

Transportation and Marketing Acer Access and Development Program

Fiscal Year 2026 Description of Funded Projects

Number of Grants Awarded: 12

Amount of Federal Funds Awarded: \$5,013,113

For more information, please visit the grant program's website: <https://www.ams.usda.gov/acer>.
The project descriptions below were confirmed by the grant recipients.

NEW YORK

Recipient: Cornell University

District: NY-019

Project Type: Producer and Landowner Education

Award Amount: \$471,712

Cost Share Amount: \$117,935

Total Project Amount: \$589,647

Improving Sap Processing for Quality Maple Syrup

This project addresses declining sap quality and syrup yield late in the season. It will evaluate defoaming agents for conventional and organic producers, investigate ultrafiltration and microfiltration to reduce microbial spoilage, and assess whether filtration can minimize defoamer use in sugarhouse operations. Outreach will include educational videos, workshops, and educational displays in partnership with the New York State Maple Producers Association to share findings broadly with maple producers.

Recipient Paul Smith's College of Arts and Sciences

District: NY-21

Project Type: Producer and Landowner Education

Award Amount: \$471,271

Cost Share Amount: \$117,818

Total Project Amount: \$589,089

Rules and Tools to Operationalize Precision Sugarbush Silviculture

Maple producers and their foresters must make tree-level management decisions that strongly influence long-term productivity yet lack quantitative decision-support tools. This project will provide practical guidance through two products: simple field-ready silvicultural decision rules and a mobile application that conducts full tree-level optimization using an economic decision engine. These tools incorporate competition among trees and market dynamics in syrup and timber pricing. To facilitate adoption, the project will deliver webinars, conference presentations, trade-press articles, and field workshops. The tools will help producers improve sugarbush productivity, realize greater economic value, and strengthen long-term sustainability in maple operations.

Recipient: Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
District: NY-020
Project Type: Producer and Landowner Education
Award Amount: \$471,713
Cost Share Amount: \$117,928
Total Project Amount: \$589,641

Helping Maple Producers Use Their Own Data to Run Better Operations

Producers increasingly use vacuum systems, sensors, and digital tools, but lack a unified way to apply these data to management decisions. This project will develop a vendor-neutral, producer-facing, maple operations dashboard that integrates data on labor efficiency, vacuum performance, sap collection, syrup yield, and production costs. Led by Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute with a producer cohort, activities include needs assessments, platform compatibility testing, dashboard development, pilot testing, technical assistance, workshops, webinars, and case studies. The dashboard will support all producers, including those without remote monitoring systems. By enabling producers to identify leaks, inefficiencies, and cost drivers, the project aims to improve productivity, reduce inputs, and expand sustainable maple sugaring across eastern forestlands.

Recipient: Cornell University*
District: NY-019
Project Type: Producer and Landowner Education
Award Amount: \$228,544

Providing Food Quality and Safety Resources for the Maple Industry

Maple syrup and maple confections are exempt from many regulations, a circumstance that supports production yet can leave the industry vulnerable to quality and safety issues when food safety practices are inconsistent. This project establishes clear benchmarks for sugarhouse sanitation and product quality. It is evaluating five FDA-approved disinfectants for reducing bacteria and biofilm on sugarhouse equipment, using strains commonly found in maple operations. Procedures developed will be applied to both food-contact and non-food-contact surfaces. The project also creates written guidance and a national online Good Manufacturing Practices course focused on sugarhouse sanitation, supported by workshops across the industry. These resources aim to help producers strengthen food safety practices, reduce contamination risks, and maintain the high product quality needed for continued consumer confidence and market growth.

Recipient: Cornell University*
District: NY-019
Project Type: Producer and Landowner Education
Award Amount: \$295,845

Preserving and Adapting Maple Flavor for New Market Opportunities

Maple syrup is a premium product whose market value depends heavily on flavor, yet traditional production practices make innovation slow to adopt. This project develops new maple syrup product lines—such as barrel-aged and flavor-infused syrups—to create added markets, particularly for lower-value late-season syrup. It is also evaluating storage best practices, such as examining how light and temperature affect syrup color and flavor. The project further studies how color influences perceived quality and consumer purchasing decisions through a nationally representative choice

experiment. Finally, researchers are identifying chemical signatures of “buddy” off aromas that reduce the value of late-season sap. Together, these activities aim to expand market opportunities, improve quality consistency, and help producers deliver syrup that meets consumer expectations.

*These projects were selected through the FY25 supplemental funding process and subsequently funded with FY26 appropriations. Cost share was not required for these awards.

OREGON

Recipient: Oregon State University

District: OR-004

Project Type: Producer and Landowner Education

Award Amount: \$471,705

Cost Share Amount: \$117,927

Total Project Amount: \$589,632

Pacific Northwest Maple Sugaring: Developing Decision Support Cost Models, Improving Training Sites, and Expanding Best Practice Education

This project supports the growth of Pacific Northwest maple sugaring by addressing region-specific production, cost, and management challenges that are not adequately addressed by information developed for traditional northeast maple production. Oregon State University will lead applied research, develop decision-support tools, improve demonstration sites, and expand producer education. Activities include production studies, cost benchmarks, estimation tools, field days, workshops, and training resources. Producers and landowners will gain tools to evaluate feasibility, reduce inputs, improve efficiency, and expand maple-sugaring activities across Oregon, Washington, and the broader region.

Recipient: Oregon State University

District: OR-004

Project Type: Market Development and Promotion

Award Amount: \$471,712

Cost Share Amount: \$125,000

Total Project Amount: \$596,712

Market Development for Pacific Northwest Maple Sap-Based Food Products: Assessment, Producer Capacity, and Consumer Interest

Bigleaf maple syrup production is growing across the Pacific Northwest but faces challenges in product consistency, market positioning, and producer marketing skills. This project will strengthen regional market development through four components: hosting a maple syrup grading school in the PNW to improve standardized quality assessment; expanding sensory testing outside the region to better understand consumer preferences; delivering targeted branding and marketing training to help producers improve visual identity and sales strategies; and providing hands-on instruction in equipment use for product refinement, storage, and diversification. Together, these activities aim to enhance product quality, broaden consumer awareness, and support producer growth and profitability across the Bigleaf maple industry.

PENNSYLVANIA

Recipient: Department of Agriculture Pennsylvania

District: PA-010

Project Type: Market Development and Promotion

Award Amount: \$283,027

Cost Share: \$100,000.00

Total Project Amount: \$383,027

Introducing Real Maple Syrup to Major Metropolitan Areas in Pennsylvania

This project expands Pennsylvania's maple marketing campaign to Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Ohio, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland. It will increase consumer awareness and industry recognition of maple syrup as a forest product and increase direct-to-consumer sales through a two-year campaign with fall rollouts and annual participation in the Pennsylvania Farm Show.

UTAH

Recipient: Utah State University

District: UT-001

Project Type: Producer and Landowner Education

Award Amount: \$471,712

Cost Share Amount: \$117,962

Total Project Amount: \$589,674

Maple SAP: Maple Sugaring Activities Program

This project evaluates the potential for profitable maple syrup production from locally available maple species in Colorado and Nebraska primarily, and complementary findings from Utah and other regions. It will assess sap and syrup yields, analyze bioactive and value-added attributes, and study how messaging influences consumer trust and behavior. Extension workshops, demonstrations, and festivals will expand maple sugaring activities for homeowners, landowners, educators, and youth. Outcomes include research-based guidance, demonstration sites, and outreach materials to support local maple syrup development and strengthen producer education across emerging and traditional regions.

VERMONT

Recipient: The University of Vermont and State Agricultural College

District: VT-001

Project Type: Producer and Landowner Education

Award Amount: \$432,448

Cost Share Amount: \$108,133

Total Project Amount: \$540,581

Sweet Standards: Establishing a Maple Syrup Quality Testing Lab for U.S. Maple Producers and Investigating Key Quality Defects in Retail Packaging

This project aims to improve Grade A compliance in U.S. maple syrup production by addressing inconsistent quality and grading standards. With approximately 50% of sampled products failing to meet Grade A standards between 2023 and 2025, the University of Vermont will establish a national Maple Quality Testing Lab for impartial third-party assessment of producer samples. Technical assistance,

educational materials, and outreach to producers will increase producer knowledge and reduce non-compliance. Research will also investigate syrup color stability in various packaging types and conditions, supporting higher quality standards and consumer trust.

WEST VIRGINIA

Recipient: Future Generations University, Corp

District: WV-001

Project Type: Producer and Landowner Education

Award Amount: \$471,712

Cost Share Amount: \$118,038

Total Project Amount: \$589,750

Increasing US Sap Quality and Grade A Syrup Yields: Supporting Maple Producers Through Effective Tubing Sanitation Practices

This project addresses syrup yield losses caused by microbial contamination in tubing systems, which reduces Grade A syrup production and producer income. It will research effective sanitation practices for both 3/16-inch and 5/16-inch tubing and deliver a comprehensive education program to train producers in these methods. By improving sanitation knowledge and practices, the project aims to increase Grade A syrup yields, enhance annual incomes, and strengthen the sustainability and competitiveness of U.S. maple syrup production.

Recipient: Future Generations University, Corp

District: WV-001

Project Type: Market Development and Promotion

Award Amount: \$471,712

Cost Share Amount: \$118,012

Total Project Amount: \$589,724

Sweet Success: Documenting and Sharing Best Practices in Direct-to-Consumer Maple Syrup Market Development and Promotion in Central Appalachia and Beyond

This project strengthens direct-to-consumer maple syrup marketing in Central Appalachia by documenting and sharing effective consumer outreach practices. Future Generations University, working with the West Virginia Farmers Market Association as well as the Maple Producers Associations in West Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, will identify successful approaches through interviews, site visits, surveys, focus groups, and partner consultations. Findings will be compiled into practical guidance and tools for producers. The project also expands market opportunities through collaborative promotions, tasting events, retail partnerships, tourism initiatives, and farmers' markets. A new Maple Success Map will document regional practices and support long-term producer collaboration. Results will help Central Appalachian producers improve consumer education, expand markets, and apply proven strategies across the broader U.S. maple industry.