



MAPLE SYRUP PRODUCTION FAQ

Q- How was the presence of lead identified in Natick Community Organic Farm's syrup product?

A- In summer 2021 we undertook a holistic review of our longstanding maple sugaring/syrup production practices to assure that it met current best practices. As part of that process, we tested both equipment and the syrup for presence of lead.

Q- Who conducted the testing?

A- The testing was conducted by a professional laboratory with experience in food-grade lead testing.

Q- What were the results?

A- The lead levels differed between batches, but all were below the MA allowable limit of 250 parts per billion, and the federal allowable limit of 500 parts per billion. Some level of lead is to be expected in the maple syrup process due to the ambient presence of lead in the environment, so we are unlikely to eliminate all traces. However, we are taking steps to further reduce the amount.

Q- What was the source of lead?

A- Traces of lead were found in the sap buckets used for sap collection, which have been replaced with lead-free plastic buckets, and the canner used in the bottling process, which has also been replaced. We have also replaced the older taps. Lead can also come from the environment and soil where the trees grow.

Q- When did you discover this issue?

A- We first learned of this issue during the summer of 2021 at which time we removed all syrup from circulation for sale or consumption. It took several months to fully research the topic, consult with experts and determine the next steps.

Q- I still have syrup products from Natick Community Organic Farm; what should I do with them?

A- If you would like to return the syrup, we will take it back at the Farm and provide a refund.



Q- What have you done to address the issue?

A- We have taken multiple steps, as outlined in our letter to the community. They include:

- Removed any remaining syrup in our store from circulation to prevent it from being served or sold to anyone.
- Consulted with several maple sugaring extension agents and scientists who provided guidance on reducing lead levels to the lowest possible levels.
- Replaced the metal buckets with plastic ones, replaced the canner, and discarded the older taps, based on advice provided by experts.
- Shared this information with Town of Natick officials and provided them with details on our plans to address the issue.

Q- My family regularly eat your syrup; should we be concerned about lead exposure?

A- We want to emphasize that the amount of lead was below the state and federal allowable limits. At the same time, we recognize that families, and particularly parents of younger children, may be concerned about this issue. We encourage you to contact your primary care physician or pediatrician to discuss your concerns.

Q- What is the Commonwealth Quality Program (CQP) the farm is working to achieve?

A- The Commonwealth Quality Program is a branding designation awarded by the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources. It is designed to help consumers identify locally sourced products that are grown, harvested, and processed in Massachusetts using best practices that are safe, sustainable, and environmentally friendly.

Commonwealth Quality certified sugarmakers are required to follow the strictest food safety standards, use high-quality equipment, and take steps to ensure the long-term health of the trees they tap.

Click here to read the [CQP program explanation](#)