

From tap to table: Local maple syrup producers hope to grow industry

Jordan Spence (231) 439-9397 - jspence@petoskeynews.com | Posted: Thursday, March 24, 2016 10:26 am

There is more than just sap in Michigan's sugar maple trees; there's potential.

Currently, Michigan only produces about 2 percent of maple syrup generated in the United States, said Phillip Munday with Harwood Gold Maple Syrup in Charlevoix. This is compared to the state of Vermont, which produces the most at 40 percent.

In Michigan, though, the climate and soil is ideal for growth, he said.

Phillip and his wife, Amber, are now the fifth generation to own the Parsons family farm. They took over operation from Amber's father in June. On the 180 acres of land there are about 2,000 maple syrup taps, Phillip said.

"I think it's important to keep the farm in the family and carry on the traditions," Amber said.

Family traditions are also important to Christi and Todd Peterson, owners of Maple Moon Sugarbush in Petoskey.

The Petersons began to make make syrup as a family activity. Eventually they bought a real boiler instead of the backyard turkey cooker they had been using.

One day Todd went for a walk on the property searching for answers about what to do with the land.

"I wasn't sure. She wasn't sure," Todd said. "We didn't understand the real purpose for the land. I just looked around the woods and asked, 'What am I supposed to do with this?' Then it was obvious to us and there was no doubt."

He said they did some research and discovered it could be lucrative and a great way to work together as a family.



From tap to table Local maple syrup producers hope to grow industry

Jordan Spence/News-Review Samples of maple syrup sit in a window at Maple Moon Sugarbush in Petoskey. There will be different variations in color throughout the season. The darker the syrup the more maple taste it will have.

Their first year of production was in 2011.

“When we invested all this money in our very first year, it ironically was the worst year (of production) since the early 1900s.”

Luckily for them, Todd said their second year of production was the best, so far.

“The first year was stressful and now it’s a joy and doesn’t feel like work,” Christi said.

The maple syrup season is about six weeks long. To make the syrup, there needs to be cold, freezing nights and warm days, Todd said. They have processed as little as 600 gallons their first year and 1,600 gallons in their best year. It takes about 40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup, he added.

Harwood Gold can make about 1,000 gallons during a good year, Phillip said.

Changing industry

To evolve with the times, both farms have found innovative ways to use maple syrup.

Christi and Todd said they are the only farm in the country to make maple syrup wine. Todd said the concept began as a hobby with a friend. Then local winemakers encouraged them to find a way to sell the wine. Now they offer nine different wines and hard cider in their tasting room at the farm.

At Harwood Gold they have a commercial kitchen where they create products like maple sriracha, farm-style maple catsup, maple granola, maple barbecue sauce and more. They hope to break ground on a farm-to-table restaurant on the property this summer.

So far, the Mundays’ first year of production has been an exciting adventure.

“We’ve been working with my parents, learning from them and getting that hands-on approach. There’s been a huge learning curve. I’ve also heard a lot of stories about my grandpa and my grandpa’s grandpa,” Amber said.

The Petersons also love how they work together as a family and they hope to change the industry in the state.

“We’re trying to grow the industry in Michigan,” Christi said. “We have the soil and climate perfect for syrup making. We’re (the state) not tapped into the resource, pun intended. Now when I drive in Northern Michigan I see sugar bushes everywhere.”

Both farms’ syrup can be found at stores and restaurants in Emmet and Charlevoix counties. Harwood Gold can be found at Oleson’s and Smoke on the Water. Maple Moon syrup can be found at D&W Fresh Market in Petoskey and The Bistro.

To purchase products or to learn more visit the Harwood Gold Maple Syrup website at www.maple-

syrup-michigan.com. To learn more about Maple Moon Sugarbush visit the website at www.mmsyrup.com.



Loading...