



On a late February day, Funks Grove Pure Maple Sirup Farm looks like it has been raided by Spider-Man. A web of tubing spreads among a forest of sugar maple trees, capturing sap and draining it into a 1,500-gallon tank.

While the tubing is a relatively recent innovation, the final product hasn't changed at this fifth-generation family operation, located about 45 miles southeast of Peoria. And the location of many of the trees still requires gathering sap the way Arthur Funk did when Funks Grove became a commercial operation in 1891: with taps and buckets.

"Ever since I was a kid, the sound of sap hitting the bottom of an empty metal bucket has been music to my ears," family member Mike Funk says.

However it's gathered, all of the sap winds up in the sugarhouse, which fills the snowy woods with the scent of maple-scented steam. Inside, Mike and son Jonathan monitor the boiling sap—every 40 gallons reducing to just 1 gallon of sirup.



... IN SEARCH OF THE ...

SWEET SEASON

As winter thaws, the sap begins to flow at a 126-year-old farm along Route 66.

Sirup

WHY "SIRUP"? That's actually how early Webster's dictionaries spelled it. And when former owner Hazel Funk Holmes wrote her will, she requested that "sirup" would, well, stick.

STORY: KIT BERNARDI; PHOTOGRAPHS: (FARM, SIRUP) COURTESY OF FUNKS GROVE PURE MAPLE SIRUP FARM

GUIDEBOOK » ILLINOIS MADE

It takes a full crew of family members to crank out around 2,000 gallons of syrup every season, and while much of it ends up in breakfast-table bottles, some is set aside for flavoring treats like the handmade leaf-shape maple Dippers, enrobed in dark chocolate, which Mike's wife, Debby, sells at the gift shop. The sweet samples, combined with warm Funk hospitality, may explain why many visitors have turned a Funks Grove trip into a beloved seasonal ritual.



ALONG ROUTE 66

FOOD-GIFT TRAIL

Pick up some tasty souvenirs while traveling the Illinois section of the Mother Road, stretching from Chicago to East St. Louis.

ABE'S CARMELCORN SHOPPE *Lincoln*

The Rainforth family makes caramel corn, cheese corn and buttery popcorn. They also sell gourmet kitchenware, packaged foods and pottery by Illinois artist Keith Rice.

SPIRITED REPUBLIC

Lincoln
Choose from 16 craft beers and eight wines on tap at this place along the square. Can't decide on one? Sample a flight. The bar also keeps more than 100 bottled varieties on hand, including beers from Illinois breweries Revolution and Triptych.

BEER NUTS FACTORY AND COMPANY STORE

Bloomington
The Shirk family is nuts about nuts. In business since 1937, the family's products include sugar-salted glazed peanuts, cashews, macadamia nuts, almonds and party mixes.

THE WINERY AT SHALE LAKE

Williamson
David and Susan Wesa's 211-acre property features a vineyard, tasting room, boarding stables and fishing lake. Cabins and cottages are also available on-site.

ROPP JERSEY CHEESE

Normal
The seventh-generation dairy farm makes 30 varieties of cheese, including cheddars, Colby, Gouda, pepper Jack, Swiss and blue, plus pork, poultry and beef products.

