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LOCAL SUGARMAKER TAPS INTO NEW TECHNOLOGY TO PRODUCE MORE MAPLE SYRUP

First Vermont Maple Producer to Install New System

Milton, VT – As the weather warms up and sap begins to flow from the Maple trees, Donnie Richards, of Meadowbrook Maple Syrup, knows how important it is to collect as much of the sweet stuff as he can to boil into syrup.

“The sugaring season lasts about six weeks, and maximum sap flow often happens within the first two to three hours of a thaw,” Richards said, “any leaks or damage in the vacuum pipeline system we use to deliver the sap to our sugarhouse means less sap is collected.”

That’s where Tap Track comes in – a new wireless system designed to help mid-to-large scale syrup producers monitor their sap lines so they know exactly when and where a leak has sprung up. Leaks can then be quickly repaired to increase the amount of sap collected.

“Our trees are spread out on 106 acres of woodland and our furthest tap is about 5,000 feet away from our sugarhouse through miles of pipeline,” Richards said, “before we installed Tap Track it could take an entire day to find a leak in the pipeline.”

The system, invented by Jason Gagne, of Swanton, and Doug Thompson, of Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, displays the real time status of Richards’ entire pipeline network on a digital map on his computer or smartphone through satellite imaging. Richards can view the status of each sap line based on the color it is on the map – if it shows up red, Richards knows exactly where to go to fix a leak. The system can even send text alerts.

“The sugarmaker doesn’t have to walk their pipelines aimlessly to find leaks – it’s a great management tool to help you get your crew to the right areas quickly so you can collect more sap,” Gagne said.

Tap Track runs on a series of battery-powered radio-unit boxes that are strapped to the trees throughout the woods and powered by solar panels. Each of the boxes contains sensors capable of monitoring the pressure in up to six sap lines. The sensors provide real time pressure data to the central database which then displays updates on the digital map. Richards has 13 boxes set up in his sugar woods which are interconnected to his network of 72 main pipelines and 5,000 taps.

The cost of the system can range from \$1 to \$2 per tap, depending on how many taps a maple syrup producer has, but Gagne says, on average, the system costs \$1.25 per tap and the return on the investment and benefits can be seen in one season. Gagne says not only does Tap Track allow the sugarmaker to save time by fixing leaks faster, it reduces the risk of bacteria getting into the sap which helps ensure high syrup quality, and most importantly, the system helps boost production.

“If you get the leaks out, in turn you produce more sap,” Gagne said, “Our test site of 20,000 taps in Ontario has resulted in more than a 5% increase of sap collection, which added over \$15,000 to their bottom line and paid for the entire system in one season.”

Richards, the first Vermont maple producer to purchase the Tap Track system, completed the installation in January and is eager to see for himself if the technology will turn into a sweet investment.

About Tap Track:

Tap Track is owned by Tap Track Technologies, Inc., based in Ontario, Canada. Tap Track is a wireless vacuum monitoring system that improves quality, efficiency, and reduces costs for maple producers. The new technology recently earned the company the Leaders in Innovation Award presented by Ontario Premier, Kathleen Wynne, in October 2013 for contributions to the overall success of the agri-food sector. To learn more visit www.taptrack.ca.

About Meadowbrook Maple (owned by Meadowbrook Acres, Inc.):

The Richards family established the Meadowbrook Acres farm in 1958 in Milton, Vermont. Currently we milk 200 Holstein dairy cows. Our farm began as a dairy business, and expanded with the addition of our sugarhouse where we make our Meadowbrook Maple Syrup. We sell all natural maple syrup as well as maple candy and cream. Visit our website at www.meadowbrookmaple.com to learn more.

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To schedule an interview or demonstration of the system contact: laurastebbins@gmail.com or [802-238-0833](tel:802-238-0833).