

Pure maple gaining on artificial syrups

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Pure maple syrup is on the rise in a declining overall market for pourable syrups. We are moving in the right direction, but still have a long way to go. That's the upshot of recent market research from the Nielsen Company looking at the market for "pancake syrups" from July 2013-July 2014.

This past summer I was fortunate to get access to this data via Mark Harran of the International Maple Syrup Institute. The data is extremely valuable to provide a snapshot of how pure maple fits in the overall marketplace for pourable syrups.

Many people are familiar with Nielsen from its TV ratings system, but they do much more than that. When you purchase an item from a grocery store or many other outlets that uses bar codes, the information on that transaction is stored for future research and analysis on market trends by companies such as Nielsen. This covers a lot of food transactions, particularly for supermarkets where most food in the U.S. is sold, but some notable markets that it misses are sugarhouses, farmers markets, small natural food stores, convenience stores, websites, and mail order. It also doesn't include pure maple sales in the ingredient market or at restaurants and other food service providers. So while these numbers are useful at providing an overall gauge of how well pure maple is doing compared with its artificial competitors in the mainstream consumer market, this data should not be seen as a complete assessment of the overall market for pure maple. Further research would be necessary to fully quantify the industry sales.

Nielsen divides pourable syrups according to six broad categories: Maple Flavored, Maple Flavored (reduced calories), Pure Maple, Molasses, Cooking Syrup, and Fruit Syrup.

The Nielsen data reveals that pure maple syrup represented \$174 million in sales (21% of the market) whereas the artificial pancake syrups made up 70% of total sales with \$574 million for the one-year data period. Sales were up 4.7% for pure maple as compared to a loss of 3.8% for the artificial pancake syrups. Since pure maple is much more expensive in comparison to the artificial syrups, the actual market share in terms of volume is much lower. Pure maple sold 22 million units compared with 200 million units of the artificial syrups, a whopping 83% of the pourable syrup market. Thus, even though pure maple made up 21% of sales, it only comprises 9% of the volume. In terms of number of units sold, pure maple is up 6% while artificial syrups are down 4.7%.

So what does all of this mean? First of all, it's certainly good news that pure maple sales are up! People are consuming fewer pancakes and waffles, and generally aren't cooking as much as they used to, so sales of all of the other pourable syrups are heading down. If pure maple was going the same way as all its competitors, we would be in serious trouble. There are at least three possibilities for why overall sales of pure maple may be growing in an overall declining market for pourable syrups:

1. People are switching from imi-

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tation syrups to pure maple syrup.

2. People are discovering new uses for pure maple syrup, beyond as a breakfast topping.

3. Existing pure maple consumers are increasing their overall use of maple syrup.

We can only speculate as to the importance of each of these factors in the overall consumption of pure maple. Further consumer research will be necessary to determine who is consuming pure maple, what they are using it for,

and why they chose pure maple over other options. The market demand is growing at about 6% per year, and while that is good news, production is growing even faster than that. If we want to keep supply and demand in balance and continue to be able to grow the industry at profitable levels, even better marketing and promotion will be necessary to improve upon the gains we are already making.

This article is submitted as part of the Market Study Group sponsored by the International Maple Syrup Institute. To learn more, go to www.internationalmaplesyrupinstitute.com.

The potential value of a joint marketing program for the maple industry

“**E**veryone working together will lift the whole industry,” said Ellen LaNicca Albanese, Senior Vice President of Padilla CRT, a communications firm that specializes in food, beverage and nutrition, at the IMSI annual meeting in Wolfville, NS in October. Maple producers need to extend how we think about how our products are used, she said, and try to extend how consumers use them.

A thorough industry-wide marketing campaign would need to include extensive studies of consumer usage and attitude, gathering data on the profile of purchasers, how maple products are used, how frequently the products are purchased and why, as well as other information. “Marketing without data is like driving with your eyes closed,” she said.

Albanese spoke about the success of checkoff assessments on other foods, such as blueberries. Money raised in this way from blueberry growers went

toward health research and promotion, and nearly tripled consumption of blueberries in the U.S. and rallied growers. Checkoff campaigns ensure that all producers contribute, since everyone will benefit from the industry’s growing sales, she said.

“Great sustainable brands are grounded in emotion,” said Albanese. In the case of blueberries, a study that mapped how competitive berries were being marketed in an effort to find a niche, and decided on ‘sociable’ as the guiding message for marketing blueberries, with terms like ‘playful,’ ‘warm,’ and ‘loving’ resonating with consumers. Maple producers could undertake a similar effort, she said, if enough funds could be raised to do so.

In comparing maple with other foods, Albanese found that the maple industry spent significantly less on marketing. For a crop valued at roughly \$500 million in 2013, she estimates that

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