

Maple sap cause for festivities

In eastern Canada, the running of sap in the maple trees is cause for celebration. Not only does it herald the arrival of spring, but when boiled into sweet syrup, is the ideal treat around which to base a party.

"Sugaring Off" — as the annual affair is called — attracts thousands of visitors to sugarbush farms. They come to witness one of nature's miracles and to sample its sweet bounty.

Generally held between mid-March and mid-April, depending on the weather, maple syrup festivals and parties feature hearty country meals of pancakes, ham and eggs, baked beans and back bacon.

The highlight of most parties is taffy making, or "la tire" as it is called in Quebec. Maple syrup is boiled past the syrup stage, then poured hot onto a tray of clean white snow. The taffy snow candy is wound around a stick to form a maple lollipop.

The maple tree and its world-famous syrup hold a unique place in Canadian history and culture, far apart from some areas of the United States, no other country in the world produces pure maple syrup.

While sugarbush farms are found in Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, it is the province of Quebec that produces 90 per cent of Canadian maple products. Canada claims almost 70 per cent of world maple production.

Of the ten varieties of maples in Canada, only two — the sugar and the black maple — produce sap sweet enough to make syrup. The sugar maple is more prevalent in Canada.

Discovered by Indians

The maple tree's sweet sap was discovered centuries ago by North American Indians. Rich in vitamin C, the sap was more than a tasty treat; it also helped ward off scurvy.

When the first Europeans came to North America, they quickly realized the syrup's value as an inexpensive and accessible substitute for cane sugar. Initially they traded some of their goods with the Indians in exchange for maple syrup; later settlers harvested their own.

The pioneer method of tapping maples involved driving wooden spiles — pegs with a channel cut in the top — into the trunk of the tree. Sap flowed along the



A cabin at a sugarbush.

channel into pails suspended below. Full pails were emptied into wooden barrels, then taken by horse-drawn sleighs to a clearing where the sap was boiled in huge iron kettles over a fire. Then, as now, it took a lot of sap to make a little syrup — 135 to 180 litres (30 to 40 gallons) of sap makes 4.2 litres (one gallon) of syrup.

Today, maple syrup is a multi-million dollar business. Gone, in large measure, is the pioneer method of gathering and boiling sap. Large commercial sugarbush farms, with up to 20,000 trees, maintain a network of plastic tubing which carries the sap directly to an evaporator house where large quantities are boiled into syrup by oil or gas heat.

Maple festivals

This spring, countless towns and sugarbush farms will host maple syrup demonstrations and festivals. Because it is impossible to predict when the sap will start running, precise dates cannot always be set far in advance. (Ideal sap running weather calls for cold nights during which the snow hardens, followed by sunny days with temperatures rising to 5-10 degrees Celsius.)

The town of Plessisville, in the Bois-France region of Quebec, is reputed to be the Canadian — indeed the world — capital of maple syrup production. The town has been hosting annual week-long festivals since 1959. As Canada's biggest maple festival, it draws as many as 100,000 visitors. Annual attractions include a province-wide exposition of maple products, a grand parade by night, outdoor discos, live theatre, craft and antique sales, fire-

works and old-time French Canadian cuisine. This year's festival will be held April 19-26.

One of the largest Ontario festivals — attracting more than 40,000 visitors — is held at Elmira, a small rural community 20 kilometres (12 miles) north of Kitchener. Scheduled for April 4, this year's one-day festival will feature syrup-making demonstrations, sugarbush tours, arts and crafts and antique shows, Pennsylvania Dutch cuisine and unlimited quantities of flapjacks with maple syrup.

For history buffs, or those who simply prefer the ways of yesteryear, the Chrysler Park Maple Sugarbush at Morrisburg, Ontario recreates the evolution of maple syrup-making from the Indian era to the beginning of the twentieth century. Free tours are operated between mid-March and mid-April, weather permitting, with sample maple syrup and sugar for sale.

In Atlantic Canada, the Glooscap Maple Syrup Festival is being held until April 11 in the Cumberland and Colchester counties of Nova Scotia.

Energy act amendments tabled

Energy Minister Marc Lalonde recently tabled a bill in the House of Commons to amend the National Energy Board Act.

The bill replaces outmoded procedures with regard to land acquisition and compensation claims, now governed by the Railway Act.

The bill is intended to establish new procedures for determining the route of a pipeline, and to deal with compensation and damage claims resulting from the building of a pipeline.

Under the new provisions, a company must give notice of the pipeline's proposed route to landowners. If a landowner files a written objection, the National Energy Board must hold a public hearing in the area where the lands are located. The board will have the power to impose terms and conditions which it considers to be desirable in approving a pipeline's final route.

As far as land acquisition and settlement of compensation is concerned, certain new requirements must be met. If a landowner and a pipeline company cannot agree on compensation, there must be negotiation and arbitration of claims. Either the landowner or the company may begin any proceedings.