As a syrup operation, how do you measure success?

By STEPHEN SAUPE

Saint John's Maple Syrup

As syrupers in Minnesota know, the 2012 season wasn’t a particularly good one. I learned this firsthand because I serve as one of the syrup-makers in the Saint John’s Maple Syrup operation. In fact, we had our worst year ever. I was curious to know exactly how badly things went for us this year so I decided to compare our production statistics for the 2012 season to the records from all of our previous seasons.

Our sugaring operation is associated with Saint John’s Abbey, Saint John’s Arboretum, and the joint biology department of the College of St. Benedict and Saint John’s University, located in Collegeville, Minnesota. Our syruping records at Saint John’s date back to 1942, which is the first year the monks and their friends began producing syrup. Several years ago, one of my students, Erika Nunnick, and I embarked on a project to analyze these data. Erika entered all of the historical data into a database, and I have maintained it ever since. Some of these data are summarized in Table 1.

As you can see in Table 1, no matter what measure you pick, 2012 was significantly worse than the historical averages from our past syrup seasons. We installed approximately the same number of taps as we did in previous years, but made less than 20% of the syrup that we normally did. Further,
SUCCESS:

Continued from PG. 1

what the table doesn't show is that this year we produced the smallest amount of syrup in our 70-year history. We made even less syrup this year than in 1942, the inaugural season in which the monks tapped only 150 trees, compared to the 1100 taps we installed this past spring!

The mission of the Saint John's Maple Syrup operation is to continue the long-standing Benedictine tradition of making maple syrup. Though our production values didn't "measure up," we still consider the 2012 maple season a major success. That's because a second aspect of our Mission is outreach. We strive to provide opportunities for the Saint John's community, including monks, students, and the public-at-large, to learn about, and participate in, the process of making a delicious and sustainable forest product. In this regard, our success measurements went off-scale!

For example, nearly 90 individuals, including students, faculty and staff, monks, and others, participated in all phases of our operation. These wonderful volunteers logged over 450 hours of service helping with everything from tapping to collecting sap to fusing the evaporator. We hosted two maple festivals that were attended by more than 600 visitors. And more than 1000 students in Pre-K through university classes were given educational tours.

Despite our successful outreach efforts, we're still praying that the weather is more cooperative in 2013. A good measure of heavenly-tasting syrup is a well-earned reward for the long hours spent in the sugarhouse.

Table 1. Maple sap and syrup production statistics from the Saint John's Maple Syrup Operation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Historical Average (1942 - 2011)</th>
<th>2012</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of taps</td>
<td>1350</td>
<td>1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sap produced (gal.)</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Days on which the evaporator was fired</td>
<td>9500</td>
<td>2410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># Days on which sap was collected</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of the sap collecting season (days)</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanker loads of sap collected</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sap (gal.) per tap</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sap/syrup ratio</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>61.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar conc. (%)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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