



David with his Holsteins. David manages the herd with his son John. They currently milk sixty-five. Syrup grades in the sugar-house window. Signs to the farm.

The winter sky is cracking open. The blue that signals spring oozes through. Where snow peels from the sunny sides of low-lying pastures, green grass flirts—even before Nature has a chance to shed Farmers Gold, the last wet snow, on fields thirsty for manure. Underfoot in the barnyard and up at the sugar house is mud and more mud.

These are close-to-ideal conditions for Vermont's season known as "sugarin," and that's what is happening this early evening in late March at Silloway Farms in Randolph Center. Inside a 720-square-foot sugar house an inferno roars in a 70 square-foot arch scheduled to consume 30 cords pulled from 300 acres of forested land, half of the acreage that Silloway Farms works. In use is a 1997 evaporator purchased from Leader Evaporator Company of Swanton, Vermont.

Family and friends congregate in the twilight. Dogs and children frolic in the mud. Inside, though, the serious busi-

ness of first concentrating and then boiling down sap that courses in through an estimated 30 miles of tubing from this year's 6,200 taps, a hefty increase over 3,400 taps in 2011, is in full swing. As of early April the hoped-for yield is 3,000 gallons of maple syrup.

"We'll be happy enough with 2,500 gallons, and that's what we're looking at right now. But we won't know until it's over," said Paul Lambert. He is a nephew of David Silloway, the family patriarch who has lived sixty-six of his sixty-seven years on 340 acres, augmented today by an additional 250 rented acres.

Paul, who is in charge of Silloway Maple, said this sugarhouse is retiring. A 1,800-square-foot building is being constructed for the 2014 season. Its bells and whistles will include a more efficient evaporator and a sanitary canning room plus a 14-kilowatt solar system powering the sugar-

house and a third of Silloway Farms.

"I'm excited about the solar. It's quite economical to put it in and it works out number-wise," Paul said.

Sugarin' here is a serious business that has expanded from 320 gallons a year in 2007 to today's present volume. When Paul graduated from Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island, in 2008, he began to shift the production of maple syrup into an industry. In producing syrup here, Paul utilizes a reverse osmosis process that concentrates the sap from two percent to 12 percent sugar content before boiling.

"With the two percent I am able to make four gallons of syrup on my evaporator in one hour; by concentrating to 12 percent I am able to make forty-five gallons of syrup in one hour," he said.

Meanwhile Bette Lambert, Paul's mother and David's

sister, offers maple-coated peanuts that, along with almonds similarly dressed, are welcome by-products of this season. Four-ounce and one-pound bags can be purchased through the farm website, www.sillowaymaple.com or by calling (802) 728-3625 or emailing info@sillowayfarms@hotmail.com. Along with syrup in sizes ranging from a gallon to a half pint, and in large bulk drums, containers of maple cream are also available. This morning Betty had finished part of a walk-about of the thirty miles of sap line.

Bette's daughter, Laura Lambert, wandered by. The last of Bette's six children to be home-schooled, she has been accepted into Vermont Technical College's dairy management program. Laura has just finished the 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. milking that will be repeated at the same time the next morning. Of a 105-herd of Holsteins, sixty-five cows are being milked at present. Holsteins, known for high milk volume, are also

Family Partnership at Silloway Farms

A Place for Everyone by Sara Duncan Widness



Bette Lambert, Paul's daughter Tessa, David Silloway, David Lambert, Laura Lambert, Paul Lambert, John Silloway, and Lynne Gately.



L to R: Paul testing the sap. He's in charge of Silloway Maple. The wood fueled furnace. Drawing the syrup. The family congregates in the sugar house in the late afternoon. The steaming sugar house is soon to be replaced, including a more energy efficient evaporator. David rolling a barrel of syrup. They are able to make forty five gallons in one hour.



yielding a respectable butterfat content, thanks to the management of David and his son John Silloway. Herd stewardship here calls for feeding their own hay and a grain mix, and pasturing when the fields are dry. Between the acreage they own and rent, 107 acres are hayed, another 200 are in pasture, and the remaining is woodland for syrup production, logging, and firewood.

In today's fast-moving world, farmers have to learn to do a quick step too. But it seems that changing and growing was always the case on Silloway Farm.

The year was 1940. The month was December. The parents of four children to come, David, Betty, Anne, and Stuart, and the proprietors of Silloway's Septic Service in Randolph, purchased the farm.

Conditions then, recalled David, were difficult for their mother who encountered ice covering the kitchen floor, no ready firewood for warmth, and no hay immediately available to feed the cattle. The cows were milked by hand until a gasoline-drive vacuum pump arrived a few years later. According to the Vermont Heritage Network, "In 1935 the Rural Electrification

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Act was passed, which brought electricity into many rural homes in Vermont for the first time.” This act was a program promulgated under the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration to ameliorate rural lifestyles, thus encouraging people to stay on farms. But it would be a few years before the lights went on here.

“She almost went back to her father, Alfred Brazier in Montpelier,” David said, adding that 700 sled loads of manure were hauled away from the barn that winter. But the couple hung on. Today everyone has stuck around, except for David’s second son, Justin, who’s working as a contractor in California’s Sonoma County “tearing down \$1 million homes to be replaced with \$3 million homes,” commented David.

In the mid 1950s thirty six feet and horse stalls were added to the



John, Bette, and David. John and David manage the herd together. They feed their own hay and a grain mix, and pasture when the fields are dry. The dairy farm. The sign into the Silloway’s kitchen. A cow after milking.

barn. By then the family was milking forty four head. In subsequent decades the barn and herd size increased, as did the size of the bulk tanks. The herd now averages 24,000 pounds of milk per cow annually. Milk is shipped to Booth Bros. Dairy out of Barre.

As steward of this family farm, David is proud of the fact that there’s been no plowing or seeding here since 1978. Fertilizing with liquid manure is the key for healthy production of grasses including timothy, orchard, reed canary, and white clover that help to fortify the herd which receives thirty percent of dietary needs from grain.

Paul Cahill works for Feed Commodities International out of Middlebury. “My job on this farm is to test David’s forages, his grasses, so we





David and wife Lynne.

know what the attributes, such as the amount of protein, are,” said Paul Cahill. With the assistance of computer technology, “I build him a grain formula that’s delivered as complete feed to match what he knows the cows need based on his forages.”

The cows know their own stanchions, so milking hands view the cows the old-fashioned way—by sight and familiarity—and know how much grain to feed depending on individual need.

“This keeps a close eye on the animal and picks up on subtle changes,” said Paul Cahill, explaining that when a computer technology is used on larger herds, feed is dispensed according to a digital formula.

With his family assuming much of the farm’s business, David engages in other pursuits. He helps a neighboring farmer from April through November. Then through Christmas he delivers up to 100 packages a day as a FedEx driver. From January to April he “helps the boys” on the family farm. He is active in the Orange County Farm Bureau, a family tradition, and plays a mean game of Scrabble. He and his wife, Lynne Gately, compete and are often within just five points of each other. When



After enjoying the bustle of the sugar house and ample mud John, takes three year old Jackson Scott, aged three, home in the early evening.

the Legislature is in session, he spends Fridays reading the Farm Bureau’s newsletter, “Under the Golden Dome,” to find out about farm-related legislative issues.

A consultant with the University of Vermont Extension’s Farm Viability Program, Alan Curler, is helping the family design the business for future generations.

“As I tell anybody I’m working with, a business plan is a living document; it’s always changing. If it’s put on the shelf and you do nothing with it, it really doesn’t help you. Nowadays you have to watch every penny you spend because the margins are so small,” Curler reflected.

Maybe now David will finally have time to enjoy his motorcycles.