

SAP AND TAP

2016 Mid-Atlantic Maple Camp

West Virginia University played host to the 2016 Mid-Atlantic Maple Camp July 20-23. Maple producers and those thinking about getting into the business traveled from seven different states and Ontario, Canada to attend the workshops and hands-on training in the field.

“It was extremely helpful,” said Rich Flanigan of Flanigan Family Maple. “I wish I would have attended something like this four years ago when we started our operation.”



Ohio State University Extension Agent and maple expert Les Ober kicked things off with a pre-conference workshop Wednesday afternoon. With his nearly three decades in the business, Ober focused on some of the basics of creating a successful maple operation and a few new techniques being used in the industry.

Camp officially started with a tour of WVU's Core Arboretum. WVU Assistant Professor of Silviculture Dr. Jamie Schuler took the campers into the woods for a look at maple trees that grow in the mid-Atlantic region and a lesson on how to use a biltmore stick. It was the first time many of the participants had ever held one.

Day two started with a trip to the WVU forest where Cornell University Extension Associate Stephen Childs divided the group into teams of three to measure and map out maples for data collection. After lunch it was back out to the sugar bush to inspect an existing maple tubing system. The campers then installed a mainline with laterals for hands-on practice with the help of



Childs and Cornell University Extension Associate Dr. Michael Farrell. The day ended in the classroom with a lesson on filtering, storing and grading maple syrup

and a demonstration from Childs on how to make award-winning maple candy. (It was tasty!)

The third day of camp focused on tapping, tap hole sanitation, vacuum and bucket management along with marketing your product. The afternoon featured a trip to several area sugar shacks to see how different producers are putting their own stamp on maple. During the evening session, the campers learned how to make maple beverages as well as plan and manage their maple operations.



Camp wrapped up on Saturday with a half-day classroom session on finances and cost evaluation of operating a maple business. The West Virginia Maple Syrup Producers Association helped sponsor the event. A Specialty Crop Block Grant subsidized the cost of Maple Camp.

“This camp has probably saved me four or five seasons of just absolute mistakes, things I was doing wrong or messing up and didn't even realize it,” stressed Daniel Brown of Bowing Oaks Farm.

Trevor Swan, who is considering getting into the maple business, called the camp a crash course in just about everything he needed to know. “It was a great exchange of information, not just a lecturer standing up front, telling you what you should do. Going out in to the forest, seeing exactly how it was done and getting to do it for myself was eye-opening!”

Brown called the instructors “top notch” but stressed the campers learned a lot from each other. “These folks are here under the same conditions I am and they are doing it on a daily basis. They know personally what I'm up against and what I'm working with out in my sugar bush.”

This was the first time West Virginia hosted the Mid-Atlantic Maple Camp. The West Virginia Maple Syrup Producers Association hopes it won't be the last.

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