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### **2021-2022 Officers:**

President: Paul Ronk  
 Vice President: Greg Christian  
 Secretary: Tina Barton  
 Treasurer: Keith Heasley

## Message From Our President



It's February already! Well, I would say by now that most of us are already collecting sap. It's looking like a great year here in Lincoln County. I pray it is for you, as well.

Looking ahead, put May 20 and 21st on your calendar for our annual meeting at the WVU Jackson's Mill facility. We have two great days planned. On the 20th, we will have a Grading workshop offered by Ohio's "Mr. Maple," Les Ober. It will be full of helpful information, not only on syrup grading, but also on producing a quality product. The 21st is our Annual Meeting. Bring your syrup for judging (maple, walnut, sycamore and any others you have), maple baked goods, maple sugar, and maple spread.

The evening of the 21st, we will have a banquet with announcements of our winners!! We will send an email in April with more specific details.

Peter Gregg, Editor of The Maple News, has offered a year's free subscription to the Maple News to all WVMSPA members.

Exciting days are ahead!!

*"Every accomplishment starts with the decision to try"* JFK

God Bless,

Paul

## Maple Days 2022

By Lindsay Kazarick, Future Generations University



Maple Days 2022 is just around the corner. Sap is already flowing in many parts of the state and before we know it the sugar shacks will be welcoming guests for the 2022 season! As the excitement is building there has been a lot going on in the background to support the producers, the Association, and local agritourism across the great state of West Virginia.

Most recently, Future Generations University celebrated a virtual National Maple Syrup Day with 12 hours of digital content on our Facebook platform,

@futureappalachia. This campaign was in partnership with the WV Department of Agriculture and the Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau and had a total organic reach of over 11, 000 people! Content included curated recipes from local chef Jonathan Ramirez at Le Bistro in Huntington, WV; a roadside stand tour from producer Adam Taylor of Frostmore Farms; an exciting welcome to Mountain State Maple Days 2022 from Association President Paul Ronk; maple recipes; getting started guides and so much more.

If you would like to register your sugar shack for Mountain State Maple Days and have not done so yet, you can do that by visiting <https://wvmspa.org/maple-days-entry-form-2/>

In addition to that very exciting kickoff to the maple syrup season, Future Generations University has also been working with Cara Rose, Executive Director of the Pocahontas County CVB to make and distribute templated marketing materials to all county CVBs across the state of West Virginia this year to help market Mountain State Maple Days 2022. These marketing packets include save-the-dates, tent cards, rack cards, email templates, and more to help ease the burden that these entities have with the little resources they have to do it. County CVBs should expect to start receiving those materials before the end of January.

Work has gone into updating the information dispersed regarding COVID-19 protocols when welcoming guests to the sugar shack, getting reimbursed for costs associated with COVID-19 expenditures, and best practices for a successful sugaring season. The University has held several webinars to keep everyone as updated as possible on these topics over the course of the last several months.

Coming up on February 17, 2022, at 7 pm, Cara Rose, Executive Director, Pocahontas County CVB, will be guest speaking at the 'Out of the Woods: Enriching Your Maple Business' webinar. Cara has been a cheerleader for all things maple but especially for Mountain State Maple Days. Join Cara as she walks us through the best practices for preparing your sugar shack for a successful agritourism season including partnerships, marketing, and how to have fun!

## READING THE WOODS: What's Under the Hood of Your Sugarbush?

By Evelyn Hartman, Future Generations University

While you are rambling around your woods this time of year tapping trees and collecting sap, take note of the unique characteristics of your sugarbush. Although most of the forest is dormant this time of year, the characteristics of a forest during the winter months can tell us a lot about which plant, animal, and fungi species may inhabit and even thrive in your sugarbush. Rainfall, soil quality, temperatures, the forest canopy, and a presence of wildlife can help to indicate existing species, what to look for come springtime, and the diverse, nature-based enterprise opportunities that await.

How would you describe the terrain you traverse to access your maple trees? Are you scaling a hillside? Probably. Are you passing by a creek? What are the cardinal directions? Stop and listen. Do you hear anything?

Dr. A. L. "Tom" Hammett from the Department of Sustainable Biomaterials at Virginia Tech and Evelyn Hartman, the Education & Impact Associate at Future Generations University, prepared a list of "research" questions for you to select from and to ponder as you meander through your sugarbush and keep a watchful eye over your evaporator this year.

Research Questions (choose as many or as few as you like):

1. Let's start with what's familiar. What other timber species do you have in your woods besides Sugar Maple?
2. Did you know that Sycamore, Beech, Birch and Black Walnut trees produce sap? Do you have any of these species in your woods? If so, how many? A few or dozens? Have you considered tapping them?



Foot prints on a snowy log - perhaps a bobcat has been here!

3. Walking in a forest with freshly fallen snow often reveals who else is inhabiting the forest. Did you notice any tracks in the snow? Turkey, bobcat, deer, or bear?

4. Is there open canopy between your sugar maples? Perhaps, you have an open space left from a fallen tree.

5. Is the slope in your forest steep— too steep to cultivate forest grown herbs that tolerate shade?

6. Do you have fallen hardwoods that are dying or dead? Keep an eye out this spring. Chicken of the woods tend to be found on dying or dead oak, cherry, or beech.

7. Do you have white oaks among your forest? Shiitake mushroom growers covet white oak logs that are about 3 – 6” in diameter and 3 – 4 feet long. Take the opportunity to clean out your understory, give your maples more room to breathe, and increase your sap production while you’re at it.
8. Did you know state foresters and consulting foresters are available in every county of West Virginia to write a forest management plan for you and your forest based on your priorities?
9. Think about your priorities. Sap production, timber management, wildlife management, recreation, aesthetics, soil and water conservation, wild foods, or other?

Take notes, write down questions that arise, take pictures, or sketch your observations. Disclaimer: Intimate time observing a forest has shown to inspire a particular style of literary work that evokes feelings and ideas about the world and usually follows a rhyme scheme. It happens to the luckiest of us.

If you have a social media account, post your observations, questions, and photos (or poems) on Future Generations University Appalachia Program’s Facebook page, tag us @futureappalachia, and add #readingthewoods to your post. We can’t wait to learn about your sugarbush and see what you dream up this sugaring season!

Contact [forest@future.edu](mailto:forest@future.edu) if you’re interested in learning more about the wonders of your sugarbush.

## **Maple Syrup Producers of West Virginia—Results from a Survey**

By Sayeed R Mehmood

In 2019, an Acer Access and Development Grant entitled “Leveraging Education and Research to Promote Maple Syrup Production in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia” was awarded to a group of researchers and outreach professionals in Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia. As a part of this project, the group committed to implementing a survey of syrup producers in these three states. This article will present a summary of selected results for West Virginia Producers.

Compared to Ohio and Pennsylvania, West Virginia had far fewer producers. A total of 61 surveys were sent of which 3 were undeliverable. We received 29 usable responses, making the response rate 50 percent. All but one identified themselves as the owner and operator. About 45% of the producers owned their operation for 5 years or less, while another 28% owned it for 6 to 10 years. The longest running sugaring operation was for 22 years. All but two producers indicated that they processed sap into syrup, while about 21% of the respondents said they produced other non-syrup products.

The respondents had a total of 45,108 taps in 2020. About 59% of the producers had 3/16” sap lines while 52% indicated that they used 5/16,” implying that some producers had used both sizes. These sugarbush operations involved tapping 29,126 trees and covered a total of 1,669 acres. Sap collection consisted of buckets (17%), bags (3%), tubing with no vacuum (66%), and tubing with vacuum (45%). Sugar maple was the dominant species in 59% of the sugarbush, while the remaining 41% were dominated by red maple.

In 2020, respondents collected a total of 557,179 gallons of sap and produced 9,755 gallons of syrup. Most producers, a staggering 90 percent, boiled their own syrup. Only one producer indicated that all the sap collected was sold to another producer. Among those who boiled their own syrup, 76% used reverse osmosis, 93% filtered their syrup, and 45% graded their syrup. Among those who graded their

syrup, 41% did it based on color, while 38% graded based on taste. Most producers (83%) sold their own syrup, while 41 percent also sold value-added maple products. Most (72%) depend on word of mouth for advertising their products, while 55% indicated they advertised on social media. Some also advertised within the local community (church, school, etc.), used road signs, or web pages.

Syrup producers were also asked about their participation in outreach events or other preferred source(s) of information. Based on their response, their sources of information in order of importance were, state maple meetings, days, or tours (76%), regional or national maple meetings or conferences (45%), extension publications (45%), videos or other digital trainings (45%), hobbyist workshops (41%), trainings offered by industry suppliers (38%), North American Maple Manual (31%), consultation from professional forester (21%). Every respondent identified themselves as an active member of a maple syrup producers association.

It appears that there are some reasons for concern about the future of sugarbush operations. Only about 17% of the respondents felt that it was either likely or very likely that their future generations will take over the operation. With a median age of 60, and some as old as 80, West Virginia's syrup producers are aging. This highlights the need for recruiting new producers.

## Workshops, Workshops, Workshops

By Mike Rechlin, Future Generation University



Quality Tapping Workshop participants at Steyer Brothers Maple



Kate Fotos demonstrating a "Rocket Sap Evaporator" at Garret County Offices, MD.

Some of us have been tapping maple trees for a long time, and you would think we would have figured it out by now. But the fact of the matter is that the way we do what we do is always evolving as science and practice come together and lead to techniques that increase production and forest sustainability. In short, we always have more to learn.

To help interpret the science and improve practices, Future Generations University (FGU) and West Virginia University (WVU) are offering a statewide series of workshops designed to increase sap production from sugaring operations in Central Appalachia.

Quality Tapping – Last December FGU offered day long tapping and backyard sugaring workshops at Steyer Brothers Maple (Oakland MD), Bower's Maple (Pendleton County), Ronk Family Farm (outside Charleston), and Tom's Creek Maple (Wayne WV). The tapping workshops were based on years of research

and practice done by the Proctor Maple Research Center in Vermont. Participants learned about the science of sap flow as well as the practice of good tapping. The material presented in the workshop can be found in the video with the link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Lg2xqvHGxk>.

Improved Sanitation - Stay tuned this spring for a workshop on sanitation with a special focus on 3/16 tubing. Three-sixteenth tubing is ready made for West Virginia with its mountainous terrain. Over years of use, however, sap production has been shown to slow, with a microbial buildup in the tubes and plugging in the fitting. The solution is sanitation. Come spring, when the season is over, we will be holding a series of workshops on tubing sanitation based on a process pioneered by Arthur Krueger in Vermont. We'll be presenting the results of studies of "the Krueger process" in West Virginia, with hands- on field practice so you can keep your 3/16 lines flowing and productive.

Forest evaluation and Improvement - Over the summer and fall, Mike Rechlin (FGU) and Jamie Schuler (WVU) will be holding a number of workshop sessions on how to evaluate the health of your forest and improvements that could be made to increase the sugar content of your tree's sap. If you've ever looked at your sugarbush with a chainsaw in hand, this workshop will give you the tools to know where to start to maintain a healthy and productive maple stand.

Details on all workshops will be posted on the WVMSPA webpage.



A well-designed tubing system in a to aged maple forest at Steyer Brothers Maple, Garrett County, MD. They have been tapping this sugarbush for over 100 years.



Learning from the trees about Sap Flow Physiology and response to wounding

## Ten Questions, Revisited

By Tina Barton

Jeff Munn of Loafer's Glory and Dry Run Spirits (Franklin, WV) answered the Ten Questions asked by Mark Bowers, which featured in the July 2021 newsletter. Unfortunately, his answers did not come in time for us to print them in July. His answers were unique, however, and deserve highlighting.

Loafer's Glory is a log cabin resort and event venue. According to the website, it is on the National Register of Historic Places. This 1840s homestead is an excellent example of a German Appalachian farm. 16 buildings are still standing, and visitors are welcome to explore the whole property. The Munns took over the venue, and then took the Future Generations Maple Syrup Production course because the family who owned this farm before them made their own maple syrup for over 100 years.

In 2021, they had 25 taps, using a wood-fired evaporator, though they hope to expand to more taps and a more efficient evaporator soon. After the first year of learning, Jeff realized that maple water could be an excellent source of sugar for fermentation. That led to experimentation with fermented maple sap, which led to their production of maple moonshine. Because of demand for their maple moonshine, they cannot tap enough trees to provide the amount of maple sap they need. They have teamed with Rick and Sam Harper of Cool Hollow Maple Farm to supplement their sap supply. They believe they are the only distiller/maple camp in WV actually producing maple spirits from 100% West Virginia Sap.

As Jeff reported, he once "had a guy fly up from South Carolina and land in Weyer's Cave, Va. He rented a car, drove to our place in Pendleton County, bought 6 bottles of our moonshine, drove back to the airport, and flew home to South Carolina. All in one day. Guess our maple moonshine is better than I thought."

When asked what he thinks about the future of maple syrup in West Virginia, he responded "If the maple industry can keep expanding, and grow beyond just producing maple syrup, the sky is the limit. I just returned from a trip to Vermont. Maple syrup is in everything up there. At least one distillery is making maple spirits like I am, there are dozens of maple flavored spirits too, and even their ice cream is maple flavored. WV needs to start promoting like that."

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experience  
LEARNING

## Maple in the Classroom: Experience Learning Tapping into West Virginia Schools

By Staff of Experience Learning

As the maple syrup harvesting season ramps up, so does the education programs within our local school systems. Becca Myers, community-based learning coordinator with Experience Learning, and their team plan to take maple education into schools across the state with their Maple in the Classroom program. Students participating in the program can expect to learn about maple tree identification, how to tap a tree, the syrup production process, maple syrup industry, nutrition benefits, and Appalachia maple history, upon other topics. These programs are designed to align with grade-level academic standards to benefit students to the greatest capacity.

Experience Learning believes in using the outdoors as an extension of the classroom and strives to connect learning with real-world applications in the schoolyard, local community, and beyond.



West Virginia is rich in history and tradition when it comes

to harvesting maple syrup. Becca, a Preston County native, realizes the importance of carrying on the legacy of the maple syrup industry and broadening the reach to youth. “I think it’s crucial to get students outside to provide meaningful, experiential opportunities that they will learn and retain, while also encompassing our heritage as they do it. Folks in these mountains have been using this sustainable food source for generations, and we want to keep this tradition going while incorporating an educational component. Providing students purposeful experiences can give them a deeper connection to their natural resources and community. Our goal for our program is meeting

students where they’re at. We encourage students to embrace their natural talents and grow



confident in their strengths while learning new skills. I am excited to see the stewardship, opportunities for learning and growth, and sweet maple syrup that result from Maple in the Classroom in the coming year!”

For more information on Maple in the Classroom or to partner with Experience Learning, contact Becca Myers at [rmyers@experience-learning.org](mailto:rmyers@experience-learning.org). See what other exciting events and programs Experience Learning has going on at [experience-learning.org](http://experience-learning.org).

## **Maple Certificate Course at Future Generations University**

By Michael Lucero

For the last five years Future Generations University has taught a maple certificate course for folks interested in starting or expanding their maple syrup production operation. Due to Covid restrictions, this year the course consisted of six online lectures going over every part of making maple syrup from the tree physiology that leads to the sap running, all the way to proven marketing techniques for the final delicious product. Again, this year, each participant is teamed up with a local producer for some hands-on apprenticeship and coaching.

This year’s course had 23 participants from seven states. Most participants were from West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Virginia; however we did have participants from Maryland, Kentucky, Ohio, and even as far away as Washington state! Participants were not only immersed in the world of maple syrup production but also received a crash course in alternative tree syrup production, such as sycamore and walnut syrups, based on the latest research coming out of Future Generations University. As in the past, course participants are provided their first-year membership in the WVMSPA, and we expect to have as many of these new maple producers as possible at our annual meeting for “graduation” and to receive their certificate of completion.

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# Virginia Tech conducts market research for syrup produced in central Appalachia

By Tom Hammett, Ph.D. & Daniel Grizzard

The Virginia Tech College of Natural Resources and Environment is partnering with Future Generations University on a USDA ACER 2020 funded project entitled “*Accessing South Atlantic Markets for US Maple Syrup: Educating consumers and Enhancing Distribution Networks*”. Virginia Tech’s work will focus on market research. The project goals are to “raise consumer awareness of the benefits of, production history of, and buying options for US Maple Syrup and to improve consumer access to US Maple Syrup in South Atlantic markets”. With project partners in Virginia, West Virginia and Maryland, the project focus stretches over a broad region of the Eastern United States.

This project’s goal is to assist the region’s maple syrup producers and forestland landowners in improving their markets. To accomplish this, Virginia Tech and the partners are conducting market research to determine the regional market accessibility for maple products. One of the first steps in this research was to conduct a shelf survey for maple syrup and maple products.

The team conducted in-store shelf surveys of food product outlets, including major grocery chains, independent grocery stores, health food stores, and gift shops to determine the prevalence of 100% pure maple products, maple flavored syrups, and value-added maple products.

In January and February 2021, the team designed and tested a survey instrument and in the Spring a team of surveyors were trained. Beginning in July, stores were canvassed for maple syrup. Stores surveyed were in areas where we did not expect local syrup to be available, and some distance from our producers. For example, stores were surveyed in Richmond, the greater Washington, DC area, and northeastern Tennessee.



Store shelf survey documented container material and sizes. Local syrup from Giles County, Virginia found in a health food store in Blacksburg (Hammett 2021).

Information collected included bottle types (glass, tin, or plastic) bottle sizes, price information, label content (i.e., where the syrup was produced, organic), and location(s) in the store where maple syrup is shelved or displayed. Is maple syrup shelved near other sweeteners, or with breakfast items? In one store there was a prominent display of syrup at the end of an aisle. But in all the other stores, syrup was on a shelf and usually with other sweeteners or jams, and in close proximity to pancake mixes. In one instance, syrup was bought in Wisconsin in bulk packages (15-gallon plastic lined boxes), and dispensed into reusable and

cleaned bottles that the customer brought to the store. No information on sugar-based “table syrup” was collected – only bottles of “real maple syrup” were catalogued.

In total, 71 stores were surveyed, and the team identified 435 different maple syrup products being sold by 121 different brands. The maple syrup observed in this survey was primarily packaged in glass bottles, with 58% of bottles being packaged in glass compared to 37% packaged in plastic, and 5% of syrup being packaged in tin or cardboard boxes. When possible, the survey taker would meet with store employees to learn more about the store’s buying practices, experience with stocking and selling maple syrup, and knowledge of local customers’ attitudes towards maple syrup and other sweeteners.

We have compiled a library of bottle photos to document label content – both front and back. We are beginning to look for lessons learned that will help direct our marketing of locally produced syrup and a new cooperative regional brand produced in the region.

Store promotions and other specific maple marketing practices were not found. Later our research might direct development of store promotion activities. With the pandemic, in-person surveying and promotion events have not been possible. When possible, our survey takers met briefly with store managers or staff to determine how the store orders products such as syrup. We also asked if the staff would be willing to stock and sell locally made syrup, who would we talk with to learn more about their policies for local syrup and other natural products, and if there is an in-store location for local products.

We hope that the information from this survey will point to new and expanded opportunities for selling more syrup produced in this region. The findings of this research will be available once full analysis is completed. Other studies that we are conducting include a producer survey to determine current marketing strategies and production capacities of producers in the region, and a travel cost or economic development assessment to determine the impact of maple events held in the region. For further information on this work, you may contact Tom Hammett ([himal@vt.edu](mailto:himal@vt.edu)).

## **ACER 2021 and Future Generations University**

By Mike Rechlin

Future Generations University was awarded a 2021 USDA grant to work with producers to increase sap production and profitability in West Virginia. More sap means more syrup, and when combined with increased profitability leads to the potential to grow the maple industry in our region; and that is the goal of the USDA Acer Access program.

With the grant award, FGU has been busy this past fall with activities that are designed to help you all over the next three years. The overall approach is to develop a series of “Model Demonstration Areas” throughout the State, work closely with those producers to increase their per tap sap production, gather the data to show that the proposed interventions worked and then share that information with other syrup producers. In a parallel track our team is developing a series of maple specific business training modules to evaluate business practices, develop marketing strategies, and enhance record keeping and data based decision making.

During the 2022 season we are working with Family Roots Farm, Frostmore Farm, Spruce Knob Maple, and The Laurel Fork Sapsuckers. Each of these operations have or will (Covid caused delays) receive a site visit and evaluation by a team of maple experts including myself, maple extension specialist Les Ober from Ohio and Abby van den Berg from the Proctor Maple Research Center. The team has or will make recommendations for



increasing sap flow and improving syrup production. Collaborating syrup producers then work with FGU staff to implement the “low hanging fruit,” or those recommendations that can relatively easily be put in place, and collect accurate information on trees tapped and sap flow.

Next fall we will be organizing a facilities tour of these and other syrup producing operations designed to present the results of this work and to “spread the gospel of more sap, more syrup, and more \$\$\$.” Stay tuned for more details, and, we have a ticket on next fall’s “Maple learning journey” bus reserved just for YOU.

West Virginia Maple Syrup Producers Association  
**Membership Application 2022** (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.

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- Participation in WV annual maple weekend

Complete application and submit with your annual dues of \$25 by May 2, 2022  
(make checks payable to WVMSPA)

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

West Virginia Maple Syrup Association  
2988 Compressor Station Rd  
Bruceton Mills, WV 26525