



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **FAYETTE COUNTY MAPLE FARM SWEET SELECTION FOR MARCH 'PLACE'**

**Uniontown, PA** – It's maple season in the Laurel Highlands.

That means maple farmers are harvesting the sweet sap from their trees and turning it into rich, delicious syrups. Most of the maple farms in the Laurel Highlands are in Somerset County, but a small, family farm in Normalville has the distinction of being the only licensed maple farm in Fayette County.

Duck's Maple Farm, owned by Donald "D.J." and Sherry Hess, is the Fayette Faces and Places selection for March.

The syrup-making business began as a hobby for D.J. during the winter months, when he was laid off from his job.

"I worked heavy construction," he said. "Back in the early '80s, we were usually laid off around Thanksgiving, and we never went back until mid-March."

While he had some free time, D.J. began tapping a few trees and cooking up small batches of maple syrup on a little Coleman stove. His father, nicknamed Duck, loved the syrup and encouraged him to start a business.

Duck passed away in 2000, but upon his retirement in 2013, the idea came to D.J. again.

"I retired in 2013, and Sherry said, 'What are you going to do?'" D.J. said. "I said, 'I'm going to make syrup.'"

The syrup-making venture started with just a few trees but grew into hundreds, some fitted with multiple taps.

"We tap every year," D.J. said. "The lines stay up. We have probably 1,800 to 2,000 taps. Most of the trees have one, some have two, and a few big ones have three."

The Hesses started out using gravity flow to get the sap to the tanks, but these days, everything is a bit more high-tech.

"I have a pump that can run the whole woods," D.J. said. "When you're cooking, you don't have time to go down and empty tanks."

The Hesses also use an evaporator and a reverse osmosis machine to speed the cooking process and reduce the amount of firewood needed. A filter press removes impurities. According to the farm's website, it takes about 50 to 70 gallons of sap to produce one gallon of maple syrup.

Sherry said the Hesses produce their syrup in February and March and sell it throughout the year, both from the farm and through various retail outlets, including G&D Market, Leeper Meats, and Mountain View Acres in the mountain areas and Youghiogheny Holistic Living in Connellsville. The Hesses also sell their products at Ligonier Farmers Market every other week,

Syrup lovers can choose from the light, amber syrup or a darker, more robustly flavored variety. Recently, the Hesses also developed a syrup that was aged in a bourbon barrel for a dark syrup with a hint of bourbon flavor. Duck's Maple Farm also produces maple candy and a maple cream spread, as well as maple-coated cashews, walnuts and peanuts.

"We sell most of it out of the house," Sherry said. "We made 600 gallons last year, and we only had 40 gallons left, even considering COVID."

Featuring Duck's Maple Farm in this month's edition of Fayette Faces and Places seems especially fitting considering each March National Ag Day is celebrated across the country. Fayette County is deeply rooted in agriculture and proud to celebrate local farmers.

To learn more about Duck's Maple Farm, visit [www.ducksmplefarm.com](http://www.ducksmplefarm.com) or follow them on Facebook.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit [www.FayetteCountyPA.org](http://www.FayetteCountyPA.org).

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