



#FridaysOnTheFarm: Farming Sweet in the Midwest

Each Friday meet farmers, producers, and landowners through our [#FridaysOnTheFarm](#) stories. Visit local farms, ranches, forests, and resource areas where USDA customers and partners *do right and feed everyone*.

This Friday meet Jesse and Tracey Paul of Paul Family Sugarbush in Trout Creek, Michigan. The Pauls and their five children – Austin, Daltin, Priscilla, Bethany, and Mitchell – work together as a family to produce up to 4,000 gallons of pure maple syrup every spring from 300 acres of maple trees in the state’s Upper Peninsula.

Path to Ownership

Wanting to give their children a new opportunity, Jesse and Tracey started Paul Family Sugarbush in 2014.

“In our hearts, we wanted to give our children a different opportunity than we had, so Tracey suggested the farm,” said Jesse.

Jesse had concerns about the challenges he and his family would face purchasing and sustaining a new farm. He and Tracey looked to USDA’s [Farm Service Agency](#) for assistance in farm ownership. FSA [farm ownership loans](#) help producers become owner-operators of family farms as well as improve and expand current operations.

“When we started this, I really feel like FSA was our partner in this business,” said Jesse. “In working with FSA, we found that there are a lot of good programs.”

FSA’s farm loan programs offer direct and guaranteed loans to farmers and ranchers to promote, build, and sustain family farms for a thriving agricultural economy. To give producers a better chance at success, FSA also provides its direct loan customers credit counseling and loan supervision.

“Without the help of FSA, we would be nowhere close [to where we are now],” said Jesse. “I don’t know where we’d be without them. We wouldn’t be here, that’s for sure.”

Tracey said she likes the fact that the farm business is a family venture. It takes the entire family of seven to get the job done. Jesse credits the family’s work ethic, cleanliness in processing, and their specialty equipment for the consistently high quality of their 100 percent pure maple syrup.



“There’s not a day goes by that we’re not laughing together as a family because something crazy has happened on this farm,” he said. “Looking forward with my children, there are a lot of good opportunities for them as beginning farmers now that they’ve had farming experience.”

Unpredictable Harvest

Daltin started learning the ropes of Paul Family Sugarbush when he was just 13 years old. At 19, he already sounds like a seasoned maple syrup farmer.

“Weather impacts everything. Some days you just get a crazy flow, and some days you don’t,” said Daltin. “On a good year we should make 4,000 gallons of syrup. A bad year, like last year, we made 400 gallons of syrup.”

Fortunately, Paul Family Sugarbush was enrolled in the [Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program](#). NAP provides financial assistance to producers of noninsurable crops to protect against natural disasters that result in lower yields or crop losses or prevent crop planting. “Last year, weather conditions were awful for sap producers. Luckily, we were able to help the Pauls out,” said Mathew Ross, FSA County Executive Director.

Farmers and Musicians

The Pauls discovered that music was a way for the family to blow off steam from a hard day’s work.

“Farming is an emotional roller coaster,” said Jesse. “My children have seen the highs and lows. We’ve seen it when stuff is just pouring in, and we’re excited. We’ve seen it when the times are so bad we don’t know how we’re going to get through the next month.”

During the maple sap off-season, the family can be found traveling the country as a seven-player bluegrass band.

“There’s a depth of character that comes from farming, from getting up and getting out when it’s 20 degrees because we know we have to,” said Jesse. “That same work ethic comes into our children’s musicianship and through their emotions when they are playing.”

More Information

USDA offers a variety of risk management, disaster assistance, loan, and conservation programs to help agricultural producers in the United States weather ups and downs in the market and recover from natural disasters as well as invest in improvements to their operations. [Learn about additional programs.](#)



For more information about USDA programs and services, [contact your local USDA service center](#).

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