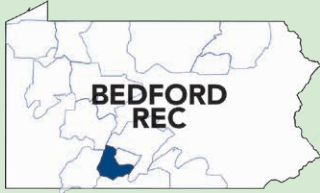


# Bedford Rural Electric Cooperative

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

## **BEDFORD REC**

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**Lois Witt Caton**

## **OFFICE HOURS**

Monday through Friday  
7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

## Get Ready for Our Annual Meeting



**BROOKS SHOEMAKER**

**BEDFORD RURAL ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE'S (REC)** 87th Annual Meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, April 8, at our new headquarters, 6 Enterprise Lane, in the Bedford County Business Park I. We are located just off Chalybeate Road.

The drive-thru meeting begins at 10 a.m. and ends at 1:30 p.m. *(Please do not arrive before 10 a.m. because we do not want to inhibit travel in the business park.)*

You may, however, arrive at any time during those scheduled hours.

We ask you to remain in your vehicle while you register, pick up an annual report, receive a ballot to vote in the election of directors, enjoy free refreshments, pick up an attendance gift and then turn in your completed ballot.

Registered attendees will also be eligible to win door prizes. Winners will be announced after the meeting. Naturally, if you have already voted by mail, you will not be able to vote again at the annual meeting.

Please make plans to join us. At this point, if you haven't returned your ballot by mail, it is probably too late for it to be received by the due date of April 5. So, come to the meeting and cast your vote in person.

Whether you are voting in person or not, you should have received the official notice of the meeting in mid-March. It is very important that you tear off the top section of the notice and bring it with you to the meeting. Remember: Every vote counts!

## Lineworkers are ready when it matters most

As Bedford REC's CEO and general manager, I have the unique privilege of seeing firsthand what it truly takes to keep the lights on for our members. In April, we take time to pause and recognize the brave men and women who make that possible every single day: lineworkers.

When storms impact our communities and outages occur, we all experience a glimpse of life without electricity. At the same time, our lineworkers get a call to action. Our crews are always ready when it matters most, leaving family dinners, working through the night, and heading into challenging conditions to restore power as safely and quickly as possible.

What makes lineworkers especially remarkable is that they aren't just restoring power to a system; they're restoring power to their own communities. They live here. They raise their families here. They understand that electricity is more than a convenience; it's essential to daily life, to local businesses, schools, farms and emergency services. Powering the places we call home is personal to lineworkers.

We understand outages can be frustrating. They bring life to a halt. We are incredibly grateful to you, our members, for your patience and encouragement during these times. Linework is demanding, physical, and at times, dangerous. Our crews approach each job with a focus on safety and teamwork. They take pride in their craft and the trust our members place in them.

On April 13, we will celebrate Lineworker Appreciation Day, but one day is hardly enough. Every day, we thank lineworkers for their service and dedication, which are the backbone of our cooperative.

To our lineworkers, thank you for your hard work, readiness and unwavering commitment to the communities we serve. We are proud to stand behind you and grateful for all that you do. 🙏

**BROOKS SHOEMAKER**  
GENERAL MANAGER & CEO

# Sweetness is a Family Affair

**GARY DIEHL**, MEMBER SERVICES MANAGER

## “JUST LISTEN. DO YOU HEAR THAT?”

One would think the answer might be something specific, but the only sounds were coming from a breeze rustling through the treetops and running water from a nearby stream.

“Those peaceful sounds of nature and spending time with my family are the main reasons we do this,” Rick Lohr says.

We’re talking about tapping trees and making maple syrup.

Rick’s son, Cody, began working for Bedford Rural Electric Cooperative (REC) in the engineering department a little more than a year ago, and while poking fun at each other during the day, we actually have some semi-serious conversations. During one of those talks, he told me his family makes maple syrup, and I immediately thought, “That sounds like a good subject for a *Penn Lines* piece.”

## Tapping into Bedford REC

As it turns out, harvesting that sweet treat is a little more common in our service territory than some might think, and just within our little cooperative family, there are a handful of hobbyists.

Of course, there is the aforementioned Lohr family. One of our longtime linemen, Gary Lafferty, also taps and produces. Then, as I gathered information for this story, I learned that our board’s vice president, Ron Wilkins, used to get into it pretty heavy while helping his brother with his operation.

The area also boasts commercial operations like those operated by longtime Bedford REC members Roger and

**REVERSE OSMOSIS:** From left, Ethan, Roger and Kathy Parks, the owners of Roger’s Sugar Shack, stand next to the two reverse osmosis units they use in their maple syrup operation.



**GETTING STARTED:** From left, Cody, Rick, Kyle and Trent Lohr stand next to the first tapped tree of the season. For the Lohrs, making maple syrup is a family affair.

Kathy Parks in Schellsburg and Dale Shoemaker in Buffalo Mills. Both operate beef farms but also produce maple syrup and maple sugar.

The basics of making maple syrup as a hobby versus making it commercially are the same, but the equipment and yield are a whole different story.

Recently, I tagged along as the Lohrs — Rick, Cody and his brother, Kyle — took a quick trip up the road to meet with their cousin, Trent, for a demonstration on tapping sugar maple trees. Choosing the right trees may be an art and a science, but experience seemed to dictate to these gents where to go and what to do.

The Lohr operation has produced as many as 26 gallons of finished maple syrup in a season, but on average, they turn out about 10 to 15 gallons annually. That yield may not seem like much on the surface; however, it’s important to factor in that producers must collect about 40 gallons of



**PREPARING FOR A TAP:** Cody Lohr drills a pilot hole in one of the sugar maple trees on the family farm in preparation for a tap.



**RELEASE TIME:** Rick Lohr holds the hydrometer he uses to check the syrup's viscosity. Also shown is the monitoring device that automatically releases syrup from the evaporator.

“sugar water,” or sap, from the trees to make 1 gallon of a finished product.

Rick and company achieve this by tapping between 30 to 40 trees during a production window. Tapping trees in Pennsylvania for maple syrup production is not something you can do year-round or even for months at a time. It's very much weather- and temperature-dependent, and the opportunity to take advantage of the elements comes down to about four to six weeks each year.

When nighttime temperatures are below freezing and daytime temperatures rise above 32 degrees — ideally about 50 degrees — you better get tapping or the window will slam shut and you'll miss out on peek sap collection opportunities.

## How the syrup is made

Equipment to make syrup in a smaller operation includes the taps, which are usually stainless steel and range in diameter from 5/16ths of an inch to 7/16ths of an inch. After the trees are selected and the tapping location is established, a pilot hole that's about 1.5 inches deep is drilled. The taps are then inserted with a few gentle whacks from a rubber mallet.

Don't worry: The trees are not harmed, and the holes heal up nicely from year to year. A collection bucket with a protective lid is hung from the tap. From there, you wait until the buckets are full, collect them and start all over again.

In Rick's case, collecting the buckets of sugar water involves using a side-by-side with a 55-gallon food-grade barrel, which is then transported to his house. The contents are added to a 325-gallon tank to await the boiling process.

Once the collection process is complete, it's time to lay heat to the sap. In the Lohrs' case, they use a specific pan, separated by baffles and specially made for maple syrup production, in combination with a preheating pan. The evaporator pan sits atop what looks like a very large burner and is fired with wood, though using different fuel sources, like propane, is not uncommon.



**COLLECTING SAP:** One of the differences between a hobbyist maple syrup producer and a commercial maple syrup producer is how the sap is collected. The Lohrs use the age-old method of collecting sap in a bucket, shown in the inset, while the Parks and Shoemakers use a maze of collection lines.



**GATHERING SUGAR WATER:** At right, the Lohrs gather sugar water using a 55-gallon barrel while commercial operations often use a larger method, like Roger Parks's truck, shown here with two 1,000-gallon tanks.



Some hobbyists boil their sap in pots or rectangular pans over what is essentially a fire pit, typically enclosed by cinder blocks. The choice, however, depends on what type of operation you decide to run with and how much time and money you want to spend.

In the firing step, water is boiled off and the sap begins to flow between compartments. At sea level, sugar water becomes syrup at 7.5 degrees above boiling, or just more than 219 degrees. But elevation and barometric pressure play a huge role in that. As a result, adjustments need to be made if you boil on a high-pressure or low-pressure day or at a higher elevation.

The Lohrs collect the product from the boiling pan just

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## SWEETNESS IS A FAMILY AFFAIR

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before it is finished — a device called a hydrometer, which measures viscosity, tells them it's ready. At this point it is almost syrup.

The last step in the “cooking” process is done in a turkey fryer that uses propane. When the Lohrs finish this step, they filter the product and place it into canning jars, which are sealed for future consumption and enjoyment.

## Hobby vs. commercial

Contrast the hobby operation to a commercial operation and you will see some not-so-subtle differences.

At Roger's Sugar Shack, Roger Parks, his wife, Kathy, and their son, Ethan, produce somewhere in the neighborhood of 1,300 gallons of product per year and distribute the bulk of it in 41-gallon stainless steel drums.

It wasn't always that way for Roger. He started out small after his grandmother got him into making syrup way back in 1984. That year, he tapped between 10 to 15 trees. By year two, he was up to 25 to 30 trees, and by 1987, he tapped more than 300. During the last few years, to keep up with demand, the Parks family taps about 4,500 trees each year.

At Maple Cove Farm in Milligan's Cove, Dale Shoemaker is a fourth-generation farmer and taps an estimated 4,000 trees a year. He also distributes his product wholesale to dealers, making the Parks and Shoemaker operations similar in size and yield.

So what makes these larger operations different? For one, the taps are plastic and connect directly to a maze of tubing, rather than draining into a bucket. The tubing runs from tree to tree and ultimately collects into one of many large collection containers, where vacuum pumps pull the sap into the collection area.

Then, the sugar water is collected in a truck with large-capacity tanks and transported back for the next step: running the sap through a reverse osmosis contraption. Reverse osmosis removes a large percentage of the water from the sap before boiling, which greatly reduces the boiling time and fuel consumption. It also increases production efficiency.

This boiling process, while similar to the hobbyists' operations, is on a much larger scale. And when the product exits this step, it isn't “almost syrup” — it's done, except for the

**NEW EQUIPMENT:** A brand new tap Cody Lohr purchased for this year's work is shown.



**SIZE SEPARATION:** At left, a large commercial evaporator is shown at Roger's Sugar Shack while, at right, a smaller evaporator does the job at the Lohrs' production site.

filtering. The boiled product is monitored electronically and released from the process automatically. This is in contrast to using a handheld hydrometer and checking it manually.

Lastly, the syrup is sent to a filter press and poured into barrels or plastic bottles for sale to the public or retailers. As previously mentioned, the Parks family also makes maple sugar, which requires additional steps to refine the syrup into sugar. If you're interested in some of Roger's products, he can be reached at 814-330-7883.

## A labor of love

Making maple syrup is certainly a labor of love, but the end product is so good, it's worth it. And while places like Canada, Vermont and New England are synonymous with maple syrup production, Pennsylvanians make some of the best around.

Suffice it to say, if you put a mass-produced syrup up against a Bedford County-produced maple syrup, once you try the Pennsylvania stuff, you may never go back. 🍷



**READY FOR SHIPMENT:** Hobbyists often place their finished product in Mason jars, at right, while commercial operations ship their products in drums.

## OUTAGE REPORTING

### In case of an outage...

- 1 Check your fuses or circuit breakers.
- 2 Check with your neighbors, if convenient, to see if they have been affected by the power failure.
- 3 Call the 24-hour number, 814-623-7568, OR call 814-623-5101 during office hours.

Please have the account holder's name, phone number, physical address or account number available. Any specific information about the outage will also be helpful in pinpointing the problem.

**To report an outage call:  
814-623-7568**