

Survey of Important Issues Facing the Maple Industry

By Kathy Hopkins, Sumner Dole and Henry Marckres

In October, in Green Bay, an informal needs assessment survey was conducted by Sumner Dole, Henry Marckres and Kathy Hopkins to identify the most pressing issues facing the maple industry. The survey was done in three segments: one survey conducted at the maple specialists meeting held on October 18, 2006; one conducted at the October 19, 2006 general session of the North American Maple Syrup Council; and one at the 2006 International Maple Syrup Institute Grading School. A similar survey was last conducted in 1985 by the Research Review Committee of the North American Maple Syrup Council. Some of the issues have changed since 1985, such as interest in acid rain, but some such as grading, quality control and forest health are as important as they were in 1985.

The survey conducted in 1985 yielded the following results. Sixty-six people responded: 44 producers, 16 government/Extension/university employees, five interested parties and one syrup buyer or packer. Priority items could be selected from a list of 14 possibilities and respondents were instructed to rate their most important priorities from 1 to 5 with 1 being the highest priority. The most important item in the highest ranking category was All environmental Factors Affecting Maple Trees (including disease, stress, health,

and vigor) with 23 votes. The second most highly rated item was Acid Rain and its relationship to Maple Trees with 11 votes. When the total number of votes for each item was totaled across all priority categories, the most important issue was again All environmental Factors Affecting Maple Trees (including disease, stress, health, and vigor) with 56 votes and the second most highly rated item was again Acid Rain and its relationship to Maple Trees with 36 votes. Close behind that those issues came Maple Diseases, Insect and Pathological Controls with 31 votes.

The 2006 survey conducted at the NAMSC annual meeting asked for participants to list the three most important issues they felt were facing the maple syrup industry. Cards were returned from 33 producers or buyers at the general session and from 14 government/Extension/university employees conducted at the Extension Specialists meeting. Categorizing these open-ended responses into similar categories yielded the following results.

PRODUCERS

The open-ended request for most important issues yielded 35 different responses. The item rated first in importance was Global warming/climate change. The second most important item was Educating the public (and children) about maple grades. Three items were tied for third most important (Marketing/Promotion, Lack of Research Funds, and Disease and Insect Control) and five were tied for fourth as the most important issue. All other items had at least one vote for most important issue.

facing the maple industry. When votes were totaled across all priority classes, Global warming/climate change was again deemed most important and Uniform grading system US and CA and Marketing/Promotion tied for second. Educating the public (and children) about maple grades was rated as third most important across all priority classes.

One poignant response did not make a list of three issues but included the following request, "I don't have any suggestions but want to remind you all not to forget the small producers. Most if not all research that has been funded does not help a producer with only 500 taps. Also, don't forget producers out West - MN, Illinois where you have many small producers that need help"

SPECIALISTS

The request for most important issues yielded 16 different responses. The item receiving the most votes was Retail Marketing and Promotion. The second most highly rated item was Quality Control and Use of Food Grade Materials. All other items had at least one vote for most important issue facing the maple industry. When votes were totaled across all priority classes, Retail Marketing and Promotion was again deemed most important and Quality Control and Use of Food Grade Materials was again the second most important issue submitted. The third most important issue was Forest Management/Tree Health/Thinning. Two items tied for fourth most important issue: Lead Management and New Equipment and Technology.



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In an attempt to broaden the scope of this survey, we decided to make the same request for the three most important issues facing the maple industry to the 25 attendees at the December 2006 International Maple Syrup Institute Grading School. None of the participants at the grading school had attended the NAMSC/IMSI meetings in Green Bay. Their responses were categorized as follows.

GRADING SCHOOL PARTICIPANTS

The request for most important issues yielded 24 different responses from 20 respondents. The item receiving the most votes as most important issue was Global warming/climate change. The second most important item was Uniform Grades. Two items were tied for the third most important issue: Purity/Making Maple a Gourmet Item and Marketing. All other items had at least one vote for most important issue facing the maple industry. When votes were totaled across all priority classes, Global warming/climate change was again deemed most important and Education/Schools for Sugarmakers was the second most important issue submitted. The third most important issue was Uniform grading system.

SUMMARY

The open-ended survey of these three different subsets of people involved in the maple industry showed both the diversity and similarity of issues facing maple producers and industry supporters. It is interesting to note that both produc-

ers and grading school attendees listed global warming/climate change as a priority item while it was not on the specialist's list. Uniform grading was listed as a priority item by both producers and grading school attendees. All three groups listed marketing/promotion as an item of importance. While this needs assessment was an informal call for ideas from different groups in the maple industry, many needs were identified. Most importantly, it identifies the need for more formal identification, description and prioritization of the issues facing the industry. It is our hope that all interested people continue the discussion of industry needs, choose an issue or issues and collaborate on ways to address the chosen issues.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank Richard Norman for sharing with me the materials from the 1985 survey to use in comparison with the results of this survey.

For a complete list of all items submitted and a tally of votes for each, please email:

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