

Office of the Commissioner of Agriculture
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AGRICULTURAL COMMISSIONER MARKS MAPLE MONTH WITH CEREMONIAL TAPPING

Charleston, W.Va. – West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Kent Leonhardt kicked off International Maple Month with a ceremonial tree tapping at the Guthrie Agricultural Center on Wednesday, March 8. It's the beginning of a month filled with maple activities including Mountain State Maple Day set for March 18.

West Virginia maple syrup producers Paul Ronk and Rich Flanigan, along with maple educator Mike Rechlin, assisted the commissioner in tapping a 65-year-old maple tree on the edge of the West Virginia Department of Agriculture's (WVDA) Guthrie complex and answered questions about the maple industry in West Virginia. A pancake brunch afterward featured pure WV maple syrup.

While maple syrup has been made in the mountains of West Virginia for generations, producing and marketing maple syrup is relatively new. The West Virginia Maple Syrup Producers Association formed in 2012 and currently has more than 30 producers across the state. The group is committed to research, education and increased production of West Virginia maple products ranging from syrup and cotton candy to sugar and other value-added products. Pure WV maple products are sold in retail locations across the state.

"In 2016, West Virginia producers tapped 48,000 maple trees. The sap collected boiled down to about 6,000 gallons of pure, West Virginia maple syrup. That is a great first step but it's just the first step," said Commissioner Leonhardt. "If the industry continues to grow, West Virginia could become an economic force in the maple industry."

Mike Rechlin, who's been involved in the maple industry for more than 30 years, stressed West Virginia has a distinct advantage over maple-producing states in the northeast. "Those states have been in the maple business a long time. However, one thing they lack that West Virginia has is mountains. When you tap a tree, you need that sugar water to flow downhill. States like Connecticut install pumps to make that happen. Here in West Virginia, the mountains do it for us."

Maple producer Rich Flanigan's Wayne County operation is just two years old but already his Flannigan Family Maple products are sought after around the region. "A lot of maple producers around the state are updating their facilities from the old tap and bucket system to plastic tubing. That's what we use. Tubing is cost efficient and saves valuable time when the sap is flowing."

February and March are considered peak maple season here in West Virginia. Some producers work around the clock to keep up with the sap flow, production and marketing of their products. Eleven maple houses will open their doors on March 18 for the 2nd Annual Mountain State Maple Day so visitors can find out how maple goes from the tree to the table. The maple houses are open to the public and there is no charge. To find out more, [click here](#).

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