

Press Room

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**Maine syrup producers hope for rebound as season gets under way***Associated Press State & Local Wire*

As the maple syrup season gets under way, Maine syrup producers are hoping for a rebound from last year's poor showing.

Maine's 2007 syrup production fell to 225,000 gallons, a 25 percent drop from 2006, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. That was the lowest output in six years.

Bob Moore of Bob's Sugar House in Dover-Foxcroft is expecting an improvement this year. Moore and many other producers have started tapping their trees even though the sap has not started flowing yet.

"Last year was bad," he said. "But there is no way to know what will happen this spring. It all depends on Mother Nature."

Maine's syrup season usually begins between mid-February and late March when the conditions are right mild days and cool nights to get the sap flowing in the state's maple trees.

Unfavorable weather is to blame for last year's output, said Jeremy Steeves of Skowhegan, who taps 33,000 trees in Somerset County.

First it was too cold and then too much snow fell, he said. After that, it was too warm and then the season ended. The USDA reported that just 19 percent of the days were favorable during the 2007 syrup season in New England, while 60 percent were too cool and 21 percent were too warm.

"It was a horrible season," said Steeves, who is secretary of the Maine Maple Producers Association.

Maine wasn't alone in experiencing a production decline last year. Nationally, syrup production was down 13 percent.

Maine was still the nation's No. 2 syrup-producing state, behind Vermont, which produced 450,000 gallons. New York was third with production of 224,000 gallons.

To usher in the syrup season and celebrate the millions of dollars it brings to the state's economy, Maine Maple Sunday is celebrated this year on March 23, with many sugarhouses opening for business and providing entertainment and samples for visitors.

On the Web: <http://www.getrealmaine.com>

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