



PORTRAITS OF THE OTTAWA VALLEY SEED GROWERS

BEEF SUNDAE AND SAP TONIC IN SYRACUSE

By [Tom Van Dusen](#)

They say that if you learn something new, anything, on a given day at a stage in life when you're confident you know it all, you're having a good day. I'm not sure who "they" are... but I certainly have arrived at that stage where I think I've heard almost all of it before.

So it was with great satisfaction that I devoured my first-ever hot beef sundae at the New York Farm Show in Syracuse which I attended Feb. 24, 2007, with a busload of directors and friends of the Ottawa Valley Farm Show. Always on the lookout for new ideas to incorporate into the OVFS, we were on a fact-finding mission to Syracuse. Don't expect to see beef sundaes any time soon at the Ottawa show where we're at the mercy of Lansdowne's official caterer... but I certainly learned a thing or two. The main lesson was about sharp marketing, about taking an age-old, some might say boring meal, and repackaging it into a catchy value-added item which sold like proverbial hotcakes.

We had been told of the novelty lunch being offered at the NY show and urged to seek out a sundae before we even arrived on the grounds. That's because our tour director had spotted the item on the show website, found it curious, and passed the info on to her bus buddies.

Beef sundae? What could that possibly be, the gang wondered, intrigued. The clever marketing concept was already kicking in. Even your jaded, seen-it-all correspondent decided to check out the beef sundae as soon as the opportunity presented itself.



It wasn't too long after the bus arrived at destination that I was wandering through the show's five display buildings, passing by many of the 425 exhibitors as I sniffed out lunch, finally arriving at the beef display area where breed princesses were serving up sundaes.

The concept was marvelously simple. Instead of advertising a small plate of beef and potatoes, they called it a sundae and sold out at \$5 each on all three days of the show. Much like the traditional version, the beef sundae was contained in a bowl. Mashed potatoes replaced the vanilla ice cream, beef tips and

gravy substituted for chocolate sauce, grated cheddar took over from chopped nuts, sour cream instead of whipped cream, and a cherry tomato topped the concoction. Cute and very clever!

But my education wasn't over. As I moved around the show digesting my sundae, I happened upon a workshop on growing edible plants and mushrooms fronted by Nancy Kaiser of Cornell University's cooperative extension department.

While Kaiser's slides and commentary on the various plants was interesting – including that your typical orange day lily is entirely edible – I was particularly impressed by her comments about raw maple sap becoming more valuable than the finished product... syrup. Kaiser said there are now grocery store chains in Northern NY interested in selling packaged sap as syrup.

Why? Claiming she fed it to her family regularly, Kaiser made sap sound like a natural power drink, chock full of sugars, minerals and trace amounts of vitamins and amino acids. The aboriginals used it as a spring tonic and medicine. Some of the kick is lost in the boiling process but, more importantly, much of the potential profits for maple producers are boiled off into the atmosphere as the sap is reduced to syrup.

I wonder if Ontario maple producers are on to this potential trendy market involving more retained product, less manpower, and reduced energy consumption? Sparkling bottles of natural sap lined up on the store shelves alongside the chemically laden drink concoctions! The choice seems obvious.

There you have it! One of the oldest meals in the world has been remarketed into something new and exciting... and it'll soon be washed down with a rediscovered natural booster drink in existence since the dawn of time.

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