

Agriculture Officials Kick Off Massachusetts Maple Month

NORTHAMPTON - March 4, 2011 - During an annual rite of spring, Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources (DAR) Commissioner Scott Soares participated today in the ceremonial tapping of a sugar maple tree to officially kick off the Bay State's maple sugaring season. Heralding the onset of the Massachusetts growing season, maple sugaring is the Commonwealth's first agricultural harvest of the year.

"Celebrating this harvest tradition reminds us that maple sugar is among the many fine Massachusetts agricultural products," said Commissioner Scott Soares. "Visiting a Massachusetts sugar shacks is a great activity the whole family can savor. We hope visitors and residents will take advantage of locally-grown produce this season and support the growing market for these products."

In addition to tapping a sugar maple at Zawalicks Sugarhouse, Commissioner Soares read Governor Deval Patrick's proclamation declaring March as "Massachusetts Maple Month." More than 300 Massachusetts maple producers - most located west of Worcester - typically produce between 50,000 to 60,000 gallons of maple syrup worth almost \$3 million annually. Some 60,000 tourists each year spend \$1.9 million during the sugaring season at maple farms and restaurants, bed-and-breakfasts, country inns, and other attractions in farm communities.

In 2010, farmers produced 29,000 gallons of maple syrup - the smallest annual harvest for the industry in more than a decade due to the lack of cold nights and abundance of heavy rain last season. The crop was valued at \$2.5 million, with an average price of \$53 per gallon.

The income from maple sugaring is a key financial boost to many Massachusetts dairy farms, and the industry preserves over 8,000 acres of Massachusetts as open space. Many sugarhouses in central and Western Massachusetts serve pancake breakfasts, sell maple products including maple syrup and maple candy, and offer sugarhouse open houses and tours. To find a sugarhouse, visit [DAR's interactive map](#), visit www.massmaple.org, or call the Massachusetts Maple Association at 413-628-3912.

"We're looking forward to a great season," said Massachusetts Maple Producers Association (MMPA) President Ed Parker, who added the association launched a new passport program to encourage Massachusetts sugarhouse tourism. MMPA will provide official passports to tourists for sugarmakers to sign. Those visiting four or more sugarhouses by April 10 are eligible for prizes. "Since our crop depends on the weather, we can't know in advance when the sap will start running or how long it will run for, but Massachusetts sugarmakers are already getting ready to continue the tradition of making the state's sweetest crop."

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. It takes approximately 40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of pure

maple syrup.

At the maple tapping ceremony, Commissioner Soares announced that the Massachusetts Farm Energy Program (MFEP) Best Management Practices Guide to encourage farms to adopt energy efficiency upgrades to reduce operating costs is now available and includes a sector for maple producers.

Sponsored by DAR and its partners at Berkshire-Pioneer and USDA, the MFEP is a statewide technical assistance program aimed at reducing the agricultural sector's energy use and greenhouse gas emissions through energy efficiency retrofits and renewable energy projects. Since its inception three years ago, MFEP has provided technical and financial assistance to over 350 farms across the Commonwealth, leading to the implementation of more than 55 projects resulting in annual savings of over 150,000 gallons of propane and oil, 10,000 therms of natural gas, almost 1 million kilowatt hours of electricity and close to 63 cords of wood. These energy savings reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 3,000 tons per year (the equivalent of 2,000 passenger cars). MFEP has also helped leverage over \$2.5 million from other funding sources to help implement these projects in Massachusetts.

Maple tapping host Zawalick's Farm has invested in equipment upgrades to save energy and reduce environmental impacts such as emissions resulting from the process of boiling down sap into maple syrup. Zawalick's invested in an evaporator with an air-tight seal for more efficient burning and installed a reverse osmosis unit that can handle 600 gallons of sap per hour and reduces the amount of fuel needed to produce maple syrup by up to 60 to 70 percent. With these investments, Zawalick's has seen a drop in the amount of cordwood they use every year, from 17 cords down to 10-12, even as they increased their taps.

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