

Maple Syrup Breaks Away From Breakfast

Producers pour it on, using maple in cocktails, cheese, even oysters on the half-shell, for a healthier, more flavorful ‘savory extender’

Boasting record-setting harvesting, the maple-syrup industry believes it is set to be more than just the topping on your pancakes, emphasizing it as a healthier, more flavorful sweetener. WSJ’s Ellen Byron joins Lunch Break with Tanya Rivero to discuss. Photo: Reuters

By **ELLEN BYRON**

The Wall Street Journal Updated July 20, 2016 12:01 a.m. ET

Maple-syrup makers are tired of sticking to pancakes.

With a record-setting harvest this year, the maple-syrup industry believes it is poised to finally be more. Maple water, maple cheese, maple cocktails, maple salad dressing, plus maple cotton candy, fudge, pastries and foie gras are hitting stores and restaurant menus, with the emphasis on maple as a healthier, more flavorful sweetener.



Runamok Maple sells its maple syrup in glass bottles resembling high-end liquor. Its syrups include versions aged in bourbon, rum and rye barrels, and others infused with cardamom, elderberry and makrut lime leaf. “This is really not aimed at pancakes,” says Runamok co-owner Eric Sorkin. *PHOTO: LEAH LATELLA/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

“We pitch chicken and ribs instead of waffles and pancakes,” says Robert Hausslein, sugarmaker for Sugar Bob’s Finest Kind smoked maple syrup, made by SBFK Inc. The Londonderry, Vt., company infuses its dark maple syrup with hardwood smoke, sells it in bottles resembling steak sauce and recommends it for use in recipes for shrimp cocktail sauce, mayonnaise and oysters on the half-shell. “At breakfast it can be a sweetener but for the rest of the day it’s a savory extender,” Mr. Hausslein says.

This summer, maple is the star ingredient on Omni Hotels & Resorts' pool menu, which includes a cardamom-maple salmon salad, grilled garden vegetables with miso-maple-carrot sauce, maple-peach margaritas and a maple milkshake. Spas at the hotel chain offer a 50-minute "maple essentials" facial using maple sap that promises to "leave skin rehydrated and gently exfoliated."



Smoked maple syrup samples at the Summer Fancy Food Show in New York. Sugar Bob's Finest Kind, a Londonderry, Vt., producer, says its dark maple syrup is infused with hardwood smoke and packaged in bottles that look like steak sauce bottles. The company calls it a sweetener and "savory extender." *PHOTO: LEAH LATELLA/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

"Each year I try to pick one ingredient that has some health benefit and a huge amount of flavor," says David Morgan, Omni's vice president of food and beverages, who says he came up with this year's maple idea. "Most people don't really know real maple syrup."

Booming production could change that. The U.S. and Canada produced record amounts of maple syrup at the 2016 harvest, helped by favorable weather, improved tapping methods, more producers entering the industry and existing players expanding their operations.

Quebec, supplier of more than 70% of the world's maple syrup, produced about 13.5 million gallons this year, up 23% from the previous record set in 2013, according to the Federation of Quebec Maple Syrup Producers. The U.S. Department of Agriculture in June reported a harvest of 4.2 million gallons, the biggest yield since record-keeping began in 1916.

Maple syrup is an expensive indulgence, with average prices over the past five years hovering around \$37 a gallon. Even with increasing supply, that isn't expected to change much, largely because of Canada's controls on its supply and increasing consumer appetite. "Prices appear to be holding up and that's an indication of demand strength," says Warren Preston, the USDA's

deputy chief economist. The large change in supply “isn’t having an overwhelming impact on prices.”

Maple syrup costs a lot to produce. Maple trees usually are at least 40 years old before sap can be harvested, and the season is short and fickle. Sap runs for around 20 to 30 days in early spring, depending on the weather. It flows best when temperatures are below freezing at night and above freezing during the day, producers say.



Nettle Meadow Farm, a goat and sheep dairy farm in Warrensburg, N.Y., was sampling maple chevre at the Summer Fancy Food Show. *PHOTO: LEAH LATELLA/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

The maple-syrup industry hopes increased attention to the potential harms of artificial sweeteners and processed sugars, as well as new labeling of added sugars, will draw consumers and companies to maple as a healthier, more natural alternative.

“I don’t believe everyone understands the difference between real maple syrup and imitation syrup,” says April Lemay, founder of April’s Maple, which makes a spreadable cream, granulated sugar, cotton candy, pancake mix, truffles and a spicy maple mustard from the maple sap it harvests on its farm in Canaan, Vt. “Real maple is better for you and a better tasting way to satisfy our sweet tooth.”

Maple lends familiarity and adds comfort, warmth and a homemade-feel to foods, says Saumya Dwivedi, a senior researcher at International Flavors & Fragrances Inc. “The American palate is so used to maple notes,” she says. “It gives consumers a nice entryway to try something new.”

Maple sap is subtly sweet and has a water-like consistency—unlike pine sap, which is thick and sticky, and maple syrup, which is viscous and sweet. It takes some 40 gallons of boiled-down sap to make one gallon of syrup, hence its thicker-and-sweeter consistency.



DRINKmaple 'pure maple water' is a beverage made with one ingredient, maple sap. Kate Weiler, co-founder of the St. Albans, Vt., product maker, says they were inspired by the fast rise of coconut water. *PHOTO: LEAH LATELLA/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

Inspired by the fast rise of coconut water, DRINKmaple bottles “pure maple water,” which is maple sap, as a beverage. A 12-ounce bottle has half the sugar of coconut water, says the St. Albans, Vt., company’s co-founder Kate Weiler.

“We couldn’t believe that this coconut water craze involves shipping coconuts from around the world, yet no one is utilizing a resource that is literally in our backyards,” says Ms. Weiler. “Why aren’t we drinking something straight from trees native to our home region?”

Happy Tree, another maple water company, last year introduced lemon and ginger flavors, and this year it launched cold-brew coffee and pomegranate versions. To overcome shoppers’ misconception that maple water is syrupy, the company uses transparent bottles.

As demand for natural sugars and locally sourced foods increases, maple syrup producers are trying to boost marketing efforts. “Maple is an agricultural product, like apples, and like anything that you find in the produce aisle, there’s not a huge marketing budget,” says Emma Marvin, co-owner of maple-syrup producer Butternut Mountain Farm, in Morrisville, Vt.



Butternut Mountain Farm sells pure maple syrup in an easy-to-squeeze plastic bottle to promote daily use. *PHOTO: LEAH LATELLA/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

Syrup makers also are changing their packaging. Butternut Mountain Farm in 2014 introduced a squeezable plastic maple syrup bottle with a silicone valve to better control pouring and minimize the sticky-mess potential. The bottle, which resembles mass-market squeezable ketchup bottles, is meant to encourage everyday use and convert families who usually use artificial syrups.

“This packaging suggests people should use it every morning in their yogurt and coffee,” Ms. Marvin says. “Those fancy bottles get put in the back of the pantry until your mother-in-law comes over on Sunday for breakfast.”

In Cambridge, Vt., syrup producer Runamok Maple sells its maple syrup in glass bottles resembling high-end liquor. “This is really not aimed at pancakes,” says Runamok co-owner Eric Sorkin. Its syrups include versions aged in bourbon, rum and rye barrels, and others infused with cardamom, elderberry and makrut lime leaf.



Sap drips from a maple tree into a collection bucket at Hollis Hills Farm in Fitchburg, Mass. It takes about 40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of maple syrup. *PHOTO: BRIAN SNYDER/REUTERS*

Co-owner Laura Sorkin, a chef trained at the French Culinary Institute in New York, posts maple recipes on Runamok's website, including a Kir Royale cocktail that substitutes Runamok's hibiscus-infused maple syrup instead of cassis. Other recipes feature curried maple cashews with sausage crumbles and sweet-and-sour beets.

Ms. Sorkin suggests drizzling maple syrup on fruit, ice cream and in coffee. "It also works with nearly any cheese, and in a lot of savory dishes," she says. "You just have to start experimenting."

Garrison Price, chef de cuisine at Asiate, a restaurant in the Mandarin Oriental hotel in New York, experiments with fermenting maple syrup. He recently created maple-flavored vinegar for vinaigrette that he pairs with hamachi. Mr. Price also dehydrates maple syrup to add crunch to foie gras, burrata and duck dishes. He plans to introduce a new cheese course this weekend—a savory, smoked maple syrup ice cream accompanied by fresh goat cheese wrapped in a smoked maple leaf.

Write to Ellen Byron at ellen.byron@wsj.com

NOTE: The article states that production was up in the United States for 2016. Sap production in Southwest Ohio was down as much as 40%. This was due to very warm temperatures experienced in February and March of 2016. As stated in the article for ideal sap production, temperatures need to be below freezing at night and in the 40's during the day. In Southwest Ohio our night time temperature were not cold enough to have normal or record sap production.

Also the article states syrup prices are \$37 per gallon. This is a bulk wholesale price sold in 30 gallon drums.

Thank you for visiting the web site of 4 Bucks Farm!