



# Helping People Help the Land Conservation Notes

USDA - Natural Resources Conservation Service - Michigan

March/April 2019

## Chief Lohr Helps MAEAP Celebrate 5,000



NRCS Chief Matthew Lohr visited Lansing on March 21, to speak at the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program's 5,000th verification celebration at the Lansing Center.

MAEAP is a voluntary program that assists agricultural producers and private forest owners in identifying and addressing environmental concerns on their

operations. The program was codified into Michigan law in 2011, at which time a goal of 5,000 verification was set.

MAEAP is administered by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and is a partnership of private and public conservation and agricultural organizations.

NRCS Chief Matthew Lohr (above left and top right) helped celebrate the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program celebrate it's 5,000th verification. NRCS Resource Conservationist Sally Van Lieu visited forester and Technical Service Provider Jason Darling who exhibited at the event (above).



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## State Conservationist's Message

NRCS Chief Matthew Lohr visited Lansing to help celebrate the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program's 5,000th verification. Reaching this goal was an important accomplishment for Michigan agriculture and for voluntary conservation. Chief Lohr's appearance as one of the day's keynote speakers helped to highlight the role of NRCS in assisting Michigan farmers in their conservation efforts.

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One of the USDA programs that saw some changes as a result of the 2018 Farm Bill is the Conservation Stewardship Program. For starters, while the program was once allocated by acres, the program now receives a financial allocation. For fiscal year 2019, congress has allocated \$700 million for CSP nationwide. Michigan producers and non-industrial private forest owners will have an equal chance with applicants from other states to compete for these funds.

In a challenging farm economy, CSP can provide some much needed income to producers who are already addressing resource concerns on their farms or forestland. Farmers who participated in EQIP and are maintaining those practices, and MAEAP verified farms or forest operations are also excellent candidates to apply for CSP.

In addition to maintaining their current conservation practices, CSP enrollees must also enhance their existing conservation. Under the new Farm Bill, payment rates for implementing CSP conservation rates are higher. The program has a larger number of eligible enhancements to choose from. To learn more about CSP, visit a local NRCS

field office or our [website](#).

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Recently I had the pleasure of meeting with representatives from some of Michigan's 12 Federally-Recognized American Indian Tribes.

The meetings were held to record their feedback on how the new Farm Bill affects tribal communities and members. The USDA is in the process of writing the rules for administering

the Farm Bill and asked each state to meet with as many tribes as possible so their concerns can be incorporated into the rule making process.

They were informative meetings and brought up ways that NRCS can be more innovative in meeting tribes' conservation goals at the state level. NRCS-Michigan has developed a close working relationship with American Indian tribes and we will continue to look for more ways to collaborate.

The Farm Bill contains a number of provisions specifically related to the USDA's responsibilities in serving American Indian tribes and communities. The Indigenous Food and Agriculture Initiative created a report on the Farm Bill's impact on tribes ranging from industrial hemp production to nutrition. Their report is available [online at www.indigenosfoodandag.com](http://www.indigenosfoodandag.com).



*State Conservationist  
Garry Lee*



*NRCS Chief Matthew Lohr and Michigan State  
Conservationist Garry Lee.*

# Detroit Turned Vintner Makes Conservation a Priority

*submitted by MAEAP*

Michael Wells grew up in Detroit, but deep down he knew that he was meant to be a farmer. Michael realized this dream when he started Arbor Vineyard and Farm in 2004. At the time, it was the only vineyard in southeast Michigan. Twelve years later, he opened Blackfire Winery using grapes from his vineyard to make the wine.

Michael draws inspiration from his dad's love of gardens and seeing things grow. He wants to do the best he can to care for his land, just in case his kids decide to take over one day. This is why Michael participates in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program (MAEAP). A voluntary program, MAEAP helps Michigan farmers adopt cost-effective practices that reduce erosion and runoff into ponds, streams, and rivers.

Michael understands that how he treats his land will have a ripple-effect on the land and waters that surround him. He was immediately drawn to the MAEAP program after hearing about it from his local MAEAP technician.

"MAEAP falls in line with my philosophy of being a good steward to the land," says Michael. "I feel very strongly about protecting the land for the future. It's a gift to us but it's a temporary gift that needs to go to future generations. What we do now impacts them."

Michael earned MAEAP recognition in Farmstead and Cropping. Before starting, he was pleasantly surprised to learn that he was already doing many of the things that MAEAP asked for. He learned quite a bit about his farm too. Going through the MAEAP process taught him how runoff from his farm could end up in waterways. He also learned how to store his fuels properly.

"I was surprised how much there was to go through that first time, but I am glad I went through it," he says. "Going through the MAEAP process gave me a better understanding of what I needed to do to look out for my property. And look out for my neighbors."

Michael was happy to welcome his local MAEAP technicians on to his farm. They were good listeners and went out of their way to guide him through the process and give recommendations on how to improve his farming practices. They were also eager to share other programs and resources that could provide additional help for Michael.

"Farmers can be fearful of anyone from the government coming onto their property and telling them what to do," he says. "With MAEAP, there is no hidden agenda. These folks

are really there to help with your operations. It's refreshing to have people who are nice and are there to genuinely help you."

Participating in MAEAP left a lasting impact on how Michael views his land. He believes it can benefit other farmers too.

"I would say to farmers who are thinking about doing it, to do it. If they aren't thinking about doing it, do it," says Michael. "There is nothing that isn't attainable. It's all worthwhile regardless of the time it might take. For me, MAEAP was a good fit. It was a perfect fit."

To learn more about the MAEAP program, visit [www.maeap.org](http://www.maeap.org), write [mda-esd-maeap@michigan.gov](mailto:mda-esd-maeap@michigan.gov), or call 517-284-5609.



*Michael Wells, owner of Arbor Vineyard and Blackfire Winery, at his vineyard near Tecumseh.*

*- photo provided by Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.*

## Women Managing Woodlands Field Day

Swollen gray clouds threatened to hamper six-months of planning for the first Women Managing Woodlands event in Emmet County. Before the first speaker was introduced the sun emerged, warming and drying the landscape from the previous evening of rain. Conservation educator, Maureen Stine welcomed the audience and shared the plans for the day.

Stine worked since early November, 2018 to assemble the team of nine renowned female conservationists in order to share current trends and issues concerning Michigan's forestland with landowners, teachers, and fellow nature enthusiasts in and around Emmet County.

The first event of its' kind in Emmet County, Women Managing Woodlands provided audience members with science-based information on managing woodlands for biodiversity and optimum wildlife habitat. The group moved through the 130 acres of the Oden State Fish Hatchery, a landscape

supporting natural resources not only indicative to raising quality fish for the State of Michigan but one that also lends itself to the education, research and planning for quality forest management.

Presentations included ideas for managing lands for high-quality timber and mast-producing trees for wildlife habitat. "I'm so glad that I came," shared participant, Bob Speeter. "Today's program was

outstanding! I learned a great deal and discovered numerous resources of which I was not aware including managing young forests for upland birds. Thank you for all your work putting this program together."

Presenters included speakers from the Ruffed Grouse Society, American Bird Conservancy, Kaiser Forestry, Michigan Association of Conservation Districts, Little Traverse Conservancy, Michigan

State University Extension, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.



*Presenters at the Women Managing Woodlands Field Day, held at the Oden Fish Hatchery near Harbor Springs on April 26. - submitted photo*

## Plenty of Forestland Knowledge in the Tip of the Mitt

The idea for a Women Managing Woods Field Day came to NRCS Soil Conservationist Maureen Stine (Onaway Field Office) during National Women's Month. As forestry management and forest conservation have taken off in Northern Michigan, Stine had met a number of female professional conservationists with a wealth of specialized skills and knowledge.

A public field day would be a good opportunity to display the conservation resources available from these women to forest owners in Northern Michigan. Stine, contacted nine female conservationists she works with in the area and all of them agreed to assist with a workshop, she said. The group included biologists and resource

professionals from governmental and non-profit organizations. They were experts in topics ranging from controlling invasive plants to improving habitat for song birds, biodiversity and preserving forest land.

The workshop attracted a diverse group of people including forest owners, other resource professionals and people interested in conservation.

Women Managing Woodlands was also a good companion for another collaborative project, Women Owning Woodlands, a national project of the National Woodland Owners Association and the USDA Forest Service. The organization is active in Michigan offering education about forestry resources.

# On Tapping Maples

by Bill Cook, Michigan State University Extension

Making maple syrup brings families to woodlands in productive ways. The idea of spending time reducing sap to syrup attracts many, both in the production and the consumption. The season is short. The memories are not.

Sugar maple has become Michigan's most common tree species, by volume. It grows in every county, although the north is where the vast bulk of these well-known trees live. Worldwide, sugar maple logs and lumber are highly sought after and carry good pricing. However, to many, it's the sweet syrup that carries the day.

While syrup can be made from other tree species, such as red maple or paper birch, it's the sugar maple that has the highest sugar content, thus

requires less sap per gallon of syrup. Rule of thumb is about 40 gallons of sap to a gallon of syrup, more or less.



In the United States, Vermont, New York, and Maine dominate the market. However, according to agricultural statistics, it is Quebec that drives the business. The U.S. imports more maple syrup than it produces, and most of that is from Quebec.

Michigan produces around 65,000 gallons of syrup each year, sometimes a lot more and sometimes a lot less. So much depends upon the spring weather. It's hard to pin down an exact date of when the syrup season begins,

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## Michigan Wetland Mitigation Bank Secures First Easement

The Michigan Agricultural Wetland Mitigation Bank reached a new milestone by purchasing its first wetland easement. Once finalized, the purchase will make up to 46 credits available to eligible Michigan producers to mitigate violations of USDA Wetland Conservation provisions.

The wetland purchased is located near Sears in Osceola County within the Muskegon River Watershed. Wetland mitigation credits from the site will only be available for wetland mitigation in the watershed or the corresponding ecoregion. The wetland was formerly a dairy and was restored to wetland habitat through a non-USDA

federal program, said Stephen Shine, wetland bank administrator for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. In addition to enrolling the land in a permanent wetland easement, additional restoration of the property is required to make the land eligible for the program, he said.

Producers who are not eligible for USDA programs because they converted wetlands to agricultural use in violation of wetland conservation provisions can regain eligibility by purchasing wetland mitigation

credits. They must purchase credits equal to the area of wetlands that were converted and of the same wetland type. At least two producers have inquired about purchasing wetland mitigation credits available through the Sear mitigation site, Shine said.



The Michigan Agricultural Wetland Mitigation Bank is looking into purchasing two more mitigation sites, said Shine. The potential sites are in the Lower Grand River Watershed and the Maple River Watershed. The mitigation bank is interested in purchasing additional wetland mitigation sites and in hearing from producers interested in purchasing wetland mitigation

credits. The program is sponsored by the Michigan Municipal Wetland Alliance, for more information visit [michiganwetlands.com](http://michiganwetlands.com), call (517) 853-5806 or email [info@michiganwetlands.com](mailto:info@michiganwetlands.com).

The Michigan Agricultural Wetland Mitigation bank was created through a grant from the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service to the State of Michigan. The program is intended to be self-sustaining through the sale of wetland mitigation credits.

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## On Tapping Maples

but for much of Michigan, it's during that last week of February. The season might run just a few days or it might run a couple of weeks. The tail of the season is typically more variable than the head of the season.

Generally, a good sign of the season onset is when the Canada geese return. By April, the season is pretty much over, except for some of the processing, perhaps.

The basic idea in making syrup is to gather the sap and remove most of the water. Trees are tapped, meaning a hole is drilled and a small "tap" is inserted. From this tap, sap will flow into either buckets or a plastic tube.

Traditionally, full buckets are regularly retrieved from the trees. Deep snow years make this a physical challenge! Sap is then poured into a large storage barrel of some sort. When enough sap is available, a large shallow pan is nearly filled and the slow boil over a wood fire begins.

In the meantime, fun can be had around the camp.

Commercially, the woods are filled with an interconnected web of plastic tubes that feed sap into a large vat, via either gravity or a slight negative pressure. Rather than sitting around a fire, a reverse osmosis device removes most of the water, then the remainder is boiled over a propane burner until just the right sugar content is reached. Those who use a

wood fire for either the entire process or to "finish-off" the syrup often claim the smoke imparts a slight flavor that appeals to many.

Either way, the taste is great!



*Michigan produces about 65,000 gallons of maple syrup each year.*

*- photo from MSU Extension*

Old-timers use their fingertips to tell when the syrup is just right. Most others use a device called a hydrometer. When about 1.37 grams sugar per milliliter is achieved, the syrup is ready, or about 66 to 68 percent sugar. There are various scales with different measurement units, the common might be what is called the "Brix" scale. Additionally, syrup is often graded on the color, from pale amber to dark brown. Some say the color reflects a different taste. Others claim that it's simply a color difference.

Commercially, prices can run from 30-70 dollars per gallon. Annually, Canada and the United States produce about 15 million gallons. However, there's a large amount of production that is not reflected in the official statistics. So, it can be difficult to track the true number of gallons.

For those who produce maple syrup as a hobby, there's a lot of enjoyment. And as far as these sugarbushes are concerned, that's what it's all about.

*This article was published by Michigan State University Extension. For more information, visit <http://www.msue.msu.edu>.*



[NRCS Farm Bill Web Page](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/)  
[www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/main/national/programs/farmbill/)

## Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events - Upcoming Events

### May

- 14 Utilizing the Farm Bill on Your Land Workshop, 8:30 to 11:30 a.m., Nolan Farms - Metamora, for more information contact the Lapeer Conservation District at 810/664-0895
- 17 Frog & Toad Survey, 9 p.m. to 10:30 p.m., Manistee Lake Sands Park - Kalkaska, for more information contact the Kalkaska Conservation District at 231/258-3307 or go to [kalkaskaconservation.org](http://kalkaskaconservation.org)
- 21 Beyond Milkweed-Other Pollinator Plants, 1 p.m., Council on Aging - Cassopolis, 6 p.m., COA in Dowagiac, for more information contact the Cass County Conservation District at 269/445-8641 ext. 5
- 28 Casco Beach Cleanup, 4 p.m., Casco Township Nature Preserve - South Haven, for more information contact the Van Buren Voyagers 4-H Club at 269/303-5407

### June

- 1 National Trails Day, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., for more information contact the Kalkaska Conservation District at 231/258-3307 or go to [kalkaskaconservation.org](http://kalkaskaconservation.org)
- 8 Preparing Your Forestland Property for the Next Generation, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., USDA Service Center - Cadillac, for more information contact the Wexford Conservation District at 231/775-7681 or go to [www.wexfordconservationdistrict.org](http://www.wexfordconservationdistrict.org)
- 14 Frog & Toad Survey #2, 9 p.m. to 10:30 p.m., Manistee Lake Sands Park - Kalkaska, for more information contact the Kalkaska Conservation District at 231/258-3307 or go to [kalkaskaconservation.org](http://kalkaskaconservation.org)
- 22 Mr. Wizard's Hop Farm and Field Day, 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., Mr. Wizard's Hop Farm - Monroe, register at [www.eventbrite.com](http://www.eventbrite.com)

### June ctd.

- 22 Controlling Autumn Olive Workshop and Demonstration, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., Liberty Town Hall - Manton, for more information contact the Wexford Conservation District at 231/775-7681 or go to [www.wexfordconservationdistrict.org](http://www.wexfordconservationdistrict.org)
- 25 Conservation Series-Tree Care, 1 to 2:30 p.m., Cass Council on Aging - Cassopolis, or 6 - 7:30 p.m., Wayne Township Hall - Dowagiac, for more information contact the Cass County Conservation District at 269/445-8641 ext. 5

### July

- 13 Adopt-a-Highway Clean-Up, 9:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., meet at Kalkaska Conservation District Office - Kalkaska, for more information contact the Kalkaska Conservation District at 231/258-3307 or go to [kalkaskaconservation.org](http://kalkaskaconservation.org)



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