

A HOBBY FARM

With a Purpose

SHARING THE SWEET LIFE AT SPRINGBORO TREE FARMS.

Some 30 years ago, Rich and Jean Hines bought 37½ forested acres nestled along the banks of the Tippecanoe River in White County, Indiana, with the dream of creating a hobby farm. “Nothing fancy,” says Rich, “just a few acres of classic Indiana woodland blessed with a nice river frontage, a pond, and more sugar maple trees than you can shake a stick at.”

The land needed some work. Truckloads of junk fouled the riverbank, and invasive species, primarily tree of paradise and brush honeysuckle, spoiled forest views and strangled native plants. But Rich saw promise and went to work.

Over the years, he planted scores of black walnut trees, a half-acre apple tree orchard, and about 300 Christmas trees.

The spring-fed pond was dredged and stocked with largemouth bass,

red-ear sunfish, crappie, perch, and channel catfish. The area began to attract occasional visits from beaver and river otters.

Next, a 20 ft. x 30 ft. sugar shack for processing maple syrup, honey, and apple cider was built. A network of tubing to collect the sap and pump it uphill to the sugar shack was installed, along with a reverse osmosis system to reduce cooking time, and a UV system to kill microbes before filtering the sap and processing it through a wood-fired syrup evaporator.

Today, Springboro Tree Farms is a hobby farm with a purpose. It’s become a local fixture in Brookston, Indiana, a small town with just over 1,500 people that’s located between Indianapolis and Chicago. Year after year the sugar maples give up their sap, bee colonies produce honey, apple trees yield cider, and the Christmas tree orchard stands ready for another December.

SHARING THE SWEETS

Almost all the farm’s products are donated to local charities for fundraising or given away to worthy causes. Maple syrup and honey are mostly donated to church fundraisers and other nonprofits. Christmas trees are given away to friends and visitors when the Yuletide rolls around.

Take for example the international ministry of the Redeemer Lutheran Church of West Lafayette. Its members include Purdue University students who come from all over the world seeking an education. “They want to experience Americana,” explains Rich. “We treat them to hot chocolate in the sugar

Rich Hines enjoys fishing in his farm’s pond stocked with largemouth bass.

SPRINGBORO TREE FARMS



A Boomer™ tractor transports wood from his forested acres to fuel the farm's maple syrup evaporator (right).



CNH Industrial LLC recommends the use of a FOPS when a tractor is equipped with a loader attachment.

shack, we give them a Christmas tree, and the church provides ornaments and education. That's always fun."

Rich also sells "just a few" products through select local retailers. A nearby micro-brewery, the Crasian Brewing Company, buys Springboro maple syrup to brew a delightful "Springboro Maple Brown" ale. Proceeds from these sales go to purchase the needed supplies, which Rich sums up as "bottles and bees."

"It's more fun to have a little pressure to produce and not just for the money but for the fun of doing it, and for the people who are involved," says Rich. Those folks include his brother, Jim, his wife, Jean, his children, Heidi and Sam, as well as Joe Velovitch and many other good friends.

"Friends from the community often stop by to help with the syrup making. It's a community effort," says Rich.

Numerous charities benefit from the

bounty and goodwill. There's "A Toast to Mental Health", a local Rotary Club fundraiser that supports mental health organizations, and World Health, a philanthropic church-based charity with international reach. The farm also has sponsored the local training program Kids Hope USA, where one adult volunteer mentors one at-risk youth at a nearby elementary school an hour each week for one year.

Another major fundraiser is Operation Christmas Child, (a project of Samaritan's Purse), a local initiative that sends hundreds of care packages to needy youth globally. Closer to home, the farm supports fundraisers for the honeybee education program at nearby YMCA Camp Tecumseh. "We put ourselves third, other people second and God first, and touch the lives of others through community engagement and education," says Rich. "It's really fulfilling."



WE PUT OURSELVES THIRD, OTHER PEOPLE SECOND AND GOD FIRST.

◀ Springboro Tree Farms supports honeybee education for youth.

Continued...

SPRINGBORO TREE FARMS

SWEET AND SUSTAINABLE

Wise land management assures the farm's sustainability, and for that Rich relies on professionals. American Pond and Lake Management maintains the pond with expert water quality management. Foresters Mike and Jennifer Warner of Arbor Terra Consulting work with Rich to create a forest management plan that includes the control of invasive species and tree thinning. For Rich, the farm is a return to his past.

"I was lucky when I grew up that I had a grandfather who had a farm back in the '50s and '60s," he says. "It was a general kind of farm, with beef cattle, chickens, and pigs, a fun place to hang out."

When he began looking for his own farm, a livestock operation at that scale (80 acres) didn't seem like the ideal fit. "But then I've always been interested in forests and trees," he says. "And I wanted some land to build a house on the river."



Large tanks of sap are transported to the sugar shack.

CNH Industrial America LLC recommends the use of a FOPS when a tractor is equipped with a loader attachment.

Rich has three houses in all, if you include two tree houses — a deluxe "gentleman's deer stand" for the adults and a smaller lookout for children.

"Building the tree houses was fun," he says. "One has a nice view of Spring Creek that runs through the property."

MOVING PERFORMANCE

Hines relies on his Boomer™ compact tractor at least once a week throughout the year, but during syrup season it's in use daily. He makes use of the unit's PTO to pump sap into containers, then he transports the large tanks to the sugar shack.



Tree House Retreat

When Rich Hines decided a few years ago to build a tree house in the woods, there was no turning back. He started with an elevated 6 ft. x 8 ft. mini log cabin for children. "When kids came to visit the farm, they'd just run to the tree house," he recalls. "They got so excited, they really seemed to enjoy it."

A few years later, he discovered some trees that were big enough and strong enough for a lookout for adults. The idea of a tree house for adults was born.

"My brother and I, we're project guys, and we really enjoy building things," he says. "We wanted the tree house for adults to be something really special, somewhere we could go to read a book and enjoy the scenery."

They went to work on tree house number two: a rustic 10 ft. x 12 ft. sitting room with a 4-foot deck overlooking a canopy of trees and a meandering creek, complete with a staircase leading up to the porch, a mix of hickory oak and walnut hardwood floors, and furnished with a couple of antique hickory rocking chairs. The room's focal point: a large cottonwood tree that grows right through the floor and through the roof.

"It's just such a pretty place with a picturesque stream that runs through the woods," says Rich. "So now we can go there to read or just 'sit a spell' and enjoy the natural world."

“It’s a compact tractor, but can easily haul 100 gallons of sap,” he says. “It’s a great product from a performance and serviceability perspective. But what really makes it great is the outstanding support I get from my New Holland dealer.”

He also uses the tractor in his forestry operations, primarily to transport wood for the syrup operation.

The acreage has a lot of downed ash trees that need to be removed, and he’s always on the lookout for more trees to harvest — especially the black locust trees, which make the best wood for fueling the maple syrup evaporator.

“I have a carry-all attachment that goes on the back to collect firewood for the maple syrup,” he says.

Next, he uses a log splitter to split the wood, which he stacks in a Holzhausen, a German method that uses a circular, frameless wood pile.

This past spring, Rich decided to upgrade to a new Boomer™ 40 with a 250 TLA loader, which he put to immediate use in his forestry operation. “It’s a great machine and spring is a great time to be in the woods with my New Holland equipment, cutting and splitting firewood,” he says. “And if I’m lucky, I just might find some morel mushrooms.”



WHO: Springboro Tree Farms
WHERE: Brookston, Indiana
NEW HOLLAND EQUIPMENT: Boomer® 40 compact tractor
DEALER: New Holland Rossville, Rossville, Indiana

Photos: Rich and Jim Hines



The Story of Maple Syrup

It takes an abundance of patience to turn tree sap into syrup. Maple syrup comes from any of the 120 species of maple trees. Trees are tapped from early March to mid-April, depending on climate: the colder it is, the later the season.

First a hole is drilled in the tree and a special spout, called a spile, is inserted. Buckets can be hung from the spiles, but larger operations use a network of tubing to direct the sap to collection stations. Maple trees are slow to give up their sap; one tree produces 15-20 gallons in a season that lasts only four to six weeks.

The sap is then transported to a sugar shack, where it is boiled to evaporate most of the water. As water is drawn off, the sap becomes thicker and sweeter. When it reaches the desired consistency, the syrup is filtered and bottled.

For Springboro Tree Farms, it takes about 65 gallons of sap to produce one gallon of syrup. Springboro makes its wood-fired, small-batch maple syrup the slow, old-fashioned way — a few gallons at a time on a wood-fired syrup evaporator. The end result: syrup that’s more robust and flavorful than most store-bought maple syrups.

For a special local treat, the farm also produces smaller batches of its bourbon barrel aged maple syrup. Empty bourbon barrels acquired from a local distiller are filled with the small batch, wood-fired maple syrup, then aged for about five months for a robust maple syrup with hints of vanilla, oak, and of course bourbon. Small batches of black walnut syrup are also produced when the Springboro Tree Farms team has the extra time and energy.

