

Maple Syrup Season 2005 – Summary

The maple syrup operation this year was run by Stephen Saupe (CSB/SJU Biology Department), William & Linda Mock (long-time friends of St. John's and the Arboretum), Sarah Gainey (St. John's Arboretum) and Kyhl Lyndgaard (First Year Symposium). Our chief consultant and spiritual advisor was Br. Walter Kieffer, OSB. We also received valuable advice and assistance from Tom Kroll, St. John's Arboretum Director. The crew (from the left - Kyhl, Sarah, Bill, Steve, Tom) is pictured in the photo below at a planning meeting that we held in late December (2004).



Image by Br. Walter Kieffer, OSB.

On Saturday, Feb 26th we spent the day opening up the shack and putting together the evaporator. We were assisted by about two dozen volunteers who did everything from chipping ice away from the doorways to cleaning out the bulk tanks to hauling wood. The following Saturday, Mar 5th, we were joined by more than 40 volunteers to help tap the trees. Steve served as the main tapper and he was followed by crews that installed spiles and hung the buckets. Everything went well except that the drill bit would frequently work itself out of the chuck in the chain saw. Some of the volunteers were so thrilled about tapping that they used a brace and bit to install spiles on their own. By the end of the day, we had installed about 600 taps.

The first day we collected sap was Mar 24 and our last day was April 10. We pulled the taps on April 16th.

Syrup-wise, the season was rather disappointing because we only jugged 38% of the syrup that we had hoped. Based on statistics dating back to 1972, on average St. John's makes about 0.8 quarts of syrup per tap. Since we had 600 taps we hoped to make about 120 gallons of syrup. However, we only finished 45 gallons of syrup. One problem was the weather – it was either too cold or too warm. We never received enough “syruping days” with freezing nights and warm days. As a result, our trees never

“gushed” as they often do. To make matters worse, the syrup quality was not as good as normal either because the warm weather caused the sap to spoil.

Historically, our sap/syrup ratio is about 40. In other words, we make a gallon of syrup for every gallon of sap that we collect. This year, our ratio was nearly 62! There are at least three reasons for this poor result: (1) during one firing of the evaporator we burned some holes through the syrup pan. This occurred, in part, because someone had inadvertently dropped a napkin into one of the flues reducing the flow in the evaporator. This, in turn, caused the syrup in the middle of the pan to burn. Although this accident could have been potentially disastrous (from a financial and time perspective), our main loss was about 10 gallons of syrup that were nearly ready to withdraw; (2) our evaporator has many leaks which resulted in the loss of approximately 50 gallons of partially cooked sap between each firing; and (3) the sugar concentration in the trees didn't peak until too late in the season when we were shutting down.

Although our syrup production was disappointing, the number of people who visited our operation was incredible. We were assisted by approximately 115 total volunteers who donated more than 455 hours of service (this excludes the actual syrup team leaders). Our volunteers included monastics (*e.g.*, Fr. Bruce Wollmering, Br. Knute Anderson, Br. Mark Kelly, Br. Gregory Ebensteiner), students, alumni, staff, and friends of St. John's. We hosted two Festivals that were attended by more than 400 people (and more than 25 volunteers) and one festival was featured in a full-page article in the *St. Cloud Times* (“Spring Means Syrup,” April 15, 2005).

We provided educational tours to more than 500 primary school children (300 3rd and 5th graders from St. Cloud ISD 743, 110 preschoolers from Sartell Early Childhood and Family Education; 65 middle-school students from St. John's Preparatory School and 34 kindergarteners from Belgrade-Brooten-Elrosa). In addition, 2 CSB/SJU Symposium classes visited our operation and students from the courses of several faculty (*e.g.*, Professor's Diedrich, Butler, Poff, Brown) used the operation as a part of a service-learning experience or for an educational opportunity. Finally, we gave two formal presentations about the operation – one for the Administrative Assembly (*ca.* 100 people attended) and the other for the Avon Hills Conference (*ca.* 20 attendees). We also supervised two student interns, Erin Lindeke and Luke Ekelund, who created a new display for the entry of Peter Engel that features the maple syrup operation.

In short, we had a fantastic year that could only have been made a little better by the weather. We very much enjoyed our experience and we especially enjoyed sharing this Benedictine tradition with many people. Even though our syrup yield was low, our visitors learned first-hand about the Benedictine values of work, community, and land stewardship.

Our yearly statistics are summarized in Tables 1, 2 & 3.

| Date | Sap tanker loads | Sap collected (gal) |
|--------|------------------|---------------------|
| Mar 24 | 1.5 | 262.5 |
| Mar 26 | 2.5 | 437.5 |
| Mar 28 | 1.5 | 262.5 |
| Apr 2 | 2.5 | 437.5 |
| Apr 4 | 3 | 525 |
| Apr 5 | 1 | 175 |
| Apr 6 | .33 | 57.8 |
| Apr 7 | 2 | 350 |
| Apr 10 | 1.5 | 262.5 |
| total | 15.8 | 2770.3 |

| Date | Time | Syrup (gal) |
|--------|-------|-------------|
| Apr 4 | 18:30 | 10 |
| Apr 6 | 17:30 | 7 |
| Apr 8 | 12:40 | 5.5 |
| Apr 10 | 12:00 | 8 |
| Apr 10 | 15:00 | 8 |
| Apr 16 | 14:00 | 6.5 |
| total | | 45 |

| | |
|--|--------|
| # sap collection days | 9 |
| Tanker loads of sap | 15.8 |
| Total sap collected (gal) | 2770.3 |
| Syrup produced (gal) | 45 |
| Ratio (sap/syrup) | 61.6 |
| Number of volunteers | 115 |
| Hours of volunteer time (<i>excluding leaders</i>) | 455 |
| Student visitors | 509 |