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[From the Washington Post, Sept. 2, 2019]

BEFORE YOU POUR ALL THAT MAPLE SYRUP ON YOUR PANCAKES, HERE'S WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IT

(By Becky Krystal)

It's fall, so you can take your pumpkin spice and . . . enjoy it in your deodorant, candles, lattes and, well, seemingly everything. Me? When I think of fall flavors, I think about maple syrup. It is actually a bit odd when you consider that spring is the season when producers collect and cook down the sap from the maple trees. Still, I'm going to stick with my convictions, because maple syrup to me evokes New England and flannel and colorful foliage, all of which are the essence of fall.

And no, it's not just sweet. "Maple syrup is a lot more complex than sugar," says Laura Sorkin, who owns Vermont-based Runamok Maple with her husband, Eric. "There's a lot more nuance than what you would get with granulated sugar." The flavor can vary depending on the time of year, but Sorkin says toffee, caramel, honey and apple are among the notes she can pick out. There's also a balance of sweetness and acidity.

We've all poured maple syrup over our pancakes and waffles. Maybe even a little too much—that stuff is \$\$\$! Here's what you need to know about how to better understand, appreciate and use that liquid gold. (Sorry, Mimi.)

The grades. In 2015, the U.S. Department of Agriculture updated its maple grades to come into line with standards already adopted by several states and Canada. One of the goals with the new grades was to give consumers better descriptors of flavor and color, as well as allow some of the very dark syrup previously classified as B grade to be folded into the A grade, providing easier access for home cooks. Sorkin says it's worth keeping in mind that the strength of flavor does not always occur in a smooth progression along with color, as you can get a lighter-colored syrup with an intense taste and a darker that's milder.

Still, here is the rundown of how the government describes the grades aimed at individual buyers (there is a processing grade that can be used by manufacturers making other products), ordered from least to most intense, as well as early to late season:

Grade A, golden color/delicate flavor: "Mild maple taste," according to the USDA. You might know this from its previous grade, Fancy. The Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Association suggests serving this grade with the expected breakfast fare or rich dairy, such as ice cream or yogurt.

Grade A, amber color/rich flavor: "A full-bodied maple taste of medium intensity," the USDA says. If you choose only one grade, Sorkin says, it should be this one. It's great on waffles and pancakes, but the Vermont association also recommends it for salad dressings, cocktails and barbecue sauce.

Grade A, dark color/robust flavor: The USDA is less helpful on the last two grades, explaining that this grade has a stronger taste than the lighter colors. You don't say. Anyway, our friends from Vermont like to take advantage of its hearty flavor by pouring it over baked fruit and vegetables and using it as a glaze for meat and vegetables. It can also shine in baking.

Grade A, very dark/strong flavor: You guessed it—"a maple taste that is stronger than robust." Okay then! What say you, Vermont? "When you need a strong maple

flavor in a bread or cookie, ice cream, or barbecue sauce, this is the grade of choice."

Storage. Keep unopened maple syrup in a cool, dry spot, out of direct light. The Vermont Maple Sugar Makers' Association recommends storing opened maple syrup in the refrigerator. Or to keep it in very good shape, you can freeze it, going through as many freezing and thawing cycles as you want, the group says, as long as you let it thaw completely and stir in any condensation that forms on the top of the syrup.

Even when properly stored, maple syrup can crystallize. In "The Clever Cook's Kitchen Handbook: 5,037 Ingenious Hints, Secrets, Shortcuts, and Solutions," author David Joachim suggests heating the jar of syrup in a pan of hot water over low heat until the crystals dissolve. (Move the syrup to a glass jar or heatproof bowl if it's in plastic.) Or, try microwaving it for 10 to 15 seconds on medium power. Of course, you can consider it candy and just eat the crystals, too. Joachim says you can salvage moldy maple syrup by scraping or straining out the mold and bringing the syrup to a full boil and returning it to a clean jar or bottle.

Substituting. "Maple syrup is about as sweet as sugar, so you can replace it using an equal amount of syrup," according to the Vermont-based experts at King Arthur Flour. "Decrease the liquid by 3 to 4 tablespoons per 1 cup substitution." If you're adding maple syrup to a recipe that doesn't call for liquid, you need to increase the flour by 1 tablespoon for every ¼ cup maple syrup used. KAF emphasizes using room temperature maple syrup, because if it's cold, it can cause other ingredients, including butter, to clump. If you use a darker grade, expect a "delightfully caramelly" flavor.

Flavoring your own. Runamok's eclectic infused syrups include such flavors as hibiscus, makrut lime-leaf, smoked chile pepper and ginger. (Here's a link to a coffee syrup in our archives.) If you're interested in creating your own infusions, especially with whole spices, Sorkin suggests gently heating the syrup and letting the ingredients steep for a few hours. Taste every so often to see whether you've achieved the right level of flavor. Keep in mind that it's better to be conservative than add too much or steep too long.

Uses. "I would just love it if people would start thinking beyond pancakes," Sorkin says. She notes that honey has really come into its own as an ingredient to be appreciated and used in a variety of ways and hopes the time will come soon for maple syrup. Maple syrup on a cheese board? Go for it! In Vermont, people have been putting maple syrup in their coffee for a long time, and Sorkin says it works in tea, too, particularly a black variety (try it in chai). She is, as you would expect, a proponent of maple syrup in cocktails.

Sorkin says maple syrup can be lost in flour-heavy baked goods, so she prefers to save it for situations when it can really shine, such as in frostings (buttercream or cream cheese), glazes and a simple syrup applied to a cake. It can be used in a wide variety of savory applications, too, adding just the right balance when played against other flavors. Sorkin, who trained at the French Culinary Institute in New York (now the International Culinary Center), likes to add a drizzle on top of a sweet potato and tahini dip. Her other recipes include maple vinaigrettes, roasted cabbage and crispy tofu. Always worth considering: Maple butter.

Need some more ideas? Here are a few contenders from our archives:

Frozen Maple Mousse. This is very much like a no-chum ice cream, which you can drizzle with a bit more maple syrup, naturally.

Maple Olive Oil Pecan Granola. Here's another way to incorporate maple syrup into

your breakfast that does not involve pancakes or waffles.

Maple Spiced Glazed Nuts. These are definitely worth adding to your party food repertoire—they make an ideal game-day snack.

Grilled Maple-Marinated Portobello Mushrooms. Maple syrup is paired with soy sauce and earthy mushrooms for an umami-rich meatless main.

Maple-Chipotle Basting Sauce. Consider using a darker grade for this sauce, which is right at home on pork or any other grilled meat.

## RECOGNIZING VERMONT'S AWARD-WINNING CHEESEMAKERS

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, earlier this year, Vermonters who are expanding and elevating one of Vermont's most honored products—cheese—were recognized with a record number of ribbons at the American Cheese Society's 36th Annual Awards competition in Richmond, VA. I am delighted, though not surprised, that a total of 44 Vermont cheeses won awards, including 5 that were finalists for Best of Show. Many of these cheeses are featured every year at our annual Taste of Vermont, held here on Capitol Hill each May.

Vermont's talented Vermont cheesemakers have brought home top awards from this competition each year, but never before has the State been a winner across so many categories. Despite its small size, Vermont was in the top three States for the number of awards earned—a significant accomplishment for this bedrock sector in our State.

The winners came from every corner of Vermont, every scale of production, and for many varieties of cheese. Large producers, like the Cabot Creamery Cooperative, which represents hundreds of farm families, came home as winners. So, too, did small operations like Barn First Creamery, which is home to just 32 goats and 2 farmer-cheesemakers. This contrast and diverse success is a fitting illustration of Vermont's agricultural landscape.

The Vermont Cheese Council helped to support the Vermont cheesemakers involved in the American Cheese Society's competition by providing technical assistance and marketing support. This council's foundational role is to help produce and advance Vermont-made cheese. The success of Vermont cheesemakers at this year's American Cheese Society's Annual Awards is just the latest testament to its effectiveness. Similar to the American Cheese Society, the Vermont Cheese Council provides the public and food professionals with educational events to learn more about cheese and cheese making throughout the State.

Cheese is a staple for Vermont agriculture and value added production, with over 45 cheesemakers—the most per capita of any State—throughout Vermont working with sheep, goats, and multiple cow breeds, to produce world-class artisanal cheese. The State's Department of Tourism and

Marketing provides visitors with a map of the Vermont Cheese Trail created by the Vermont Cheese Council. It features locations where visitors can experience over 150 varieties of cheeses. Great cheese requires great dairy farmers, and both are fundamental to our State's economy and tradition.

I am proud to celebrate the success of all the cheese producers throughout my home State of Vermont and want now to recognize the Vermont cheesemakers receiving awards from this year's American Cheese Council. They include Barn First Creamery, Westfield; Boston Post Dairy, Enosburg Falls; Cabot Creamery Cooperative, Cabot; Fairy Tale Farm, Bridport; Grafton Village Cheese Company, Grafton; Jasper Hill Farm, Greensboro; Maplebrook Farm, Bennington; Mt. Mansfield Creamery, Morrisville; Parish Hill Creamery, West Westminster; Sage Farm Goat Dairy, Stowe; Spring Brook Farm/Farms for City Kids Foundation, Reading; Vermont Creamery, Websterville; Vermont Farmstead Cheese Company, Woodstock; Vermont Shepherd, Putney; and Von Trapp Farmstead, Waitsfield.

#### VOTE EXPLANATION

Ms. HARRIS. Madam President, I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 234, the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 119, Michael T. Liburdi to be U.S. District Judge for the District of Arizona.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 235, the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 120, Peter D. Welte to be U.S. District Judge for the District of North Dakota.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 236 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 119, Michael T. Liburdi to be U.S. District Judge for the District of Arizona.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 237, the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 120, Peter D. Welte to be U.S. District Judge for the District of North Dakota.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 238 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 203, James Wesley Hendrix to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Texas.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 239 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 203, James Wesley Hendrix to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Texas.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 240 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 204, Sean D. Jordan to be U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Texas.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote

No. 241 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 204, Sean D. Jordan to be U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Texas.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 242 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 205, Mark T. Pittman to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Texas.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 243 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 231, Jeffery Vincent Brown to be U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Texas.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 244 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 232, Brantley Starr to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Texas.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 245 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 233, Stephanie L. Haines to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Pennsylvania.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 247 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 327, Steven D. Grimberg to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Georgia.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 248 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 345, Jason K. Pulliam to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Texas.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 249 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 350, Martha Maria Pacold to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 250 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 352, Steven C. Seeger to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 251 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 364, William Shaw Stickman IV to be U.S. District Judge for the Western District of Pennsylvania.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 253 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 205, Mark T. Pittman to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Texas.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 254 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 231, Jeffrey Vincent Brown to be U.S. District Judge for the Southern District of Texas.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 255 the confirmation of Executive

Calendar No. 232, Brantley Starr to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Texas.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 256 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 345, Jason K. Pulliam to be U.S. District Judge for the Western District of Texas.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 257 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 350, Martha Maria Pacold to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 258 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 364, William Shaw Stickman IV to be U.S. District Judge for the Western District of Pennsylvania.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 276 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 233, Stephanie Haines to be U.S. District Judge for the Western District of Pennsylvania.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 278 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 327, Steven D. Grimberg to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 279 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 352, Steven C. Seeger to be U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 315 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 359, Frank William Volk, of West Virginia, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of West Virginia.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 316 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 363, Charles R. Eskridge III, of Texas, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Texas.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 317 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 328, David John Novak, of Virginia, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Virginia.

I was absent but had I been present I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 318 the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 348, Rachel P. Kovner to be U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of New York.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 320 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 359, Frank William Volk, of West Virginia, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of West Virginia.

I was absent but had I been present, I would have voted no on rollcall vote No. 321 the confirmation of Executive Calendar No. 363, Charles R. Eskridge III, of Texas, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Texas.