



# Wisconsin Maple Producers Association 2024 Lifetime Member Award



On May 3, the WMSPA awarded Fred and Bonnie Hedmark of Hedmark's Maple Ridge the WMSPA Honorary Life Membership award at the WMSPA Annual Meeting. Hedmark's Maple Ridge is over a century old family hobby located in the Town of Fence, Florence County. Fred and Bonnie Hedmark are the third generation to make maple syrup.

It all started in 1916 when Fred and Stephanie Hedmark grew weary of city life in Chicago. They traded two lakeside apartment buildings for 160 acres in the Town of Fence, sight unseen. They moved to the Northwoods with their toddler son Edward and lived in a tent that summer until the log cabin was built. In 1918 Stephanie moved back to Chicago to give birth to their second son Milan. They made maple syrup for their own consumption and bartered the rest for other necessities while raising 5 children.

During World War 2, Milan was stationed in Chicago where he met Vita. In 1945 they were married, bought a farm and moved back to Fence. In 1958 Milan and Vita purchased a 3'x12' King evaporator, put up a modest building, put out 700 taps and started producing maple syrup commercially with their three sons: Bob, Mike and Fred. Through the years they increased the number of taps to as high as 1600 taps, using buckets and bags. The unique aspect was Milan always used a team of horses to gather the sap.



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In 1995 Milan urged his youngest son Fred to try installing tubing on his property close to the family farm. The property has a very steep ridge running north-south, making it a perfect setup for gravity tubing, thus the name Hedmark's Maple Ridge. In 1996 Fred and Bonnie installed 500 taps and went into partnership with Milan. 1996 was the last year of using the horses for gathering the sap, because in 1997 they installed another 400 plus taps for a total of 900 plus taps on tubing. In 1998 Milan turned the operation over to Fred and Bonnie.

In the fall of 2000, Fred built a new sap house at 6748 Lunds Road and installed a 4'x18' evaporator, the official start of the third generation. For the 2009 season; vacuum was added to the tubing. Currently tapping 1,200 plus taps, with more taps in the future.

On March 15, 2006, Hedmark's Maple Ridge had the honor of hosting Wisconsin's First Tapping ceremony at their operation. Wisconsin Maple Queen Cynthia Voelz tapped the official first tree and Alice in Dairyland, Geena Cooper read a proclamation from Governor Jim Doyle declaring March 15th to April 15th as Maple Month in the State of Wisconsin. In 2007, Hedmark's hosted the annual fall tour in district 2 with their operation as one of the stops. In October 2008, Hedmark's Maple Ridge was named 2008 - 2009 Wisconsin Maple Syrup Producer of the Year.

Fred and Bonnie have been involved in the Wisconsin Maple Producers Association (WMSPA) for many years. Fred has served as District 2 director since 1997. He has also served as Vice-President, President and Wisconsin Delegate to the North American Maple Syrup Council (NAMSC).

Fred has attended the NAMSC conventions over the years and has served as an associate member. They have entered their maple syrup in the NAMSC syrup judging contest and received several awards for their syrup over the years.