Sustainability in the Maine Maple Sugaring Industry: How Alternative Forms of Wealth Are Conceptualized By Producers

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Maple Syrup

- Maple syrup production range is from Kentucky to the Gaspé Peninsula in Quebec
- Canada accounts for 70% of world production of maple syrup, with Quebec producing 90% of that
- In the U.S. Maine is the third largest producer of maple syrup besides Vermont and New York
- Six- to eight-week season in early spring
- Warm days and nights below freezing necessary for sweet sap production

Photo: https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2013/04/07/geography-in-the-news-maple-syrup-time/

Future of Maple Syrup Production

- Climate change has to potential to drastically impact the maple syrup industry
- Increased temperatures has been predicted for northeast North America and has the potential to negatively impact sugar maple habitat
- Predicted that syrup season will need to start earlier to make up for temperature changes from climate change

Photo: https://www.extension.iastate.edu/forestry/iowa_trees/trees/sugar_maple.html

Valuation

- When financial motivations do not explain the whole story, alternative forms of capital can provide insight
- Social connections, traditions and history, local ecology, and personal well-being can all be considered alternative forms of capital
- Alternative forms of capital may provide insight into Maine maple syrup producers motivations

Photo: https://newengland.com/yankee-magazine/seasons/spring/sap-buckets-up-close/

Framework

- Community capitals framework in *Rural Communities* (Flora, Flora, & Gasteyer, 2016)
  - Social Capital
  - Cultural Capital
  - Natural Capital
  - Human Capital
- “No capital exists in isolation”.
  - (Flora, Flora, & Gasteyer, 2016, p. 32)
- Fluid and dynamic; depend on the perception of the person assigning value

Research Questions

1. How is social capital valued by Maine maple syrup producers and how does it shape operations?
   - To what extent is gift reciprocity present and used to support social capital?
2. To what extent are other community capitals (cultural, natural and human) present and how do they shape the operation?
3. Are these capitals perceived differently between first-generation and multigenerational producers?

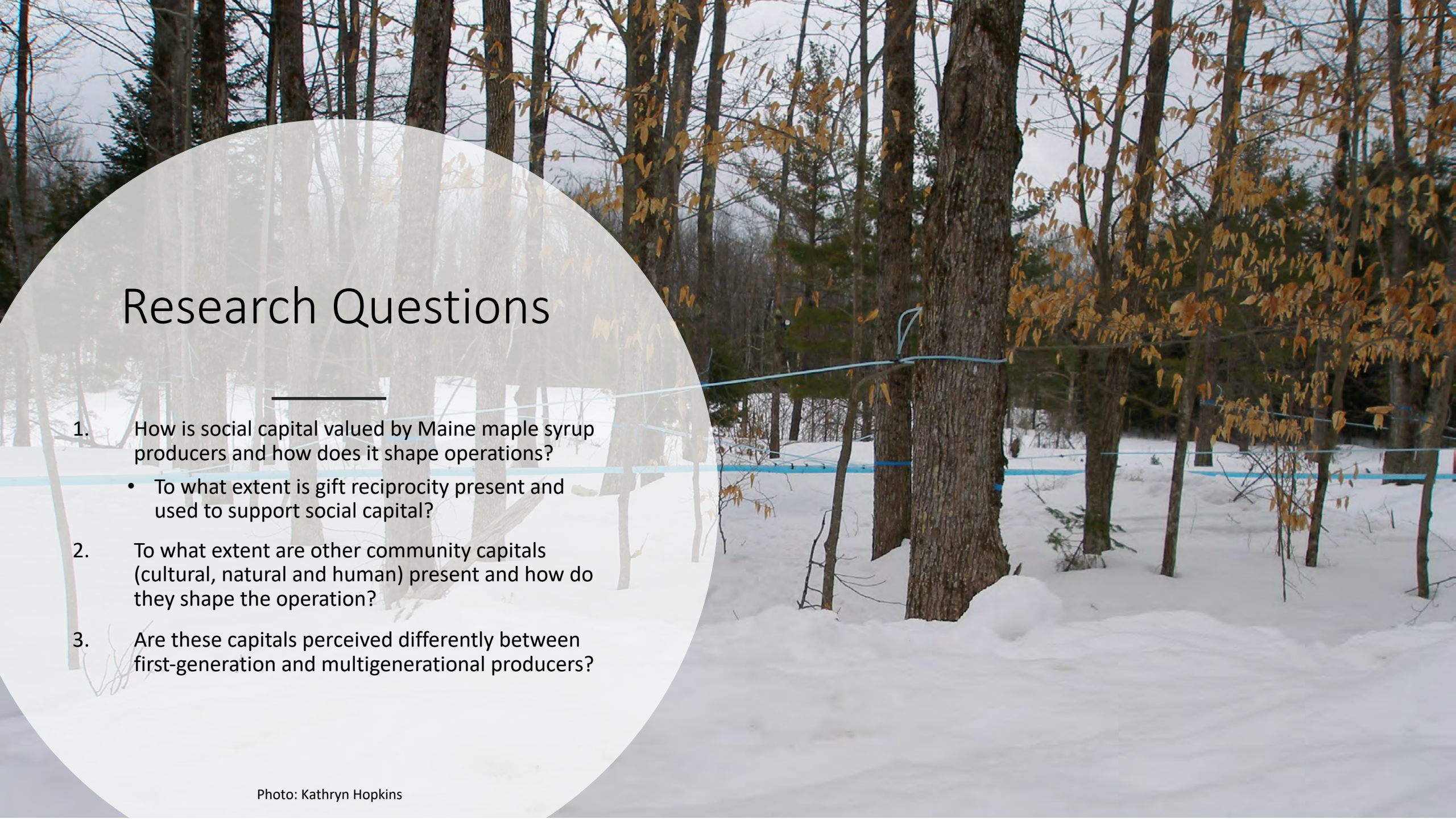


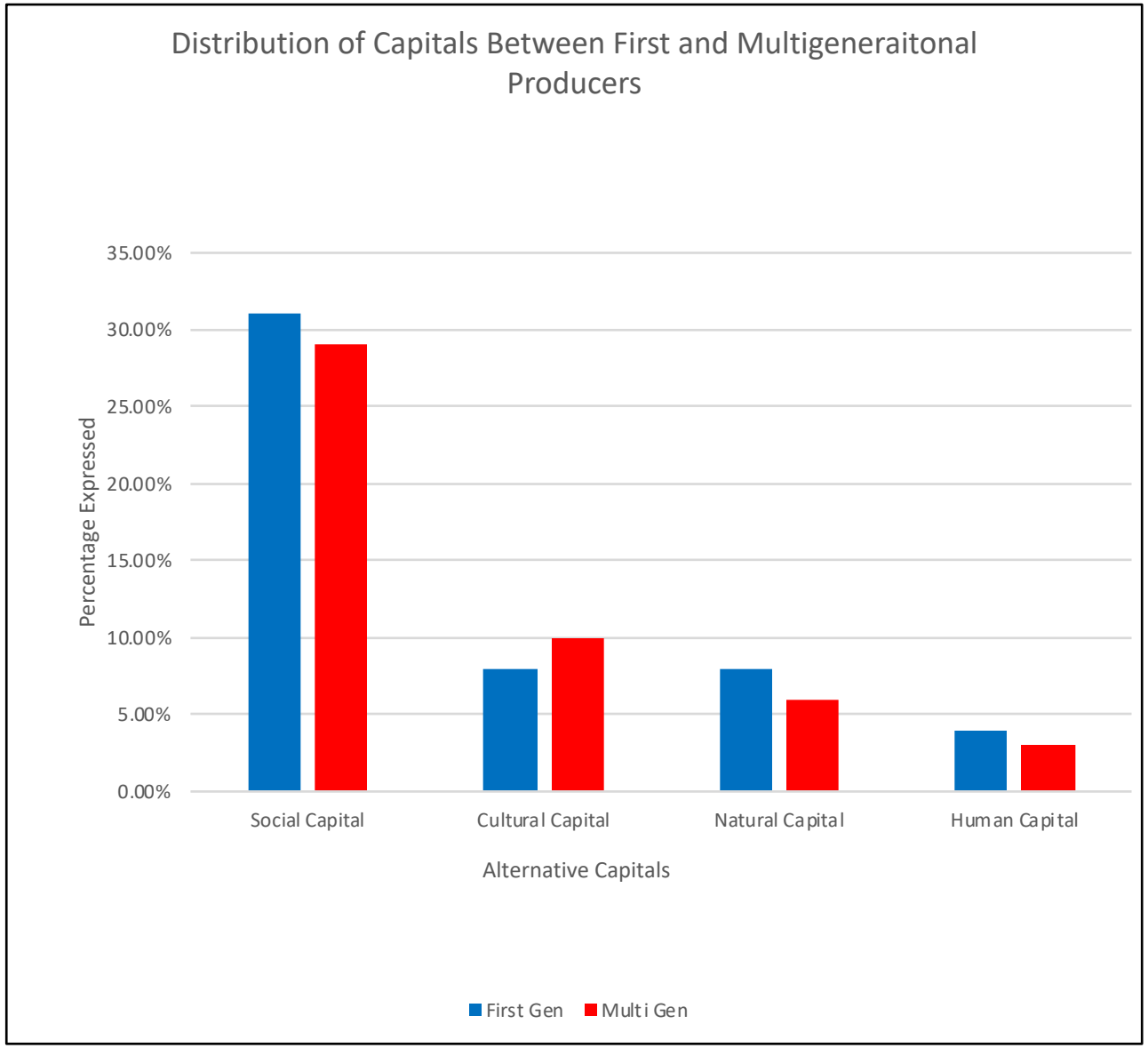
Photo: Kathryn Hopkins

Methods

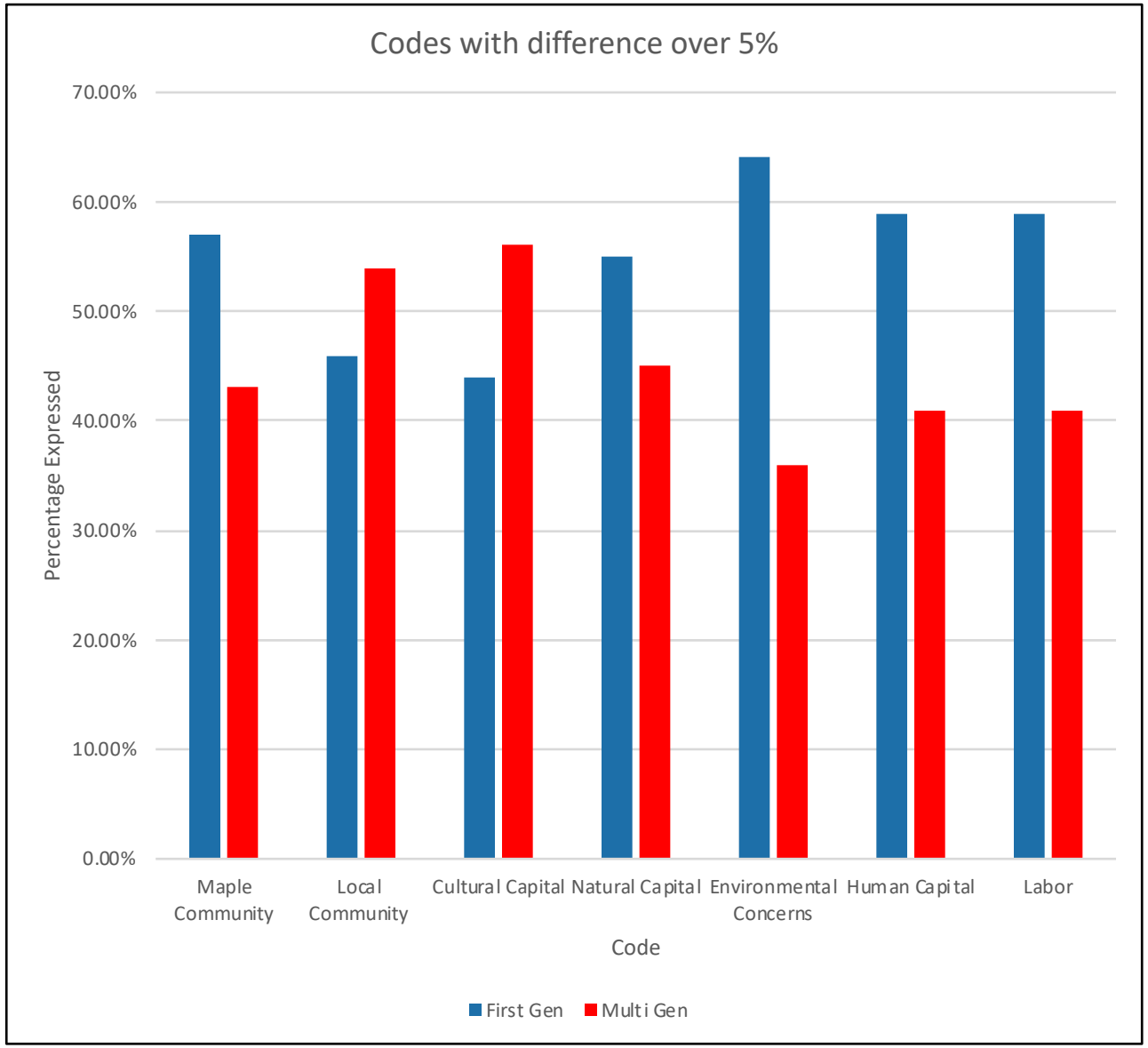
- Research conducted as part of Sweet Spot Project at UMaine
- 10 semi-structured interviews
- Conducted between August and October of 2018
- First-Generation and Multigenerational Producers
- Coded for four alternative capitals and subset ideas of each capital

Photo: Skye Siladi

Findings


Distribution of Capitals Between First and Multigeneraitonal Producers
35.00%
30.00%
25.00%
20.00%
15.00%
10.00%
5.00%
0.00%
Percentage Expressed
Social Capital
Cultural Capital
Natural Capital
Human Capital
Alternative Capitals
First Gen
Multi Gen

Findings


Codes with difference over 5%
70.00%
60.00%
50.00%
40.00%
30.00%
20.00%
10.00%
0.00%
Percentage Expressed
Maple Community
Local Community
Cultural Capital
Natural Capital
Environmental Concerns
Human Capital
Labor
Code
First Gen
Multi Gen

First-Generation

- Social Capital
  - *…instead of buying a three hundred-dollar tool I was able to borrow it from somebody else and use it for 10 minutes and then give it back.* MS9, first-generation
- Cultural Capital
  - *…when you're brand new you don't come in with any preconceived ideas on what, how it needs to be done.* MS19, first-generation
- Natural Capital
  - *I mean to me is like wonderful to be able to own a piece of land and not have it be developed. And even though it's more of a working forest. But you don't start tapping a maple tree until its 40 years old. You can't just go out and plant a new round of trees and expect to have a business.* MS2, first-generation
- Human Capital
  - *You got to have somebody who is almost athletic to climb the trees because tapping is what it takes most of the time…* MS20, first-generation

Photo: Sara Velardi

Photo: Sara Velardi

Multigenerational

- Social Capital
  - *I offered to pay the people money, they don't want money, they want syrup.* MS3, multigenerational
- Cultural Capital
  - *That was my grandmother's recipe. Yeah and I'm not letting anybody know what it is.* MS21, multigenerational
- Natural Capital
  - *After, what I do during the winter…I can be out in the middle of the night or I could be in some crawlspace and it's like why am I doing this. And then that's over with and I go do* [maple sugaring] *and that's where I get my sanity back. Out with the birds and deer. So, it's more, health wise I guess, I get my health back out there.* MS3, multigenerational
- Human Capital
  - *I don't know if I could find someone I could trust for, and to be able to teach them fast enough, everything that they need to know.* MS6, multigenerational

Conclusions

- For Maine maple syrup producers, alternative forms of capital are of concern
- Social capital is utilized to obtain goods, labor, and knowledge
- First-generation producers are more concerned with environmental factors than multigenerational
- Multigenerational producers are more concerned with cultural capital and local community
- Sustainability both ecologically and continuation of tradition

Photo: Kathryn Hopkins

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