

WHO'S YOUR FARMER?

NICK POLAK North Forest Maple LLC



DESCRIBE YOUR FARM

North Forest Maple was founded by my brother, Brian Polak. My father, Ron Polak, is also an equal contributor to the efforts at North Forest Maple. Other family members and friends also help and contribute their time and efforts. We are a small sugar bush with 1,350 taps on 40 acres. The taps are all on tubing hooked up to a vacuum. We use a reverse osmosis machine to remove much of the water from the sap before it ever touches the evaporator to be boiled and cooked into maple syrup. We produce around 800-1,000 gallons of maple syrup each year. It wasn't always this way, however. When my brother and I began in 1993, we started by converting an old workshop into our syrup house and started tapping around 200 trees using buckets. Each year we added more taps, equipment, and streamlined the process. Soon we had 550 taps with buckets, dump stations in the woods on tubing to make gathering easier, and an automatic draw off which took the syrup off the pan when it was finished. In 2013 we made our biggest leap, switching over from buckets to tubing. At this same time we expanded to the 1,350 taps we have now, as well as built a pump station which houses the vacuum pump that pulls the sap in from the trees. That same year we added the reverse osmosis machine and made a designated bottling room in the syrup house.

WHERE CAN YOU BE FOUND?

We are located 10 miles northeast of Merrill at N3096 Polak Road, Merrill, WI. The easiest way to get there would be to take HWY 17 north from Merrill and then head east on HWY C to Polak Road.

WHAT IS YOUR HOPE FOR FARMING?

That people will recognize, appreciate, and support local farmers and syrup producers by purchasing their products, rather than cooperate imitation versions of our products. They may be less expensive but lack drastically in quality and taste.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE THING YOU PRODUCE?

Pure Grade A Medium Amber Maple Syrup

WHAT BROUGHT YOU INTO FARMING?

Making maple syrup is a Polak family tradition dating back to 1889 when Great Grandpa Charles Polak, along with his brothers Louis and Joseph, settled in the town of Schley in Lincoln County. They began a sawmill and started producing maple syrup. When my Grandpa, John Polak, and his two brothers, Fred and Carl, took over the sawmill they also took over and expanded syrup production, growing to as many as 5,000 taps all on buckets. In 1976 when the sawmill closed, Grandpa John took over the syrup business on his own. He built a new syrup house and upgraded to an all tubing system with a vacuum pump in 1978. In the 1980s my Uncle Joe Polak took over the family business from Grandpa John and started Maple Hallow which is still a large supplier of maple sugaring equipment to this day. My brother and I grew up making maple syrup with our father at our home as children, and this has carried over into the creation of North Forest Maple at its current location, which just happens to be the same location that Great Grandpa Charles settled and started it all back in 1889.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT FARMING?

Being out in the woods in the spring time as the snow is melting and plants are sprouting. While the spring weather is not ideal for most other crops or farming, nor for most other outdoor hobbies, it is perfect for producing maple syrup. We also love the camaraderie. When smoke begins to bellow from the large stack, people from all around stop in to see the process. And of course, we love sampling the final product!

WHAT IS MOST DIFFICULT ABOUT FARMING?

The most difficult part about being a syrup producer is never knowing how mother nature is going to cooperate. We are very reliant on the weather and have no control over when the sap will run or how much for how long. It is also not a very profitable expedition as any money made goes directly back into the business, making it more of a hobby or pastime than a business.