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# Currey Farms set for another syrup season

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*Record-Eagle/Craig McCool  
Art Currey taps a maple tree for syrup on his Charlevoix farm.*



*Record-Eagle/Craig McCool  
Currey hopes to produce 1,000 gallons of syrup from about 3,000 trees over the next few weeks.*

CHARLEVOIX — The woods behind the Currey farm look like a science project.

Miles of translucent, blue tubing are strung through the trees. This week, as northern Michigan daytime temperatures climb above freezing, those plastic veins will course with sap.

Tens of thousands of gallons of the light, slightly sweet stuff literally will be sucked from about 3,000 maples by a powerful vacuum. It will be pumped nearly one-third of a mile to the sugar shack, forced through a reverse osmosis filter and then boiled several hours in an evaporator at over 200 degrees.

All so Art Currey can have better-tasting pancakes.

And a retirement. Currey Farms, a family business that Currey resurrected after a three-decade-plus hiatus, is entering its second syrup season. And oh, how sweet it is.

"I always wanted to do syrup. It gets in your blood," said Currey, 55. "I'd much rather be outdoors in the woods doing this than sitting in an office all day."

A retired large-animal veterinarian, Currey learned syrup from his father. Robert Currey was a dairy farmer who ran a commercial syrup operation from the same maple stand in the 1970s.

The younger Currey made syrup as a hobby for years, tapping trees in his neighbors' yards, before leaving his veterinary practice downstate two years ago to make syrup full-time.

And it is, in many respects, a full-time job. The sap might run just 20-or-so days, depending on the weather, but before that, there's preparation: checking the 15 miles of tubing for vacuum leaks; re-hanging lines the deer have knocked down; drilling 5,000 tap holes. Larger, more mature trees get two or three taps.

"I've never been one to really do much sitting around," Currey says.

He has some help. Currey's mother, Betty, who lives on the farm and ran the boiler during the 1970s operation, makes meals and still takes occasional turns stoking the fire. Neighbor Ron Cox, a retired Charlevoix school teacher, used to help Currey's dad tap the trees and is lending a hand in the production this year.

Currey's wife, Jan, handles most of the bottling and marketing. The couple spent nearly all of their Saturdays at small town festivals and farmers markets around the state to make their investment — about \$35,000 for the in-the-woods operation and a \$25,000 wood-burning boiler, among other things — pay off.

It worked. Currey Farms produced 650 gallons of syrup last spring. All that's left of that first run are three dozen or so bottles.

This year, the goal is to produce 1,000 gallons. That will require 40,000 gallons of tree sap, eight cords — about 30 truckloads — of wood to evaporate it and more than a few long nights in the sugar shack.

So when it's over, does Currey get tired of syrup?

"Nah," he said. "When summer comes, I pour it on ice cream."