Baer Bros. Maple Camp

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My name is Mike Lynch and I am a farmer from Somerset County. My wife Sherry, sons Cody and Reagan, and I operate Baer Brothers Maple Camp. We utilize over 4000 maple trees using new technologies to produce maple syrup and maple products that we sell locally and throughout the USA. In addition to the maple production we operate a cow calf operation and I work for CDL USA as a sales representative and store manager.

Tapping maple trees to produce maple syrup is an old tradition, and in principal we utilize some of the same techniques from the past to make boil maple syrup. However, like many different aspects of agriculture, technology has made us more efficient and allows us to produce more product and a better product. With a few exceptions, maple producers have left behind the old techniques of collecting sap in metal buckets, today if you drive past a sugarbush in the spring you will no longer see those buckets, but a series of tubing snaking through the woods. That tubing is part of a larger collection system that creates a pipeline to deliver raw sap from each tree to a central collection point. Additionally, these lines may or may not have a vacuum system that assists in the movement of sap from the trees to a collection tank. Because many of these types of systems are located in rural wooded areas with many miles between them, some producers have begun to utilize various monitoring systems that have the ability to notify the farmer of problems at any particular location. These monitoring systems can detect leaks in the pipeline systems, transmit freezing data, measure tank levels, and operate motors. By utilizing the data, the system can actually alert the farmer of problems within the pipeline system or alert them to preset levels in their storage tanks by way of an email or text to their smartphone, tablet, or base computer. This is a tremendous laborsaving device and offers peace of mind.

As part of my job at CDL USA, I sell and service our own Smart Maple Production Network to other maple producers across Pennsylvania and surrounding areas. One of the most frequent problems that we run into is the lack of a reliable internet service in the area we are working in, the internet allows our systems to “communicate “with the farmer and any employees. The remote monitoring

systems use a solar and battery radio unit to transmit monitoring data collected in the woods. This data is collected by the computer and relayed to the farmer to notify that person of a leak, freeze-up, or a full tank of sap. As you can imagine, that monitoring system relies heavily upon a reliable broadband technology to work effectively. However, throughout much of Pennsylvania's maple producing regions, including Somerset County, internet connections can be spotty. Without strong connectivity, these systems can't be used to their full potential. There are locations in other regions where producers rely upon touching button on their smartphone and then even hundreds of miles away a pumping system begins the processes for making maple syrup. That is only possible if they are able to rely on their system to be instantaneous, not lagging by seconds.

The season for making maple syrup like any agricultural product is short, sometimes only a few weeks depending upon the weather. Maple producers are looking to maximize their time as much as possible during this short season. Technology is allowing us to do that. But, without a greater availability of broadband in rural communities, I have to worry about whether our internet can handle these emerging technologies. My family and I also are heavily involved in promotion of maple products, including the organization of our Somerset County Maple Weekend tour each March. This has become a great way to showcase our Maple Producers and Somerset County through tourism, each year has been better than the last. Customers are willing to pay for "local" products and support our farmers. However, in this day and age there is an expectation that they can use "plastic" to make all of their purchases. The lack of internet connectivity can make processing credit cards problematic.

In our store CDL Southern PA, we rely also on connections much as any store would. Our pricing is stored online. The main system that is used for inventory, invoicing, and payment relies upon being able to log into our main system in Vermont. Connectivity can mean the difference in making a sale that day or not at all.

Technology is truly transforming agriculture, from dairy to maple syrup production. Farmers need reliable internet service in order to tap into the latest technological advances. I'm hoping our state can put a greater investment in delivering broadband to our rural communities. Farmer like myself are small business owners. We want to live and work in rural communities, but we need to be able to "connect" to do our jobs. I am hopeful that Pennsylvania can come up with a long-term solution that lays out exactly how our state government and private businesses can deliver the much needed broadband access to communities like ours. I'm thankful for the commitment that you are making to finding solutions to this difficult problem.

Thank you for your time.

Mike Lynch