

John Buck

Buck Family Maple

February 12, 2025

Farm to School Awareness Day

For the record, my name is John Buck, of Buck Family Maple. I appreciate Bob Hildebrand inviting me to come in and talk about maple and the importance of the Farm to School program to our small family maple farm in Washington, Vermont. It's a 70-acre family-run farm. We had about 2,000 taps, and according to the Vermont Maple Sugar Makers Association, that's a makes up the one of the largest proportions of membership representative of maple sugars in Vermont. And so, you know, Bob talked about the income that we receive from the sale of maple to the Abbey Group. And it's, it's, it is important to us, from the standpoint that he brought out that it's a regular sale we can count on. We also know those kids are going to eat maple syrup. And so we can set aside a certain amount of syrup every year, knowing that we can sell that to Abby Group and to, and more specifically, to the schools that are really close to our sugar house.

For example, the Washington Village School, one of the schools, is only six miles away, so we're bringing syrup in there and we've been doing this now for, five, six years or so. We've gotten to know all the food service people, and they love us. When they come in, they say, "Oh, thank God you're here. We're almost out of maple syrup!" It's being consumed rapidly by these kids. But aside from the income portion of it for us, because that, like I said, you know, it's no denying it's important. But on the other hand, what I find so gratifying is the look on the faces of the kids when we come in with our maple syrup, and knowing that these kids are seeing food produced next door. Maple syrup and all the other food that they eat doesn't *just* come from a store, and it's really gratifying for us to know that they are being indoctrinated this way. You know, it's just part of life. "Oh, maple comes from trees. Beef comes from the beef farms." It comes from farms. It comes from the earth. It comes from our neighbors.

This program has a huge cultural benefit to Vermont and Vermonters, and it helps to keep rural, rural and the rural culture of Vermont alive. And we depend upon active farms to keep the forest and the farmland healthy and vibrant and viable, so that this doesn't compete with real estate values and other human uses. We at Buck Family Maple, and I think at any farm, thinks about sustainability, and thinks about taking good care of the earth, the forest, the farmland, and also thinks about the next generation. And in my case, my grandchild, I'm hoping that they'll use this property too to make maple syrup or harvest firewood or

whatever else comes from the property. So it has multiple benefits. Sustaining small farms in Vermont is crucial, and I think the Farm to School Program is one of those programs that's essential for making that happen.

Our maple farm is in South Washington, Vermont. We are on about 70 acres of forest land. If you know Washington at all, or Northern Orange County at all, it's, you know, it's a very rural part of the state. It's a beautiful part of the state too. Our sugarbush sits at about 2,000 feet in elevation, which seems remarkable when you're in this rolling kind of forest. It snows there about eight months out of the year. And if not for mud season, we'd have a lot more school children coming to our sugar bush for tours. We get lined up every year to come, and invariably, mud season keeps that from happening on a regular basis. But it is the fact that we are so close and so local gives us teachers an opportunity to bring their children out to give them a first hand look at what happens on the farm.