
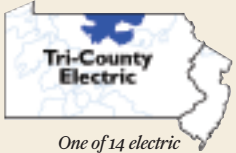


Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, Inc.

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 



One of 14 electric cooperatives serving Pennsylvania and New Jersey

Tri-County REC
22 North Main Street • P.O. Box 526
Mansfield, PA 16933
Mansfield — 570/662-2175
Coudersport — 814/274-8740
Website:
www.tri-countyrec.com
Email:
trico@tri-countyrec.com
For emergencies call:
1-800-343-2559

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- James R. Davis**
Chairman
- Gerald A. Kite**
Vice Chairman
- Alston A. Teeter**
Secretary/Treasurer
- Donald H. Blackwell**
- Alfred G. Calkins**
- Lowell W. Geiser**
- Ferd W. Irish**
- Nicholas Reitter**
- Barbara J. Seeley**

Craig Echer
President & CEO

STAFF

- Annette Bender, Executive Assistant**
- John Lykens, Director, Engineering & Operations**
- Barbara Johnson, Director, Financial Services**
- Bryan Berguson, Director, Member Services**

OFFICE HOURS

Monday through Friday
7:30 a.m. - 4 p.m.

GUEST COLUMN

Seeing stars. . .



by Bryan Berguson
Director of Member Services

The dark side

“Star light, star bright,
first star I see tonight...”

That little nursery rhyme we all whispered when we were kids after the first star of the evening was spotted, some might say, is in danger of becoming a memory.

No, the stars aren't going away. But they are getting harder to see, especially for astronomers. The reason:

light pollution.

The light side

“Honey, would you mind taking the garbage out?”

“I will as soon as I find the flashlight! It's pitch black out there, and I don't want to trip over a skunk or run into a bear! We should call Tri-County tomorrow and see about getting a yard light installed.”

I'm not trying to start any arguments. I'm just trying to shed light, no pun intended, on two opposing views of yard lights that we are faced with at the cooperative.

Pennsylvania's first official “Dark Sky Park” is in our own back yard — Cherry Springs State Park in Potter County. Due to its exceptionally dark skies, Cherry Springs State Park is considered to be one of the best places on the Eastern Seaboard for stargazing. Those who enjoy scouring the evening universe through powerful telescopes go to great lengths to keep the skies dark, but light pollution is an ever-encroaching problem. Pollution from yard lights is especially problematic.

On the other hand, night time in the

hills and woods of Pennsylvania can be a scary place for some people. Yard lights can effectively put those fears at ease by illuminating areas you use at night or that you wish to secure. For a monthly fee, Tri-County will install and maintain a yard light in the location of your choosing.

A bright idea


So what, then, is Tri-County doing to protect the night sky? We have begun exploring the use of light shields! No, this isn't some high-tech contraption straight out of “Star Wars.” A light shield is as simple as it sounds. It's an aluminum fixture that covers an existing or new yard light and directs lighting toward the ground, where it's needed, and not skyward, where it contributes to light pollution.

Manufacturers have started making outdoor light fixtures with built-in light shields specifically to combat this problem. If you are in the market for any type of outdoor light fixtures, look for a unit that is approved as “Dark Sky Friendly” by the International Dark-Sky Association to ensure you are getting a light that won't unnecessarily pollute the sky with extra light.

Whether the lights are on your porch, attached to your barn or garage, or installed by your cooperative on a utility pole, the light can be directed where you need it most.

“...I wish I may, I wish I might, have the wish I wish tonight.”

Let's work together to do what we can to ensure our kids can whisper this little rhyme to their children some day.

For more information, call our member services department at 1-800-343-2559. 

Tapping the *Sweet* Life

BY JEFF FETZER

FOR TRI-COUNTY member Richard Patterson, living the sweet life means working seven days a week, 16 hours a day this time of year.

The proprietor of Patterson Farms Maple Products wouldn't have it any other way during sugaring season.

"It's a lot of work, but it's a fun life," says Patterson. "When you are a sugar maker, and the temperature is right and the wind is blowing from the west — it's perfect. I love it."

Patterson is no ordinary sugar maker. He runs the largest maple products operation in Pennsylvania from his 180-acre farm off Gurney Road near Sabinsville, Tioga County. In a good year, his 70,000 taps will yield about 15,000 gallons of maple syrup. That syrup, along with maple creams, candies and granulated maple sugar produced on site, is distributed far and wide. In fact, Patterson Farms' office manager, Linda Neal of Little Marsh, says she has shipped items to consumers in 35 nations.

Going global with the sugaring business was not Patterson's intention when he quit high school at the end of his junior year in the early 1960s.

"I had farming on my mind," he says. "I didn't have time for (school) because I had so much I wanted to do."

He worked as a hired hand at several local farms until he turned 21, the age at which his father, Clifton, had agreed to sell the family dairy operation to him. That was in 1965. And for the next decade, Patterson focused his attention on growing his dairy business.

"We were full-fledged dairying," he says. "Then in the 1980s, the dairy industry backed up."

Milk prices stagnated, and many long-time dairy farmers went out of business or looked for other income streams to keep their farms afloat. At about the same time, however, consumer demand for organic foods had begun to grow in the United States. Among those foods: real maple syrup.

Untapped potential

Making maple syrup had long been a

sideline at Patterson Farms, a rite of spring initiated by Patterson's grandfather, Orin Patterson, in 1921 when he tapped the property's sugarbush for the first time. Patterson and his father, Clifton, maintained that tradition.

Syrup production at Patterson Farms remained virtually unchanged — varying only with the weather — for over six decades. Each year, about 600 sap pails would adorn the farm's sugar maple grove, yielding syrup for family use, bartering purposes and local sale.

With the movement toward all-natural foods afoot in the 1980s, Patterson spotted an opportunity for 100-percent pure Pennsylvania maple syrup. He began upping production and started making maple confections and maple sugar.

"We went from 600 buckets to 2,700 buckets," recalls Patterson, noting the pails must be collected daily during the peak sap flows of the sugaring season, which typically runs from mid-February through early April. "We had some growing pains."

Fortunately, Patterson says, at about the same time he was working to expand the maple business, plastic tubing sap-collection systems hit the market. He soon began converting his sugarbushes to the tubing systems. These systems use gravity to drain the clear liquid sap from sugar maples trees directly into stainless steel holding tanks.

"Business started growing, and we just kept adding and adding," says Patterson, who eventually had to lease sugarbushes



HOW SWEET IT IS: Tri-County member Richard Patterson displays a bottle of maple syrup outside the "sugar house" at Patterson Farms Maple Products near Sabinsville. Patterson's board-and-batten sugaring complex houses an evaporator room, showroom, warehouse, commercial kitchen and tank room. Visitors are invited to tour the facility any time. Patterson Farms is one of 14 sugaring operations in Potter and Tioga counties that will hold open houses in conjunction with the Potter-Tioga Maple Weekend, March 29 and 30.

from neighboring property owners to keep up with demand.

In 1990, he hired Neal to assist him with running the business and perform book-keeping duties. In 1994, Patterson constructed a modern evaporator building to replace the dimly-lit, dirt-floored sugar shack that had been used by three generations of Pattersons for sugar-making purposes. Two years later, Patterson says, he caught his big break. He read an advertisement in which the U.S. Department of Agriculture sought vendors to sell products at a farmers market it was establishing at its headquarters in Washington, D.C.



TAPPING IN TO MOTHER NATURE: Third-generation sugar maker Richard Patterson inspects the sap-collection system in one of his 25 sugarbushes in western Tioga County. Patterson's crew of six to eight assistants will drill about 70,000 taps this year, making his operation the largest in the state. Patterson Farms can collect upward of 90,000 gallons of sap in one day under the most favorable flow conditions. It takes about 40 gallons of sap to make one gallon of finished maple syrup.

Thanks to the assistance of one of Patterson's long-time maple syrup customers, state Rep. Matt Baker, along with several other legislators, Patterson Farms Maple Products was accepted into the original federal farmers market program in 1996. The program, which sought to support the sustainability of small farms while bringing farm-fresh products to the capital area, has since expanded to other federal agencies, including the Departments of Transportation, Labor, Energy, Justice, the Social Security Administration and the State Department.

Patterson enlisted his sister, Mary Lee Zechman, to run his maple products stands at the federal farmers markets, which operate during the growing season. Today, the sale of maple products at those out-of-state markets account for about 60 percent of Patterson Farms' business. They have also introduced his products to the nation and the world.

"You can't believe how much stuff goes down to Washington," says Patterson. "We

send about 500 pounds of granulated maple sugar down to the farmers markets each week."

Granulated maple sugar is maple syrup that has been boiled down until it crystallizes into sugar. It is commonly used as a substitute for cane sugar, and has a subtle maple flavor.

A natural return

Patterson attributes much of the growth of his business to the fact that consumers want all-natural foods today, even when they come at a much steeper price. A gallon of Patterson Farms' table-grade maple syrup, he notes, sells for about \$36.

"Some people say it costs too much," says Patterson. "My theory is people will pay for good stuff — not sweet, artificial syrup somebody made out of whatever."

His theory has proved correct over the past two decades, as he has transformed his maple operation from a sideline to a full-time, year-round operation. He even sold his entire dairy herd, which had grown to about 150 cows, in 2000.

"That wasn't an easy thing to do," he admits, "but there was so much going on here. The problem with dairy farming is it's a hard way to live, and the maple was making the living. And my passion for maple is even more than my passion for dairy farming ever was."

Patterson says his passion for the sweet potion of the sugar maple stems back to his childhood days.

As a boy, he remembers traipsing through the snow each spring to help collect the galvanized steel sap pails hanging in the sugarbush. As he got a little older and more enterprising, he would tap his own trees, boil the sap down in a pan set up on a gas stove on the back porch, and

make maple candies to sell to his classmates and teachers at school. Little did he know that one day he would be Pennsylvania's top maple producer.

"It's a very unique operation, and I marvel sometimes at how we built it, how it all came about," Patterson says. "We weren't trying to be the biggest, but we accept it very proudly."

At 63 years of age and a year removed from open heart surgery, Patterson says he's not thinking about slowing down any time soon. It's sugaring season, after all. The temperature's just right, there's a westerly wind blowing, and Tioga County's sugar master says it's time to go a-sapping.

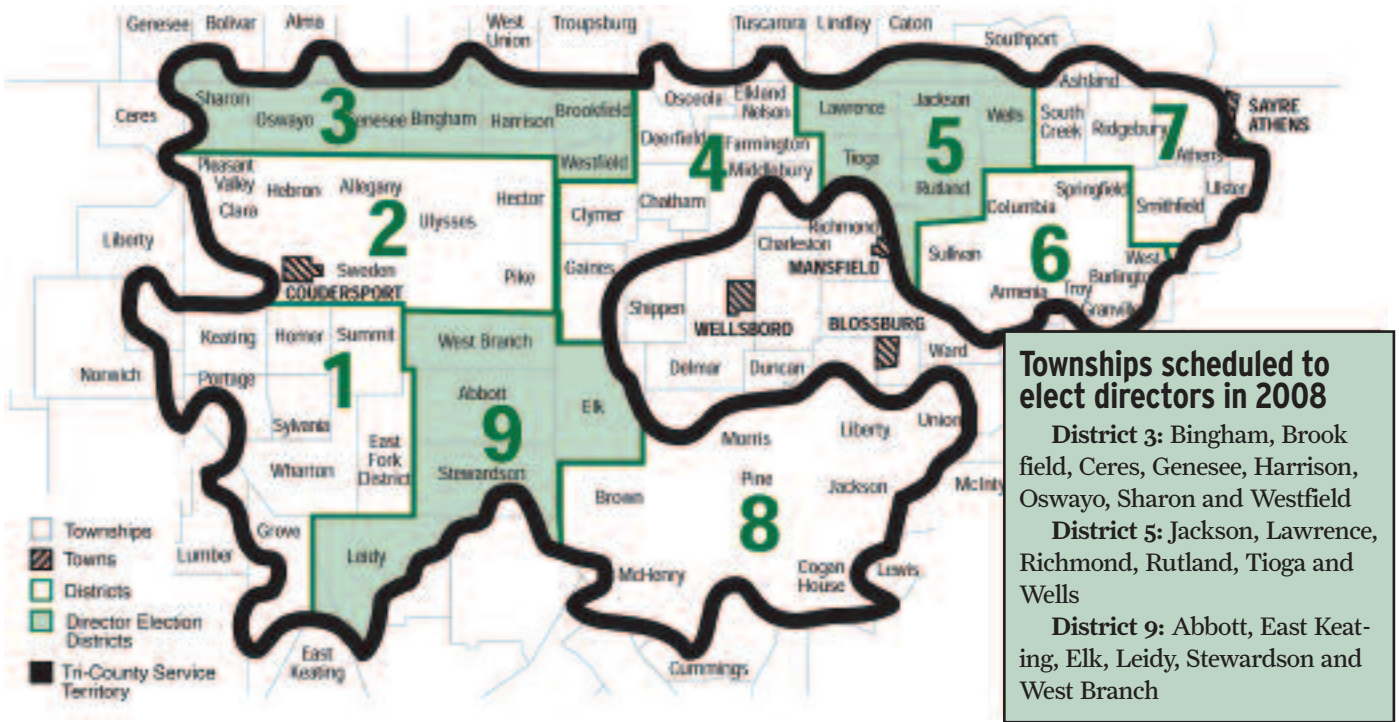
"I love what I'm doing," Patterson says. "Ever since I was youngster, sugaring has always been part of the beginning of spring. It just gets in your blood. I don't want to do anything else." ☀



BOTTLED GOLD: Patterson Maple Farms packages its maple syrup in a wide variety of attractive bottles, as well as tin cans and plastic jugs. More information about Patterson Farms and their maple products can be found online at www.pattersonmaple.com or by calling 814/628-3751.



NOT JUST FOR BREAKFAST ANYMORE: Patterson Farms' office manager, Linda Neal, displays a variety of maple products, from sugar and popcorn to candy and barbecue, that are offered for sale in the show room.



Official notice of director elections

Candidates sought for districts 3, 5 and 9

ELECTION by majority — it's what makes America a democratic nation. It's also one of the hallmarks of membership in a rural electric cooperative.

As a member, you may take an active role in democracy at Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative by running for a seat on the co-op's board of directors. Or you can exercise your democratic rights by simply voting in your district's election.

During the co-op's annual meeting each July, a portion of the membership has the opportunity to vote for directors to represent the district in which they reside.

This year, Tri-County will hold director elections for Districts 3, 5 and 9, currently served by directors Nicholas Reiter, Barbara J. Seeley and Lowell Geiser, respectively.

If you reside in one of these districts and wish to run for a seat on the board, contact the cooperative's Mansfield office. We will send you a director candidate information packet. It contains the forms and instructions necessary for filing your candidacy.

Duties of a director

Directors are responsible for developing cooperative policies and long-range plans. They voice members' concerns and make recommendations to Tri-County's management staff.

Nine directors comprise Tri-County's board. Each board member represents a specific area within the utility's service territory, as the map on this page illustrates.

Directors serve three-year terms. Elections take place on a rotating basis, with three of the co-op's nine districts voting each year. Board members meet regularly at Tri-County's headquarters in Mansfield on the fourth Tuesday of each month.

To be eligible for director candidacy, you must meet the following criteria and all other guidelines listed in the cooperative's bylaws:

- ▶ Receive electrical service from the cooperative at your principal residence.
- ▶ Be a member and a bona-fide resident of the district you seek to represent.
- ▶ Not be in any way employed by, or financially interested in, a competing

enterprise or business selling electrical appliances, fixtures or supplies to the members of the cooperative.

Election procedures

To register as a candidate, you are required to file an official petition and personal statement of qualification for director. Both documents must be submitted to Tri-County Rural Electric Cooperative, P.O. Box 526, 22 N. Main St., Mansfield, PA 16933. The filing deadline is 4 p.m., Friday, April 11, 2008.

For your name to appear on the official ballot, you must secure at least 15 signatures from members residing in your district.

Remember, joint memberships have only one vote; so husband and wife signatures count as a single signature.

If you have any questions regarding director elections, please direct them to Bryan Berguson, Tri-County's director of member services. You can contact him at 570/662-2175 or 1-800-343-2559.

Remember: director candidate petitions are due by April 11, 2008. ☀