

With another season of maple sap collection in the past the time to start planning and preparing for the 2020 season is now. In 2019 there were over 260 inspections of licensed facilities involved in the production of maple syrup products. These inspections included a look at many areas of operation related to food safety such as employee health and hygiene, cleaning and sanitizing procedures, prevention of contamination from chemicals, and avoiding cross-contact with major food allergens.

Cleanliness is Essential to Business Operations

Businesses have shown that they can meet state requirements for these areas in many ways. For example, by having conversations with employees about washing their hands properly upon entering the processing area, storing personal food and beverages in designated areas, and demonstrating these behaviors to others while working. It may also include working in a limited capacity or not at all if you have a communicable disease, acute vomiting or diarrhea, or exposed open wounds. Cleaning and sanitizing can be challenging for maple syrup operations, but starting with equipment that is free of visible debris and sanitizing with hot water or a chemical concentration that you can test and demonstrate to your inspector will put you on your way towards completing your inspection. Those that have carefully read the label on their chemical sanitizer know whether it is safe to use with food production equipment and how much to use to avoid leaving toxic residues. Once finished with the chemical sanitizer and other chemicals they store them away from food, packaging, and clean equipment so that they are not likely contaminated. A bottom shelf located in a separate room from the evaporator may work well for this purpose.

Safe Water is Critical to Produce a Safe Product

Producing safe food is every business' priority. Access to safe water is critical, and when water is not available on-site there are options. You may have to transport water in a bulk container from another location on your property or from another property. These containers may not be used to transport other materials that may contaminate the water, and they must be cleaned and sanitized before being filled. They must also be effectively sealed to protect the water from contamination while it is being transported, inspected on

a routine basis, and stored and serviced properly to prevent contamination. Take care to maintain, cap, and store all pumps, hoses, and fittings as well. Whether your water source is on-site or off-site, you must provide a safe water report when the water comes from a private well. Typically, this means an "absent" result for coliform bacteria. A list of certified labs that perform this testing may be found at <https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/wells/documents/privatelabs.pdf>.

All Food Processing Plants Must Have a Recall Plan

You may find that you need to recall your product, and unless you have a recall plan in place already it may be too late to prevent injuries or illness. For example, if a business recalls bottles they manufacture due to pieces of broken glass it is still your responsibility to be prepared and take action when necessary to protect the public. Work with your sanitarian if you need a recall plan template and modify it to fit your operations. You may also find recall information and request a recall plan template from the DATCP website at https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/FoodRecalls.aspx. Things you should be prepared to address in your recall plan include how you will identify and contact customers who purchased your product, how you will identify affected product (for example, lot codes and expiration dates), and how you will communicate the recall.

Can You Legally Still Call It Maple Syrup?

Maple syrup must conform to the standard of identity to be labeled solely "maple syrup", meaning it must have a solids content of at least 66 degrees Brix, contain no added sweeteners, and meet other requirements. For example, it may contain salt, chemical preservatives, and defoaming agents, but may not contain other ingredients or undeclared allergens such as milk from butter. Adding value to your products with additional flavors and other ingredients can be a way to make your products stand out. For example, adding bourbon barrel flavoring which is unlikely to significantly affect bacterial growth, but would need to be declared properly within the statement of identity and ingredients statement. Be aware that there may be food safety impacts from adding ingredients. For example, adding hot peppers, cinnamon sticks, or vanilla beans. Keeping your product safe and

compliant with laws may be as simple as using a name other than "maple syrup" for the statement of identity, but it may also require adding an acidulant and filing a "scheduled process" with the U.S. Food and Drug Administration or processing your product to control potentially fatal *Clostridium botulinum* spores.

Moving Forward

There can be many choices to turn maple syrup into high quality and profitable products, but only you can make the choices that will produce safe food. Use the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's resources and others to help make the best choices. Resources are available at https://datcp.wi.gov/Pages/Programs_Services/FSMapleSyrup.aspx.