



So You Want to Upgrade Your Maple Syrup?

United States and Canadian agencies have approved a new set of grading standards for maple syrup, based on a more than 10-year process by the industry to develop a unified system for producers in both countries. The new rules went into effect in December 2014 in Canada, and in January 2015 in the United States.

The USDA regulations remain voluntary, but some states, including Vermont, Maine and New York, have passed laws mandating that producers use the new system. Each state has a different time period for phasing in the new system. Some states began using the system in 2014, and most will have it fully implemented by the end of 2015.

The new system has been under development for many years, through a process led by the International Maple Syrup Institute. Sugarmakers and others in the industry have been involved in the process, and the open comment period during the agencies' rulemaking periods allowed feedback from the general public as well.

For the sugarmaker, the transition means making a few purchases: a new temporary or permanent grading kit and new labels. Most state producer associations have developed posters and cards that help to explain the new system. The

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...nothing tastes better than 100 percent pure maple syrup

change also offers an opportunity for sugarmakers to educate their customers when they ask about how to select syrup using the new system. Questions commonly heard, along with some possible answers, include:

• **Why was the system changed?** The primary goal was to develop a standard set of grades that all maple producers could use, so that consumers could better identify and purchase their favorite syrups. Adding language that distinguishes the grades by taste as well as color was an important goal as well, since most consumers choose their favorite based on taste. There was also a desire to remove the term “Grade B,” as such a designation wrongly suggested that this syrup was in some way inferior to Grade A.

• **I still want Grade B!** The standards for the syrup now labeled “Dark, Robust Taste” are roughly the same as those for the former Grade B syrup.

• **What makes syrup different colors?** The primary reason for color variation has to do with the time during the season when the syrup is made—batches made earlier in the season, when the weather is still cold, tend to be lighter. As the season continues and the weather warms, the syrup tends to darken. Sap with higher sugar content and sap run through a reverse osmosis machine need to spend less time boiling in the evaporator, which can also play a role in producing lighter syrup.

• **What’s the difference in nutritional value?** Nothing. Regardless of grade, all syrup has the same nutritive qualities,

THE NEW GRADE

The new system is meant to replace the patchwork of state and provincial regulations in an effort to make purchasing syrup easier for consumers, packers and wholesale buyers. Gone are Grade A light, medium and dark, along with Grade B and Canada No. 1 and 2. The new grades are all Grade A, and are broken out by light transmission percentages. From lightest to darkest, they are:



* Golden Color, Delicate Taste (75 percent light transmission or greater)



* Amber Color, Rich Taste (50-75 percent)



* Dark, Robust Taste (25-50 percent)



* Very Dark, Strong Taste (25 percent or less)

including antioxidants, manganese, magnesium, riboflavin, amino acids and other minerals. Pure maple syrup is also lower in calories than many other sweeteners, and is fat-free, gluten-free and allergen-free.

• **Which grade is the best?** They’re all excellent—nothing tastes better than 100 percent pure maple syrup. Everyone has a different preference for flavors, so offer your customers samples of each to let them figure out which ones they prefer. **F**

Winton Pitcoff is a freelance writer and coordinator of the Massachusetts Maple Producers Association.



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