

From Your Assistant Commissioner



A Busy February and March Takes DAMF On The Road

Both Commissioner Jasper and I always intend to get out of the office more and visit farms, events, and conferences. It seems like the months of February and March have given us a good start for 2025. Despite some travel hiccups, we had a productive trip to Washington, D.C., for the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) Winter Policy Meeting, gathered with NH agricultural service providers in Plymouth to discuss disaster planning, attended two commodity group annual meetings in Manchester and visited a local sugar maker in Pittsfield.

We have been fielding plenty of questions lately about the impacts of federal pauses, freezes, and firings. Unfortunately, as I mentioned at the NH Vegetable & Berry Growers Association (NHVBGA) Annual Meeting, we also don't have many answers. I remain hopefully optimistic about the programs for farmers and food businesses here in New Hampshire that are already under contract or cooperative agreement. As time has progressed, it appears that previous commitments are being honored. New programs or additional, uncontracted funding (like the Local Food Purchase Assistance '25 program) are proving to be less safe. While these issues couldn't have been solved at the NASDA meeting, they were discussed, and policy was formed to help the organization that represents all 50 states and four U.S. territories engage in substantive dialogue with our federal partners. Bringing agricultural officials from across the country together as a unified voice is as important as ever.

Locally, UNH Extension hosted a two-day conference called "Weathering the Storm: Collaborative Disaster Planning for NH Agriculture." Organized by Extension's Olivia Saunders and co-facilitated by NH Agriculture Mediation Program's Cara Cargill, the event brought together state agencies, subject matter experts, and farmers for a focused discussion on disaster response and preparedness. DAMF was well represented by State Veterinarian Stephen Crawford, Assistant State Veterinarian Nathan Harvey, and Director of Agricultural Development Rebecca Ross. The group participated in a table-top exercise to simulate a natural disaster hitting NH, affecting several operations. We also spoke to Adam McCurry, Agriculture Technician at NC A&T State University in North Carolina. Adam shared his experience responding to the rural communities he serves after hurricane Helene.

On back-to-back Wednesdays, the NHVBGA and NH Tree Fruit Growers Association held their annual meetings at the Puritan Restaurant in Manchester. David Rousseau, Director of the Division of Pesticide Control addressed the former with some updates on regulations and products. Morgan Dube and Erika Clifford, Entomologists with the Division of Plant Industry tabled at both events, educating growers on the spotted lanternfly. Finally, Martha Kelly, Program Assistant with the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) program, was there to interact with growers and provide materials for covered and non-covered operations. I came away from both meetings impressed as ever with the

depth of knowledge NH producers must have to deal with all of the economic, pest, weather, and disease pressures they face.

March is famously Maple Month here in New Hampshire. This past Friday, Governor Kelly Ayotte made that official with a proclamation and tree tapping ceremony at Journey's End Maple in Pittsfield. Owners Marty and Amy Boisvert, and their family, welcomed the Governor, Commissioner, other maple producers, and Department of Agriculture, Markets, and Food staff to sample some products, tour the sugar shack, and celebrate the kickoff to Maple Weekend.

In her proclamation, the Governor boiled down the essence of maple production in New Hampshire, "Maple sugaring has been an integral part of New Hampshire's history, economy, and culture for centuries, with generations of producers carrying on the time-honored tradition of tapping trees, boiling sap, and crafting the finest maple syrup." With that thought in mind, and a crowd circled around, the ceremonial first maple tree of the season was tapped!

Maple producers across the state are now keeping an eye on the weather forecast. Depending on where the operation is located, it may be a quick season. With winter seeming to leave as abruptly as it showed up, let's hope the requisite cold nights and warm days syrup-makers need can hang on for a couple more weeks. Journey's End estimates they were at about 1/3 of an average crop as of Friday. Producers will now have to find the delicate balance between maximizing production and late-season sap quality.

Josh Marshall, Assistant Commissioner