**Sugar Rush:**

**Protecting Canada’s Sweet Treat**

Food and Culture

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Dr. Tubb

University of New Brunswick

Jackson Sweetland

Student ID: 3704235

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It is the end of February and producers all around North America are busy gearing up for the upcoming maple season. Thousands of trees will be tapped, and millions of gallons will be exported all around the world. This natural sweetener has never been more popular! Maple syrup is a globally recognized food that is most popular in Canada. Known for its sweet, earthy taste, it is a staple in many kitchens. Due to the perfect weather in the spring, Canada is an ideal place to produce this sweet treat! Maple syrup is a globally recognized food that is most popular in Canada.

What began with methods our settlers discovered in the late 1700’s, has now evolved and transformed into a multi-million-dollar global industry. Sap from sugar maple, hard maple and red maple begins to flow in the spring. Sap is collected from maple trees using buckets, pails, or pipelines. Once the sap is collected; it is boiled over fire or other heat source to remove most of the water. This process concentrates the sugar content into a sweet syrup. Syrup is done when the temperature reaches 219 F on a candy thermometer.

Marketing of maple products can be very easy, as they can often be advertised as an organic natural sweetener that is relatively cost effective for consumers. Nutritionally, maple is considered a good alternative to other highly processed sweeteners. With its unique taste, it makes it appealing to many consumers around the world! Other products such as butters, cream, candy, and treats can all be made from this single ingredient.

Unfortunately, the sustainability of this industry is at risk. Recent concerns for our environment and climate change have equally drawn attention to the location, seasonality, and overall continuation of this practice in the future. The effects of global warming could see a major shift in production to the north due to the seasonal temperature requirements for sap flow, however this is not, in fact, where the maple trees grow and survive today. It takes so long for a maple tree to reach the size required for production that planting, and preservations of our forests needs to be considered today. Weather, environmental protection, and forest preservation are all key factors for keeping this sweet treat alive!

Secondly, and a more obvious threat to the maple industry is the availability of the trees themselves. Unfortunately, the increased amount of logging and clear-cutting has forged ahead to fuel sawmills and pulp and paper mills in many regions. The logging industry is in direct competition for trees and land. The value of this wood for other businesses like furniture, flooring, heating, paper, construction, instruments, and much more creates competition for the same resource.

Action plans today can very well help protect the maple industry here in Canada. The challenges the industry faces are manageable, and it is not too late to turn the future around, prolonging this sweet treat far into our future! Reducing global emissions and protecting our precious maple trees will help in keeping the sweet treat, and its piece in Canadian heritage alive. Whether you like pancakes or not, maple syrup is a natural sweetener that we can produce locally. Constant changes to global imports and exports fuel the need to protect the things we have readily available to feed our growing population in the future.