

MEET A SUGAR MAKER

As part of a new series highlighting our members, we're starting short interviews with Vermont's sugar makers, large and small, near and far. Our first conversation was with Matt Wamsganz of Snow Hill Farm in Westford, Vermont.

ALLISON HOPE, VMSMA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

Q: I SEE ON YOUR WEBSITE THAT YOU LEARNED ABOUT SUGARING FROM YOUR DAD, VERNON, WHO STARTED SUGARING IN SARANAC LAKE, NEW YORK IN THE MID 1900'S. WHY DID YOU START YOUR OWN OPERATION?

MATT WAMSGANZ: Sugaring was in my blood from when I was a kid. As I grew up, I always had my sights set on finding land and starting up sugaring. I was one of nine kids and only two of us are doing any sugaring these days.

Matt has 1,000 taps on his land and also buys sap from a neighboring sugar maker who has about 5,500 taps. Snow Hill Farm made about 2,200 gallons of syrup last year – about 50% sold wholesale and 50% retail. Most of the retail sales are to local grocery stores and the rest is locally through the sugarhouse.

A: DID YOUR WIFE KARIN KNOW THAT THIS WAS PART OF THE PACKAGE WHEN SHE MET YOU?

M: Karin's a country girl at heart, having grown up in New Haven, and she knew one of my prerequisites was maples on a hill in the country.

A: DO YOUR KIDS HELP WITH THE OPERATION?

M: Not as much as you would think. Maybe don't write that... (said with a laugh). When we were a wood fired operation and the kids were younger, they helped in the sugarhouse. But they're teenagers now and they have lots of other things going on. Plus we've automated so much of the operation and gone to an oil fired arch so we don't need as much help.



Matt Wamsganz Pictured Right with Fellow Sugarmaker Ron Frey

A: WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT SUGARING?

M: Working in the woods, going tree to tree and seeing the growth.

A: WHAT DO YOU LIKE LEAST?

M: Cleanup. There was no hesitation in that answer! It's the part that nobody really sees. So they come into the sugarhouse and smell the sap boiling and it looks pretty easy. But emptying and cleaning everything takes time and you have to do it right.

A: WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

M: I built everything from the ground up. We milled the lumber for the sugarhouse from our land and I drew up and designed and constructed the sugarhouse myself.

A: WHAT HAS CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

M: The price has dropped; that's been a bummer. We keep track of the weather – when we had our first boil and when we had our last boil. Even back fifteen years ago we had some early boils, so it's not uncommon, but it does seem to be getting more frequent.