

Chain of Custody Certification for Maple Syrup Producers: Enhancing Opportunities for Market Access and Economic Return



“Certification provides a preferential market tool for sale of maple syrup, especially for sales to Europe where they have embraced certified products”

*~ Gary Ivens,
MAPLE RIDGE FARM,
APPLE HILL, ONTARIO*

What is Forest and Chain of Custody Certification?

More and more, today’s consumers are starting to ask about where the forest products they are buying are coming from. When given the choice, their preference would be to purchase from responsibly managed sources.

Forest certification is a process by which forest owners can publically demonstrate that their forests are well-managed. Forests that are “certified” have been evaluated by independent, third-party auditors against a set of internationally approved standards that take into consideration the forest’s economic, social and environmental values.

Just like wood products, it is also possible to label the syrup you make as coming from a responsibly managed source. This is product certification, often referred to as “Chain of Custody”. It is way of tracking a forest product from the woods where it was harvested to the final consumer. It guarantees that the product they are buying is coming from a sustainably managed forest. Chain of Custody follows the path wood products take through the entire supply chain, including processing, transformation, manufacturing, and distribution. For a wood product to be labeled and sold as “certified” it must come from a certified forest and be produced in facilities that hold Chain of Custody certification (CoC).

What are the advantages of Forest Certification?

Certification is completely voluntary, and all certified forest owners and forest product producers have chosen to partake in the process despite the additional costs and responsibilities associated with becoming and staying certified. This means that there needs to be some tangible benefit to forest owners and forest product producers to justify their decision to open up their management practices to public scrutiny.



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CHAIN OF CUSTODY CERTIFICATION FOR MAPLE SYRUP PRODUCERS: ENHANCING OPPORTUNITIES FOR MARKET ACCESS AND ECONOMIC RETURN



It is possible to certify your sugar bush and by doing so, you have proof that your management practices are being done on a sustainable basis.



The demand for certified forest products continues to grow and for some international jurisdictions, certification is becoming a mandatory requirement for all imported wood products.

“Certification makes the producer and the consumer feel good”

~ Fred Huszarik,
CERTIFIED MAPLE SYRUP
PRODUCER, ALMONTE,
ONTARIO

The specific reasons to get certified in the first place vary considerably from woodlot owner to woodlot owner but, in general, the following benefits are possible.

For the forest owner:

- improved image and credibility
- greater accountability for forest management practices
- pride in achieving an internationally recognized system
- validation of their forest management decision making
- access to new and unique domestic and foreign markets

For the consumer:

- assurance that the product they have purchased came from a forest that is well managed for all its values
- an opportunity to make informed purchasing choices

For regulatory agencies:

- assurance that environmental and safety issues are being addressed
- reduced risk to society
- the ability to take a “hands off” approach to the need for regulations that protect societal values

For the general public:

- comfort that the maple syrup producer is audited by a “Third Party”, and concerned about environmental quality
- knowledge that best management practices are being voluntarily implemented



What is the Role of the Eastern Ontario Model Forest in Forest Certification?

The Eastern Ontario Model Forest (EOMF) Forest Certification Program provides an opportunity for woodlot owners to become certified to the internationally recognized standards for sustainable forest management and chain of custody certification developed by the Forest Stewardship Council® (FSC®). The EOMF Forest Certification Program allows for individual landowners to share the benefits and costs of FSC certification by certifying their lands as part of a larger group, under the umbrella of one certificate.

The EOMF is focused on developing strong markets for certified forest products, and furthering the opportunity for private landowners to realize the benefits of sustainable forest management – maple syrup is one of those products.



Maple syrup for certified woodlots can be labeled as coming from a well-managed sugar bush through the EOMF’s chain of custody program.



What is Maple Sap and Syrup Chain of Custody Certification?

If your sugar bush is certified, you can market your maple products locally, nationally and internationally as coming from a sustainably managed forest under an internationally recognized certification system.

Additionally, you may be able to:

- seek enhanced market opportunities that demand proof of responsible management
- encourage a market strategy that separates your certified operation from those that are not certified
- enhanced economic returns due to market access as a reward for publically recognized environmental stewardship
- promote your products to consumers, and in particular to high-end restaurants as well as other select niche markets
- take advantage of new marketing efforts which are currently underway to expand the recognition of the FSC logo as the essential symbol for Canadian shoppers.

What is involved in Maple Syrup Chain of Custody Certification?

The EOMF is the only organization currently offering certification services to maple producers in Ontario. In order to sell maple syrup as “certified”, producers must meet and follow a number of the forest management and maple syrup production requirements.

This means that your sugar bush management, sap collection, and processing operations are subject to evaluation by third-party auditors against a set of criteria – if you meet the standard, your woodlot is “certified” and you will be able to market your products as having come from a “well-managed” source.

While it may sound a bit onerous at first, it is important to recognize that the certification process of is not that difficult for most producers. Yes, there will be some gaps between what you do now and what is required by the certification system but generally, these gaps are easy to overcome and in many cases, provide additional operational benefits.

Some of the main examples of the maple specific operating procedures include:

General Considerations:

- Maple-tapping and processing equipment must meet all applicable licensing laws, sanitation standards, quality control, packaging and labeling requirements.
- Your forest management practices must conform to all applicable laws and regulations.

Public Notice Considerations:

- The Landowner and/or Forest Manager must communicate with neighbours, local communities, and any potentially affected groups or individuals when sugar bush management activities have the potential to negatively impact them.

What is this logo?



The mark of
responsible forestry

This logo, when affixed to a maple syrup product, means that it is Forest Stewardship certified as coming from a responsibly managed forest and that the producer is part of the EOMF's group certificate for maple products. “Non-certified” products cannot make the same claims. The license code identifies the EOMF as the FSC certificate holder.

“It provides preferential purchasing by discreet customers”

~ Cliff Rogers,
LORD'S MILL SUGAR BUSH,
GRENVILLE COUNTY, ONTARIO



“We have a forest management plan for our sugar bush which was the first step in getting it certified. Getting involved in the EOMF certification program was not a difficult additional step.”

~ Ray Fortune,
FORTUNE FARMS, ALMONTE,
ONTARIO



Management Plan Considerations:

- You will need a forest management plan that incorporates your forest inventory and your sugar bush management objectives.
- Your plan shall be technically sound and sufficiently detailed, given the size, complexity, and intensity of your operation.
- The plan shall describe and justify the intensity and method of sap harvesting.

Operational Considerations:

- Sap collection equipment shall be installed with minimal damage to trees.
- Sap collection infrastructure (i.e., collection pipelines) and management activities cannot negatively impact wildlife populations and other forest resources.
- The intensity, frequency, and seasonality of sap harvests cannot exceed sustainable levels and must be based on a combination of scientific study and/or long-term local experience and knowledge.
- Recommended tapping rates and best management practices shall be followed in the forest.
- Sensitive site elements must be identified and protected from damage.
- Management and sap collection practices shall minimize impacts to forest composition, soil structure and fertility.
- Unused sap collection materials and any waste generated from sugaring operations shall be removed from the forest and disposed of appropriately.
- Tree harvesting practices shall incorporate new scientific or technical information as required.
- Workers shall receive adequate training and supervision to ensure proper tapping and processing techniques.

Monitoring Considerations:

- Regular monitoring shall be incorporated into your sugar bush operations.
- Monitoring practices are technically sound and identify or describe the following:
 - changes in the maple component of the forest, maple growth rates, and regeneration;
 - changes in forest health;
 - presence of high pest populations;
 - harvesting levels including number of taps used, volume of sap collected; and volume and grades of syrup produced.

“In Canada, we are ahead of the wave that has swept Europe with regards to certification of forests. All maple syrup producers should become Chain of Custody certified in order meet the global market demands in the future.”

~ Ray Bonenberg,
MAPLESIDE SUGAR BUSH, PEMBROKE, ONTARIO

For more information on the EOMF and our Forest Certification Program please visit:
eomf.on.ca/certification



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