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**Notes from editor (not for publication):**

Hi, Joslyn — I loved everything except the first-person-ness. I quickly did some nudging and a little reordering and easily made it into a really nice centerpiece news feature with all the heart and without — I hope — sacrificing any of your material. I added a couple of transitions and some data where I got to wondering myself. I’m always happy to arm wrestle over anything here or go over any changes in detail. Pictures look fantastic. I’m going to try to get this on the page today to get this week’s paper off to a great start. —J



HEADLINE ELEMENTS:

####BEGIN HED####

1 How’s the maple season? Ask when it’s over.

####END HED####

####BEGIN SUBHED####

2 Vermonters’ near-cultlike reverence of maple syrup is  
3 part of who we are — not only in its consumption but its  
4 preparation

####END SUBHED####

5 TEXT BODY:

####BEGIN TEXT####

6 Just when so many of us are ready to accept that this  
7 Vermont winter will never end, the sap starts running.

8           At the annual Sugar on Snow Supper at Broad Brook  
9 Community Center (BBCC) on March 7, neighbors sat shoulder to  
10 shoulder at long community tables passing around the deviled  
11 eggs, baked beans, mashed potatoes, dinner rolls, and coleslaw  
12 made by Broad Brook Grange members and others in the  
13 community. Volunteers — ranging in age from tweens to nearly  
14 90 — served the ham.

15           This meal, of course, was just a precursor to the reason  
16 we all gather for sugar on snow: ultra-locally harvested snow  
17 (straight from the backyard of the BBCC) slathered with hot maple  
18 syrup boiled down by David Franklin, who has been doing this  
19 work for decades.

20           The maple syrup flows liberally, and tradition dictates we  
21 slurp it down with a side of pickles and donuts. This wholesome  
22 picture is an annual fundraiser for the Grange and a priceless  
23 memory.

24           In these hilltowns, we pour our syrup on pancakes,  
25 waffles, and French toast and enjoy it as candy, slathered on  
26 toast, as a healthy-ish replacement for sugar in baked goods, and  
27 as a sweetener to savory dishes like squash.

28           According to the state Agency of Agriculture, Food, and  
29 Markets, state maple farmers produced 3.06 million gallons of  
30 maple syrup in 2025. It was a \$94 million business in 2024.

31           We can easily take our maple syrup for granted.  
32 Vermonters’ near-cultlike reverence for maple syrup is part of  
33 who we are — not only in its consumption but its preparation.

## 34           **‘The Goldilocks tree’**

35           Like many Vermonters, Sam Schneski moonlights —  
36 sometimes literally — with what he calls his “little out-of-control  
37 hobby” making maple syrup.

38           A county forester for the Vermont Department of Forests,  
39 Parks, and Recreation, Schneski started his operation in Guilford  
40 with 90 buckets and a little backyard evaporator, and his tools  
41 haven’t changed all that much.

42 Maple syrup is maple sap with the water boiled off until  
43 it is 66.9% sugar. It takes approximately 40 gallons of sap to  
44 make one gallon.

45 Schneski has gotten better and better at it over the years.  
46 He now produces around 100 to 125 gallons of syrup every  
47 sugaring season and sells it via his small enterprise, Schneski's  
48 Maple & Tree Works LLC. (You can find it at the Brattleboro Food  
49 Co-op.)

50 How is this season going? "The standard answer from  
51 most sugarmakers is, 'I'll tell you when it's over,'" he says.

52 That's because the sap flows under certain conditions.

53 "Sugar maples are sometimes referred to as the  
54 Goldilocks tree," Schneski says. "They like things just right — not  
55 too hot, not too cold, not too dry, not too wet, but just right."

56 He describes the perfect conditions for sugaring, which  
57 start the prior summer with "ideal temps" of 75 to 85 degrees and  
58 average rainfall, followed by a good cold winter.

59 Late winter is the critical time for sap to flow, and it's  
60 best if the days are in the 40s and the nights down in the 20s.  
61 But, Schneski adds, "We rarely get that anymore."

62 Still, he says, "Sugarmakers are clever people. They were  
63 originally all farmers who sugared for their households, so they  
64 came from that problem-solving, figure-out-how-to-make-it-work  
65 heritage."

66 Today's commercial sugarmakers are just as scrappy, and  
67 they still care deeply about the quality of their product and take  
68 pride in the fact that Vermont is famous worldwide for its maple  
69 syrup.

70 "The changing climate has made us all adapt to tapping  
71 on a variable timeframe as well as dealing with surprise heavy  
72 wet snows, ice storms, and days where temperatures spike way  
73 above what we used to think of as normal for the time of year,"  
74 Schneski says.

75 Maples are not the only trees you can tap: beech, birch,  
76 butternut, sycamore, and walnut are all tappable, but none quite

77 compares to the sugar maple and red maple in terms of sap  
78 production and sugar content.

79 "In Alaska, they make birch syrup, which I've only had  
80 once," Schneski says. "That's just about the right number of times  
81 to try birch syrup."

82 Vermont's dominant tree scene is new-growth deciduous  
83 hardwood, with generally calcareous (sweet, not acidic) soils that  
84 lend themselves perfectly to the growing of sugar maples.

## 85 **At the mercy of variables**

86 Sugarmakers are at the mercy of location, climate,  
87 culinary trends, and market conditions. But sugaring is also a  
88 matter of devotion and skill.

89 Does he think of sugaring as more of an art or a science?

90 "It's definitely a science," he says, though he concedes  
91 that "once you do it for long enough, it can feel like an art,  
92 because you become naturally in tune with the process and how  
93 the weather, the trees, and your boiling system work together."

94 "But there is no room for creativity that would veer away  
95 from the core scientific processes of how trees make sugar and  
96 how heat applied at the right time, for the right amount of time,  
97 results in pure maple syrup," he says.

98 Those standards are mandated by state law and  
99 regulated by the state, which stringently enforces density, grade,  
100 color, flavor, clarity, sanitation, packaging, and language on the  
101 labels, among other aspects of Vermont's signature crop.

102 Having so many variables associated with sugaring only  
103 adds to the magic of it all.

104 Real maple syrup is not a given elsewhere. Out West,  
105 you can't expect that what you pour from the pitcher on the diner  
106 table will be the good stuff.

107 "Maple syrup is so common to us here in the Northeast,  
108 but most folks in the rest of the country have either never tried it  
109 or really need to go out of their way to get some by mail order —  
110 or by visiting Vermont," Schneski says.

####END TEXT####

BIO/COATTAIL:

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111 To learn more about maple sugaring and maple products  
112 in Vermont, visit the [Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Association](#),  
113 whose annual Maple Open House Weekend takes place  
114 statewide Saturday and Sunday, March 21 and 22.

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LINKS:

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VIDEO:

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LOGLINE (SOCIAL MEDIA):

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