maple Producers, most of whom are located west of Worcester, are optimistic about a good harvest.

Many sugarhouses in central and western Massachusetts serve a delicious pancake breakfast, offer tours and sell maple products, including syrup and maple candy. [Click here for a complete listing of Massachusetts sugarhouse restaurants.](#)

DAR's mission is to ensure the long-term viability of local agriculture in Massachusetts. Through its four divisions - Agricultural Development, Animal Health, Crop and Pest Services, and Technical Assistance - DAR strives to support, regulate, and enhance the Commonwealth's agricultural community, working to promote economically and environmentally sound food safety and animal health measures, and fulfill agriculture's role in energy conservation and production. For more information, visit DAR's website at www.mass.gov/agr and/or follow the latest updates on the Commonwealth's agricultural trends via Twitter at twitter.com/MDARCommish.