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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Saturday, March 19, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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Our letter from Washington, D.C., today begins with sweet news from the Forest Service.

Our correspondent writes: "Guess what sound has been ringing in my ears all day. I've been hearing voices from the north. Echoes have been carrying the annual cry of 'sap's up' all the way down from Vermont and across from Wisconsin. In my mind's eye I've been seeing buckets by the million hanging from sugar maple trees and farm youngsters eating maple wax with a pickle or stirring maple cream or enjoying new sirup on breakfast buckwheat cakes.

"Even those of us tied to desks here at the Department of Agriculture Building have been doing our bit to celebrate the maple sugar season. We've been mailing out Farmers' Bulletin No. 1366 to all the people who have been asking for it. (And a lot of them have asked just lately.) At the latest count No. 1366 was voted the bulletin of the week. Its title is 'Production of Maple Sugar and Sirup.' And it is very popular with farm families who own a sugar bush, even with old-timers at the job of sugaring off. For that matter, requests for it even come from the far South and the West -- a long way from the sugar maple country. An Arizona lady writes this week that she wants a copy for 'patriotic and sentimental reasons,' to use her very words,

"You see, maple sugar and sirup are 100-percent American products. The only countries in the world making them are the United States and Canada. The earliest explorers in this country found the Indians making sugar from the sap of maple trees. Up along the St. Lawrence River they were making large amounts for trade with other Indians. The white settlers soon adopted this native American sweet and improved upon the crude methods of making it which the Indians used. For many years the settlers in the northern parts of this country, even those as far south as Kentucky and Virginia had no sugar but what they got from the maple trees.

"This purely American industry still flourishes in the northern states where the sugar maple grows and where the gradual spring each year insures a good flow of sap. They make maple sirup and sugar in about 22 States. Of these Vermont produces the most and New Jersey the least. But only about 10 States rank as leading producers of maple products. These are: Vermont first; then New York; Pennsylvania, third; New Hampshire fourth; Maryland fifth; then Michigan; Massachusetts; Ohio; Maine and Wisconsin.

"Department and State foresters have studied the sugar maple tree and determined how best to care for it and how new groves should be planted. Sugar chemists here at the Department, and in State laboratories as well, have worked out best methods for making sirup and sugar and other delicious maple products. All this information is gathered in the bulletin I mentioned -- No. 1366.

"If you want my personal and private opinion of the very best maple treat, I'll mention maple cream. I always think of it as half way between sugar and sirup -- an ideal spread for cakes, crackers and waffles or a confectionery base. Department chemists worked a long time learning just how to produce maple cream that was smooth and fine-grained so would sell at a good price. They found that the art of making it depends on keeping the sugar crystals so small that they do not feel rough or coarse on the tongue. This is accomplished by boiling the sirup to a density slightly heavier than that for a soft sugar and suddenly cooling the product, stirring all the time with a large spoon or paddle. This beating and cooling tends to produce very small crystals. And the very small crystals give that creamy look to the product. They do not separate on standing if the proper density has been kept.

"Maple cream of high quality brings a much better price than plain sirup and sugar -- in fact, has brought thousands of extra dollars to producers of maple products in recent years. The chemists say that the early run of sap does not make the best cream. It makes a product which is generally called 'maple butter.'

"I couldn't write a letter about sugaring off without also mentioning maple wax. Up North where often the snow is still on the ground while the sirup is being made, maple wax is the great treat of the season. They make it by boiling the sirup without stirring until it is thick, and then pouring it, boiling hot, directly onto snow. The chill cools the sirup immediately and prevents the sugar from crystallizing. That gives it the waxy texture. You can get the same effect by pouring thick boiling sirup onto ice. Maple wax can only be made in small quantities and won't keep waxy for any length of time. But anyone who has ever tasted it -- well; anyone who has tasted it won't soon forget it.

"The maple sugar bulletin also gives some helpful hints about storing maple sugar. Because sugar tends to absorb moisture and then mold quickly, it should always be kept in a dry place. On the farm, they wrap the hard cakes in paper and store them up on the top shelf of a warm dry place, like a kitchen pantry. Another point. Sugar to be stored needs to be boiled to a high temperature so it will not become soft and have a liquid part that will drain out.

"As for the sugar maple tree, the foresters say that it is a stately and vigorous forest tree, capable of growing in dense stands and has a full and heavy crown. The seedlings are very thrifty and can stand the shade of a complete forest cover."

That concludes this week's letter of news notes from Washington.

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