

Laurier researchers are studying a tasty topic: maple syrup

WATERLOO – Maple syrup is delicious. That’s a fact. It’s thick, it’s sweet and pancakes would be nothing without it. For Laurier Brantford Professor Brenda Murphy, it’s also more than a condiment: maple syrup is a part of the Canadian identity, and it’s a part that might be lost if climate change rears its head.

Murphy and two research colleagues – Laurier Brantford humanities/indigenous scholar Annette Chrétien and University of Guelph physical geographer Laura Brown – are working together on a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council-funded interdisciplinary study on maple syrup and climate change. They hope their research will provide local communities with resources to not only help mitigate climate change but also adapt to it.

“The mitigation side basically asks: how do we reduce our carbon footprint to save the sugar maple trees?” said Murphy. “The adaptation side says: no matter how much mitigation we do, we’re going to have to adapt eventually because climate change is coming whether we like it or not.”

Sugar maple trees have a relatively small growing range: from Tennessee in the south to Thunder Bay in the north, and from a small corner of Manitoba in the west to the east coast. A master’s project using climate change projections from the Canadian Centre for Climate Modelling and Analysis of Environment Canada shows the possibility of noticeable reductions in sugar maples in Ontario within just 50 years.

Murphy says these results mean Ontario sap producers need to start thinking about adapting now.

“Farmers and producers can begin to be more selective about the sites they choose to plant trees on, to pick the best areas with better soil conditions and access to water,” she said. “It’s a small way around letting Mother Nature do her thing.”

Murphy and colleagues are also researching the role maple syrup plays in Canadian society. The Elmira Maple Syrup Festival, for example, brings more than 60,000 people to the area and has economic and social benefits. Murphy says examples like this help people better understand the climate change issue.

“Climate change is this weird, ephemeral thing that’s out there and people want to know, ‘how does it affect me?’ Well, if it affects an industry in my community, and a cultural symbol, now you have something to hold onto. I see this as an opportunity to think about climate change in a very practical way.”

For more information, visit the study’s website at: www.wlu.ca/homepage.php?grp_id=12610.