

Survey-

A survey was developed and sent to Health Food Retailers, Artisan Retailers, local wineries and Bed and Breakfasts.

Results from the survey were poor. Most of the surveys were not returned. However, continued market research did show that sending the survey in the middle of spring work was not good timing. In talking with winery owners and employees, it was noted that a late fall mailing would have been better. This is very busy time for B&B owners as well. Also, it is essential to follow up the survey with a personal visit to each contact.

While traditional plastic or metal packaging works fine in Health Food stores and fair in Artisan Shops, it is necessary to use quality, innovative glass packaging for the high-end niche market. Multiple designs in various sizes will work best. In making this decision, it is important to remember that many of these sales will be used as decoration, as well as utilized on the table.

Costs-

Cost of Production

Increased Costs vs. natural syrup

It should be noted that these increased costs will come in three areas.

One—If you are not Certified Organic to begin with, you will need to certify your Sugar Bush (the land that you are tapping). It is important to note that the cost of this will vary between certifiers. If your farm and the land the sugar bush is on is certified or certifiable ground, the variation will come in whether the maple process is required to have a separate organic inspection each year apart from the rest of the operation. Some certifiers will require this, others will inspect the sugar bush and processing operation at the same time the rest of the farm has its normal annual inspection.

Two—Actual in the field costs will vary only if you use formaldehyde taphole refreshers, tap trees at a number or tree size different from Certifier requirements, or use a non-approved de-foaming agent. Organic butter is often used as a de-foaming agent. There is an oversight requirement of maintaining a tap map of your sugar bush, as well as records of the number of gallons of sap collected and the number of gallons of syrup made. You will need to store syrup in an approved container. You must maintain sales records so that your syrup can be traced back to your farm. These records will need to be easily read and accessible at all times and maintained for 5 years.

Three—Increased cost of glass containers as opposed to plastic or metal containers. It is apparent that the need for glass containers for high-end ‘niche’ marketing is essential.

Measuring Results

In the case of our farm, we were able to change our certifier to one who required only one inspection per year for the land, animals, and maple production. As noted earlier, this will vary by certifier and the size of the maple operation.

I cannot comment on the cost of non-organic production using unapproved materials. Most of the producers I know and have spoken with at length do not routinely refresh tap holes. The cost of de-foamers they use and organic approved products does not vary significantly.

To this point, in both retail and wholesale marketing of syrup, organic marketing of syrup has continued to increase. In regards to retail marketing, as with any product, it is necessary to present the product in a way that is appealing to the sight as well as the taste and wallet of the consumer. In working with others researching the retailing of Certified Organic Maple Syrup this has become quite apparent. In marketing in grocery and health food stores, the fact that the syrup was Certified Organic was enough to justify the increased asking price. However, as you move into more of the “niche” markets of Artisan Shops, Bed and Breakfasts, of local wineries, the type, quality, and attractiveness of the product containers become extremely important.

As noted above, Certified Organic continues to demand a premium in the Central New York area, and more growers are looking at Certified production each year. The demand for Certified Organic Maple Syrup continues to increase each year.

Working with other producers it was noted that the Certified Organic Maple Syrup in containers identical to Natural Maple Syrup was selling wholesale for one to three dollars over the retail price of the Natural Maple Syrup.

Outreach Plan

The outreach plan is and continues to be to share the knowledge and techniques that were used on our farm with anyone, anywhere, who is interested. I have spoken at local organic growers meetings. I have shared and continue to share the Certified Organic Maple Sugar process with growers across New York and the Northern Tier of Pennsylvania.

I am aware of many Certified Organic producers, either making Certified Organic Maple Syrup now, or intending to add Certified Organic Maple Syrup production in the near future.

As part of this process I worked with one certifying body expand and update their maple products standards. With the help of local CCE agents we were able to advise the certifier about best practices in regards to minimum tree tapping size. The number of taps per tree and variations tap hole sizes.

At this point I am employed as an independent organic farm inspector. A discussion with clients often turns to the possibility of adding certified maple production to their farm plan. I believe the outreach of this grant continues everyday and I expect that to always be the case.