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## **As Maple Syrup Prices Rise, New York Leaders See Opportunity**

By [OLIVER SCHWANER-ALBRIGHT](#)

MAPLE syrup has joined the luxury good market. Local retail prices can be the equivalent of over \$100 a gallon, more than extra virgin olive oil, or a decent Kentucky bourbon.

Two poor seasons and increased global popularity have sent prices soaring as the 2009 harvest begins.

"It's not just what happened last season, which was the worst year for maple syrup in some time," said Steve Jenkins, a partner at the Fairway stores in New York, "it's what happened two seasons ago. That drove up the price 30 percent, and put the kibosh on the stocks. Then last year it went up another 70 percent."

At Fairway, a liter costs \$21.99, more than \$83 a gallon. At Gristedes, a 12-ounce bottle goes for \$14.99, almost \$160 a gallon.

Brunchers won't see relief any time soon. This year's harvest just began. Wholesale syrup prices are set at the end of the season, so they won't be known for months.

But higher prices are already seen as an impetus to expand the domestic maple syrup industry. On March 9 Senator [Charles E. Schumer](#), a New York Democrat, and Representative John McHugh, an upstate Republican, introduced a bill to help small producers nationwide get access to trees on private land and to create centralized storage and bottling plants. They hope to increase sales for the \$65 million industry by 400 percent.

"Listen to this, we have 289 million maple trees in New York," Mr. Schumer said in an interview, "but we tap less than one-half of 1 percent of them. It's a large, untapped resource, shall we say."

David Campbell, president of the New York State Maple Producers Association, said the

jump in retail price is unprecedented. “There’s no surplus left anywhere in the world,” he said. “Everybody is waiting for this year’s crop.”

Which largely means waiting for Quebec, the [OPEC](#) of maple syrup. It accounts for more than 70 percent of the global supply, 5.35 million gallons last year. Vermont, the domestic leader, produced 500,000 gallons. New York, which had a strong year, produced 322,000 gallons.

Quebec produces more because it taps over a third of its trees. Vermont taps 2.1 percent.

Almost all maple syrup in the United States and Canada is made by family-run businesses. But the Canadian industry is dominated by big cooperatives, the most powerful of which is Citadelle, with popular brands like Shady Maple Farms, Camp, Maple Gold and Cleary’s, sold in maple-leaf-shaped bottles.

Citadelle establishes a base price for its members, setting the market for the industry.

A warm April shortened the 2008 Quebec season and some producers tapped trees for only 3 days, instead of the normal 20. (Cold weather delayed sugaring in 2008 and in 2007.) Citadelle paid its more than 2,000 member farms a one-time premium last year to offset the financial loss, but income still dropped 33 percent.

While supply has dwindled, international demand has increased, largely because of marketing efforts by the Federation of Quebec Maple Syrup Producers, a trade group representing 7,300 companies. The focus has been on Asia, and Japan now accounts for 10 percent of Canada’s maple syrup exports, said Geneviève C. Béland, a marketing executive with the federation.

“They’ve put so much into it, in part, because it’s so important to them culturally,” said Michael Farrell, a maple tree specialist with [Cornell University](#)’s Department of Natural Resources. “But it’s beneficial for the producers here in the U.S. They’ve created such an intense international demand.”

It’s a demand that Mr. Schumer hopes will be met by domestic producers. “Shovel-ready, tree-ready, tap-ready,” Mr. Schumer said of the bill. “It’s ready to go.”

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