Sugarbush Vocabulary

Maple syrup production has its own unique equipment, processes, and vernacular or language. The vocabulary resource will help you familiarize yourself with many of the terms used within a sugarbush.

Bulk tank- Stainless steel or food grade plastic tanks used for the bulk collection and storage of maple sap.

Buddy taste- When sap starts to have an “off” taste or taste differently from sap gathered throughout the season. This usually happens at the end of a maple season when sugar is being used by a tree to form buds. Can signal the end of a maple season.

Bucket system- Historic process of attaching buckets (traditionally metal) to taps or spiles which have been hammered into a tree. Maple farmers must go tree to tree to collect sap and then bring the sap to a central location.

Cloudy/milky sap- Sap which has a cloudy/milky appearance compared to clear sap. Usually appears towards the end of a maple season when trees begin to bud. Can signal the end of a maple season.

Drop line- Piece of hosing (usually 5/16th diameter) that runs from the tap in a tree to a collection vessel or into larger diameter hosing in a sap line system.

Freeze/thaw cycle- The process of temperatures being above freezing and below freezing which cause negative and positive pressures in and a tree causing sap to flow. Prime maple weather is considered below freezing at night and above freezing and sunny during the day.

Gravity system- A sap line system that relies on slope and gravity to cause a natural vacuum in a system to pull sap from trees to a central collection area.

Lateral line- Piece of hosing (usually 5/16th diameter) that drains the drop lines of 3 to 5 trees and runs into the main line.

Main line- Piece of hosing (usually starting at ¾ and bigger) that collects sap from multiple lateral lines and runs to bulk tanks or releasers.

Maple bit- Drill bit designed specifically for drilling trees for sap collection. Bits come in industry standards of 7/16′, 5/16 , and 1/4.

Maple sap/sap- The sucrose (sugar), nutrient, and water mixture which is found in trees. Sap is used by trees to move energy through the tree from roots to leaves. Sap from a maple tree is on average 2% sugar with other Acer or maple species being less.

Pump house- Covered structure used to house vacuum pumps used in vacuum sap line systems. Usually but not always connected to a sap house.

Releaser- Canister which allows the separation of sap from air in a vacuum system which allows the system to stay under pressure or charged and sap o be sent to bulk tanks.

Sap bag- Plastic bag used in a sap bag system which collects maple sap. Sap bags are replaced each maple season.

Sap bag holder- Bracket placed over maple tap used to hold sap bags. Sap bag holders are often made of galvanized metal.

Sap bag system- Process of attaching bag holders and bags to taps or spiles which have been hammered into a tree. Maple farmers must go tree to tree to collect sap and then bring the sap to a central location.

Sap density- The measure of the amount of sugar and other solids in tree sap. Sugar maple trees have the highest levels of sugar which is on average about 2%.

Sap house/ sap shack- Covered structure used for bulk collection and storage of sap. Usually but not always connected to a pump house.

Sap run- Steady run of sap during. Coincides with strong freeze/thaw cycles

Sugarbush-An area of maple trees which are managed and harvested for the production of maple syrup.

Sugar house/sugar shack- Structure used to house and process maple sap usually found in or near a sugarbush.

Tapping- a. The process of drilling a maple tree and placing a tap into the drilled whole.

b. The sound made by hammering a tap into a drilled hole. The sound goes from hollow to solid sound when tap is set.

Taps, spiles, spout, or spigot- small tube placed into a drilled hole in a maple tree to allow for the collection of maple sap which can be made of wood, plastic, or metal. Industry standard sizes are 7/16th, 3/16th, and the predominately used 5/16th diameter sizes.

Vacuum system- system of hoses placed under vacuum from a vacuum pump which are run through a sugarbush for the purpose of suctioning sap to a central location.