



HISTORY OF THE INTERNATIONAL MAPLE SYRUP INSTITUTE

One of the main reasons for the establishment of IMSI was the depressed market conditions for dark maple syrup in the early 1970s. This situation began in 1973 when Canadian production increased by 434,000 gallons from the previous year. During the same period, producers in the United States obtained a smaller crop, but one with a larger proportion of dark syrup. The traditional market for dark, pure maple syrup was American companies producing blends, but their purchases had been declining. This meant that there was a surplus of dark syrup in the marketplace.

The 1974 production season did not relieve the problem of surplus dark syrup, so representatives of the maple syrup industry in Canada and the United States arranged a series of meetings in an attempt to resolve the issue.

The first meeting regarding the syrup supply issue was held in South Burlington, Vermont in mid-August, 1974. Dr. L. David Garrett, Director of the George Daiken USADA Maple Research Laboratory presided over the meeting. Dr. Garrett was a visionary and he offered the suggestion “to create an international organization of processors, producers and government representatives to work out an international marketing strategy”. Up until that time, maple producers and packers had very little contact and it was recognized that Canada and the US had different government strategies. There were also two languages to contend with and obvious communication challenges. While there was mediocre reception for the idea, Dr. Garrett persevered and encouraged the group to “Give it a try - What have you got to lose?” Finally, those in attendance at the meeting felt that it would be worthwhile to continue discussions in favour of the idea. Jean-Pierre Potvin agreed to set up a second meeting at the Quebec Department of Agriculture facility in Montreal and further meetings ensued alternating between Burlington and Montreal. As the meetings continued, it seemed as if there were many of what seemed to be insurmountable obstacles. Questions included “How do we equate fair and balanced voting? How can we structure the use of government funds? How can we acquire US funding to balance Canadian funding? However, Dr. Garrett and Mr. Potvin worked to successfully guide the discussions to a workable solution as the meetings continued. Two key contributors to the discussions were Don Green, Delta Foods, Ontario and Adin Reynolds, who at this time had the world’s largest sugar bush with 125,000 taps in Michigan and Wisconsin, located in Aniwa Wisconsin.

Finally, at a meeting in Plattsburg, New York, on February 20, 1975, seventy members of American and Canadian maple products industries accepted a set of by-laws established by the joint US-Canadian Maple Committee, which created the Institute to promote the marketing of pure maple products worldwide. After the structure for IMSI was created, IMSI needed to be formally chartered in Canada and the United States. IMSI was chartered in Montreal, Quebec and in Delaware which was selected as the charter state. The charter signatories were Gilles Croteau of the Plessisville Coop, Quebec; Adin Reynolds, Reynolds Sugar Bush, Wisconsin; and Bill Clark, Vermont Maple Sugar Makers Association, Vermont.

Following the adjournment of this conference, the first IMSI meeting was convened. Eighteen members of the North American maple industry affixed their names to the by-laws that formally established the International Maple Syrup Institute. A slate of officers was elected and work began. Later in 1975,

Claude Tardif was hired as the Institute's first executive secretary. Don Green, Ontario, was the first president; Adin Reynolds, Wisconsin, the second, and Gilles Croteau, Quebec, the third.

IMSI was founded to promote and protect PURE Maple Products. It is a non-profit organization funded by membership dues, voluntary project contributions, and occasionally grants from the Government of Canada. A contest for a logo design was held in 1976; the response by far exceeded initial expectations. The entries were judged by a jury on November 15 of that year and the results were announced on December 2 during the 1976 general meeting of the Institute. Members were informed that the IMSI aimed to establish a logo or symbol to identify the product as pure and which could be printed or affixed on labels, but that it did not intend to establish a new label.

The plan was to coordinate efforts to develop public relations, promote the logo, and protect the integrity of the product. In 1976, there was a drastic need to market a surplus of dark syrup. A promotional campaign was organized with the assistance of Agriculture Canada. The dark syrup was consumed, and the IMSI experienced a first victory.

The years 1978, 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1987 yielded four of the poorest crops in history. Syrup was essentially non-existent. Prices skyrocketed, creating a sellers' market and promotional efforts were not required to sell syrup. Strategies were altered in response to the situation. The prevailing attitude was, "If we can sell all we can make, why waste money on promotions!" The interest then shifted to trees, as environmental issues were becoming paramount. This was followed by a reversion: 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991 and 1992 saw five of the largest maple crops on record. Supply became abundant, warehouses filled up, and there was a surplus never seen before. Once again, the IMSI assumed leadership in helping deal with the situation. As in the past, with the assistance of Agriculture Canada, IMSI conducted one of the most extensive generic pure maple syrup public relations campaigns in the history of the maple industry. It was well planned, well executed, and proved very effective. The film "Frost and Fire" was released in 1982 as part of this campaign.

Many experiments were conducted during this period. A maple bank was tried and a USDA Promotion Board was considered. Other stopgap remedies were suggested and, out of these trial and error projects, the *Regroupement* was born in Quebec. This organization purchased the surplus syrup and helped stabilize the market. IMSI's promotional efforts along with the help of the North American Maple Syrup Council (NAMSC) and the *Regroupement* led to a spirit of cooperation that had never existed before. We worked hard, promoted well, cooperated, sold products—and the surplus disappeared.

IMSI representatives also addressed the US government in 1986 regarding the potential negative impacts of acid rain on the maple resources and in the mid-1990s the IMSI spent much time and resources working with a company in France to develop a legal test to detect beet sugar adulteration in maple syrup .

For resource people, government and private researchers, equipment manufacturers and distributors, and syrup producers and packers alike, the IMSI is front and center, yet it does not interfere with the internal workings of their organizations. All maple organizations remain distinct, have their separate mandates, and remain independent. The IMSI exists to serve, to lead and to facilitate cooperation. The framework for communication, information exchange, and cooperation between all maple organizations which the the IMSI provides is particularly important as increasing amounts of maple syrup are sold

worldwide. It also plays the very important role of monitoring for adulteration in North America and around the world to protect the integrity of the product.

The Institute's Board of Directors meets quarterly in the US and Canada to manage the affairs of the Institute. Each year, annual meetings are held in cooperation with the North American Maple Syrup Council in a host state or province. These meetings help the Executive, Directors and Volunteer Committees stay abreast of issues, maintain momentum behind project initiatives and communicate accomplishments and progress to members.

IMSI provides the direction, the logo, and policing for purity to protect the integrity of pure maple syrup. As more and more maple syrup and sugar products are being sold worldwide, IMSI provides a framework for diplomatic exchange, communication, information exchange, and cooperation of all maple organizations.

In recent years, IMSI has developed a proposal for a standardized, definition grades and nomenclature for pure maple syrup and is now moving to facilitate regulatory approvals and implementation of the new standard. When implemented, this initiative should help protect consumers and allow them to more easily purchase maple syrup which closely matches their expectations. It should also assist marketing efforts in North America and around the world. Adoption of standardized definition, grades and nomenclature for pure maple syrup will help the consumer appreciate the uniqueness of pure maple syrup in the marketplace.

In 2010, IMSI embarked on a review of nutritional and health benefits information for pure maple syrup. The intent of this review was to identify scientifically backed information currently available and make it more generally available to maple syrup producers and maple packers in an appropriate format and provide guidelines for its use. This project was completed early in 2012 with finalization of a nutritional poster, rack card and information CD. The IMSI is currently working to transfer these resources to the IMSI members and others who may benefit.

The IMSI continues to provide an effective forum for sharing information on important issues related to the production, sale and marketing of pure maple syrup. The IMSI also continues efforts to help safeguard the maple industry from adulteration of syrup and is helping address other issues which could negatively affect the maple industry such as inappropriate labeling of substitute products in the marketplace and inappropriate government policies affecting the labelling and sale of maple syrup. In 2009, the IMSI embarked on a strategic review of the organization's mission, objectives and by-laws. In 2010, the IMSI revised its Use of Logo Policy and developed a Code of Ethics which has been adopted by the IMSI membership. The IMSI's Directors and Executive wish to ensure that emphasis and work activities are directed to provide the most value to members of the organization and the maple syrup industry now and in the foreseeable future.