



MEET A SUGAR MAKER

As part of our series highlighting Members, we're sharing short interviews with Vermont's sugar makers, large and small, near and far. On October 30, 2020, Cory had a conversation with Pam Greene of Ox Pasture Maple in East Berkshire, Vermont.



Pam & Dave serving sugar-on-snow at Greene's Ox Pasture Maples

CORY: I read online that your sugaring operation has been around for approximately 50 years?

PAM: Yes, Stan Greene, my Dad, started the business 54 years ago. My Dad was an old time Vermonter who had a tremendous love of nature and being in the woods. He didn't grow up sugaring at his house, but he spent time in neighbors' sugarhouses. Although, he said back then children weren't always welcomed into sugarhouses. He remembered getting yelled at a lot to get out of the way. My Dad worked as a Customs Officer, and when we started sugaring, we only did it on his days off. He wanted all four of his kids to get into it, but he was wary of building a sugarhouse at first. For the first two seasons, we boiled outside, even in the snow, rain and sleet. Luckily for him, we all liked it. Now today, the operation is at 15,000 taps which is sort of small by Franklin County standards, ha-ha. We tap 50 acres of our 200-acre sugar-bush and we boil with wood. We became certified organic over 10 years ago.

CORY: Who's involved with your operation?

PAM: Jim Greene, my brother, is the master boiler. He sees maple as a business and also makes all equipment decisions. Louise, my sister-in law, never sugared until she came into the family. She manages our books. She is now retired from her career as a special educator. Before that she would spend any free moment outside of work helping out in the sugar-house. My nephew, Caleb, does a lot for the business. He's a great mechanic, which comes in handy. It's not a matter if something will break, it's a matter of when. He assists with boiling, splitting wood, and tapping trees. He's also a really good hunter. He helps keep the red squirrel population down. David, my partner, helps me with the marketing, canning, and shipping of our products. Through his efforts, we've seen our syrup photographed on the Great Wall of China, in Israel, and in South America. I help David with marketing, as well as running the Vermont Maple Gift Shoppe in Franklin. My niece, Michelle, is selling our syrup at a Farmers' Market in Fort Myers, Florida.

CORY: Tell me about your business name. How did you come up with it?

PAM: When my Dad built the original sugarhouse, he unearthed a lot of ox harnesses and wire. He learned that the previous owner sugared with oxen in the late 1800s. He felt it was natural to call it Ox Pasture Maples.

CORY: In 2006, your original sugarhouse burned down. What's the story behind that?

PAM: That was quite tough. Especially, because the fire happened during the last boil of season. It was really dry that season, to the point that my brother would wet down leaves around the sugarhouse regularly as he was afraid of sparks igniting the dry leaves. Which unfortunately happened. All of our barrels for the season were in the sugarhouse. We lost all of that and the equipment that was in the sugarhouse. Luckily, no one was in the sugarhouse when the fire started. One of the firefighters saw Jim's four-wheeler next to the sugarhouse and they initially thought he was inside. We had to do a lot of hard thinking about rebuilding. Luckily, Caleb wanted to continue our tradition of sugaring. The silver lining is that we were able to build the new sugarhouse next to the roadside for customer exposure. In the winter, we get a lot of visits from skiers coming home from Jay Peak. You can see the steam from our sugarhouse coming from Montgomery, so the skiers and others will follow their eyes and scent to us! We were able to hook up to power. We had no power in the old sugarhouse and it was one mile up the mountain. The new sugarhouse is right next to my brother's house, so his commute to work is now just a couple of steps. Being the oldest sibling, it was especially hard for me, I have a lot of great memories in that old sugarhouse.

CORY: Your operation is just a couple of miles down the road from the Canadian Border. Has the border closure affected your operation at all?

PAM: Yes, COVID-19 has affected us and it will likely impact us next season. This past season was freaky because it's normally a social time of year. This year it was just immediate family. I certainly miss connecting with people. I've been able to see a lot of babies have their first taste of maple. I've never seen a baby spit up maple. Overall, sales were good. Our retail went up with everyone staying at home and cooking to pass the time. Believe it or not, a lot of sales come from Canadian skiers visiting Vermont. We also get a kick when our syrup goes over the border to Ontario and Quebec considering how big maple is in those provinces.

CORY: What's your favorite meal/recipe with maple in it?

PAM: That's a tough, but good question. It's hard to pinpoint one, but I will say that we have a real kitchen in the sugarhouse, and we often will have salmon fillets or pan-fried ham steak drizzled with maple. Louise makes maple rag muffins that are to die for. All of us use the VMSMA cookbook regularly. I get a lot of compliments on the maple vinaigrette recipe at pot lucks. People ask for it so much, that I had to start bringing photocopies for people to take home with them. Dave often will stir maple into whole milk. I am trying something new this year, Bourbon Barrel Aged Maple Syrup for the Holidays.

CORY: What is your favorite part of the sugaring process?

PAM: I have a couple. One is spending time with family. Another is being close to nature. I love watching and seeing the change from winter to spring and sometimes back to winter. You never know when the height of the season will come. Lastly, I love carrying on the heritage from my Dad and other Vermont sugarmakers, including the Abenaki people who first sugared here.

PAM: I'd like to mention some of my influences.

CORY: Of course, please do.

PAM: I have a handful that have been instrumental in my maple career. First, my Dad. He got me into sugaring. Dave Marvin was and still is an influence for me. He told my Dad years ago "I want to make it in maple." And I'd say he has. I'm proud to see what he's built and now what Emma and Ira are doing with Butternut Mountain. UVM Professor, Marifranca Morselli. She was a heroine to me. Years ago, there weren't a lot of women in maple. Larry Myott, a UVM Extension Maple agent taught my family so much. He had a great mantra. "Quick, clean, and cold." And last, Bill Clark. He's an old time Vermonter who was ahead of his time with maple marketing. I loved the flip charts that he used to bring to county meetings.

PAM: I'd like to end by saying that I hope everyone has a great 2021 Season.

If you'd like to be featured in this section in a future newsletter, please email Allison at allison@vermontmaple.org or Cory at cory@vermontmaple.org.