

FNE10-683 Interim Report

Marketing Analysis of New State Shaped Maple Candies

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The goal of my project was to design and make Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts shaped maple candy molds using new materials of FDA approved silicone rubber. Then do an analysis of how well they sell compared to traditional maple leaf candies. Then present my findings in a way that other maple syrup producers could utilize them.

My farm has changed some since I originally applied for this grant. My father past away unexpectedly and I depended on him to run the sugar house and make retail sales. Now I've been forced to discontinue all retail and concentrate on all wholesale sales. I even had to tear down the sugar house and move it to a different spot on my property. Luckily there is a demand for my Rhode Island shaped candies at farmers markets and stores. The 2010 maple crop was down a bit, I still made 75% of a normal crop and compensated by raising my syrup prices 15%.

My cooperators also didn't have as good a maple crop as usual. Since my project covered multiple state shaped candies it was necessary to have people in those states making molds and candies to collaborate my findings.

I didn't start my project until June. That's when I had time to devote to the project. I started by finding an existing picture of each state. State road maps turned out to be my best resource. By trial and error I had to make enlarged copies of each picture, first at 10% then 15% then 25%, trying to find the right size to fit into the candy box. Originally, I was going to have three different sized candies in three different sized boxes. When it came time to buy the boxes I was given a price break if I bought a full box of large candy boxes. I fixed the dilemma of having a medium size candy by not filling the large candy mold all the way to the top. I did have a problem with Massachusetts. It was disproportionate to the size of the box. I had to shorten the length to fit in the box; I don't think anybody will notice the difference. Once I had a picture of the state I wanted, I traced it on tracing paper than glued the tracing paper to a piece of poster board. I then cut out the shape of the state. Then I used sculpey clay. It's clay that when baked in an oven will stay hard. The clay will remain soft until then. So as not to disturb the sculpture, I did the work right on a cookie sheet. To start, I used a rolling pin and two wooden dowels and parchment paper. Once I had the clay soft, I would place a piece of parchment paper on the cookie sheet; put the clay on that with the wooden dowels parallel with each

other with clay in the middle. The dowels act as a depth gauge when I use the rolling pin to flatten the clay on the parchment paper. I could use different diameters to make thicker candies. Then I take my state shaped poster board cut out and lay it on the clay. I cut the excess clay away from around the state shaped stencil. The sides of the shape should have a slight bevel to make it easier for the candy to release from the mold. For Rhode Island, I used a small flat headed dowel to press the clay down to accentuate the shape of the bay and the islands. To make the letters R I., I used a tapered dowel with a flattened end, like a pencil with the end broke off, to press in to the clay. Massachusetts was done similarly to accentuate Cape Cod so it wouldn't break off. I took the dowels off the cookie sheet and baked the sculpey in the oven. Once the sculpey had cooled sufficiently, I started to make a mold by taking equal amounts of Amazing Mold Putty part A and part B. It's not so crucial to be exact, I just eyeballed it. I mixed it together until it was uniform in color. Then I pressed the putty onto the clay sculpture on a flat surface, making sure to press it into the detail and getting the corners just right. I pressed the top flat so the mold when upside down sits level to pour the candy. I let it cure for half an hour. I repeatedly made ten of each size large and small of each of the three states. I then used Amazing Casting Resin. It's a two part liquid that when mixed together in equal amounts and poured into the molds will cure into a solid exact replica of the candy. This I repeated until I had one hundred pieces of each size and shape. When I spoke to my cooperators to let them know I had resin casts and molds for them to experiment with, they informed me that they don't make candy in the summer since it melts in the heat. In late August I drove to their houses to demonstrate how to make their own molds. I left ten boxes of mold making putty with each of them. I waited a month before contacting them again.

In November, the Maple Syrup Producers Association of Connecticut had their fall meeting. I offered to speak to them about my findings of my SARE project. The president wasn't looking for any speakers; he already had one lined up. If I wanted a minute to speak during announcements he would allow that. I was given a table in the commercial area to distribute my resin casts with individual instructions. I figured, one on one with anyone interested, was probably better any way. They had a record turnout of members that day and I passed out all my resin casts. I even had my picture taken for The Maple News published in New York state and circulated throughout the maple producing region.

In January 2011, the Massachusetts Maple Producers Association had their winter meeting and I received the same response. Just a table to pass out my resin casts of Massachusetts. I did talk with the chairman of the North American Maple Research Committee, Mike Girard. He was very interested in my project and wondered why nobody had thought of it sooner. When I was researching my proposal I called the maple specialist in Maine, Kathy Hopkins, She showed an

interest in what I was trying to do. Then I found out she would be the speaker at the meeting so I made a Maine shaped sculpture and made a mold and gave it to her to use in Maine. We'll see what happens.

The results of selling the state shaped candies have been mixed and unexpected. The first problem was white spots on the finished candy. Maple candy can get white spots and the causes are not known for sure. Some say high humidity could cause spots but rather than throw it away we would sell it as is. My project proposal stated that the candy would be marketed in white candy boxes, two little candies in a small box or a large candy in a large box. The box itself seems to be restricting the sale. The box doesn't say anything to indicate the candy inside is special. I need to work on the presentation a little bit more. The last observation made is that people are cheap. The small state shaped candies weigh more than the maple leaf candies and people were buying mostly on price. First the two dollar candy would sell out, then the three dollar candy would sell out and so on until all the candy was gone. My cooperators were including the state shapes in large boxes of candy as the center piece and that went over well. Sales were up for Christmas. They sold all the candy they had made and could have sold more had they had it.

Production of the candy had its own problems. The candy molds had to be made one at a time and poured as individuals some of which didn't sit level. This made making large quantities of candy difficult. I've since found a different manufacturer of a liquid silicone rubber. I spoke to the owner on the phone the other day and explained my need to make a multi cavity sheet mold. He said I stumped him, nobody had ever asked that question before. It took him a few minutes but he made a suggestion as to how to go about doing it. He said that I had an original idea and that he was going to make a how to video for his web site.

Outreach projects include articles yet to be written for trade magazines in the coming months. I would like to expand the marketing methods at least through the maple syrup season. I would like to make a video of the process. It would be easier to understand then to read this report. I also need to take pictures to record the process.

Material List To make a sculpture

Sculpey oven baked clay Craft Department Purchase at Walmart \$6.00

Cookie Sheet

Parchment Paper

Rolling Pin

Variety of different sized dowels two - six inches long

Material to make molds

Amazing Mold Putty Purchase at Michaels Craft Store Ask a clerk, otherwise you won't find it

Amazing Casting Resin Order on line at www.amazingmoldputty.com How to video at site

Copy flex Liquid Silicone Order on line at www.makeyourownmolds.com How to video at site