

Maple producers hoping for a sweet season following nasty winter

STEPHEN PETRICK
OSPREY NEWS NETWORK

Local maple syrup producers are hoping for a sweet spring, in light of a nasty tail end to winter. Freezing mid-March weather is causing sap to run slowly.

"We've had a little bit running, but it froze before we could do anything with it," said Colleen Nyman, who runs J & C Nyman Farms with her husband John near Picton. "We've usually boiled at least once by the end of February."

She's worried that many syrup farmers won't have much product to show off by the time the Maple in the County festival takes place this weekend.

"It will run at some point, but it may not be as long as we want it to be," she said.

March usually marks the start of maple syrup season, as freezing temperatures at night, mixed with above zero Celsius conditions in the day, allow sap to begin flowing from maple trees.

Producers say a fluctuation from about -6C to 6C

can create a handsome harvest.

The Nymans aren't the only ones praying for more of those days in the second half of the syrup season. "It's going pretty slow because it's too cold," said Doug Stone of Stone's Maple Producers, another sugar bush just outside Picton.

He said if conditions are perfect for the whole season, a tree can produce enough sap to make a litre of syrup.

He is not expecting that result this year, saying if the weather improves he might have an average season.

With 1,000 trees on his site, he hopes to make 500 to 600 litres.

"I've got know way of knowing (the result) until the end of the season," he said, with a laugh.

Todd Vader, who runs Vader Maple Syrup at East Lake, said he hasn't been hurt by bad weather as much of others farmers in the area. He has boiled syrup four times already this year — enough to make 450 litres.

He believes temperatures in the south end of the county have been more ideal.

"One or two degrees can make a difference," he said. "Our main bush is just a mile from Lake Ontario so we tend to get earlier runs."

Others, producers were just getting ready to collect sap late last week, unsure about how a late start to the season will affect their crop.

Janice Hubbs, who runs Hubbs Sugarbush with her husband Ron, in north Prince Edward County, said 90 per cent of trees on her property have now been tapped.

But in others years they're ready to go in late February. Cold weather and thick snow has them well behind schedule this year.

"This year mother nature has thrown a monkey wrench at us," she said. "We have a metre of snow in the woods right now to manoeuvre through. It makes it really difficult."

However, she said, maple syrup producers shouldn't fret over the weather. When it comes to sap, it's not a matter of if, but when.

"It's going to be spring eventually," Hubbs said with a laugh. "We'll take it when we get it."