

International Plowing Match

OMSPA Participation Guide

INTRODUCTION

The International Plowing Match hosted at varying locations across Ontario each year is the largest outdoor show in the country and very likely North America. Annual attendance averages 75,000 people with the largest being visited by over 100,000. Plowing matches have been part of our agricultural history for well over a century and the event highlights rural life and the different rural communities across Ontario. Proceeds raised from the event are typically donated to local hospitals and charity groups and if done correctly can also be a big revenue boost to the participating OMSPA Local.

GETTING INVOLVED

These events are huge and comprise of 50 or more different committees and 1000+ volunteers just to make the event work. Booth space is commercially available but a Local can easily tie into the various themed “tents” without cost. Eastern Local participated in the *History & Heritage Tent* in 2015 but we also had invitations for the *Educational Tent* and the *Local Foods Tent*. Deciding which tent to participate in should be determined on the material you can gather for your display and your confidence in the committee organizing it. Have lots of old maple stuff? Go for the history tent. Can you make up some interesting teaching and/or science displays? Educational tent is for you. Most of these different tents will have their own committees and it is strongly recommended at least one of your group participate in all their meetings likely starting 8+ months in advance. By attending the meetings you will have valuable input that may help your efforts in the tent and also have better pull on your booth location. Booth location within the tent can make for a large difference in your visitor numbers. Most tents will be laid out with multiple entrances or exits. Try to be close to one of these openings in the tent if you can and avoid one of the long straight aisles with booths across from each other. By being close to an entrance or exit you can actually extend

your display outside for larger items like the OMSPA evaporator and use them to draw people in from across the grounds. Another thing to try for is being located next to either another interesting exhibitor or attraction. If you are located in the midst of a long row of senior groups for example you may be by-passed by visitors for a more interesting area of the tent. Two examples for the benefits of attending the planning meetings for Eastern were the last minute change to allow sales (except maple syrup) and to increase the number of daily volunteer passes from 2 per day to 3 specific to the maple producers' booth. Without participating we would have had an additional \$17/day expense and lost all opportunity for any revenue. If we were to sample sugar we needed 5 people per day to make it work efficiently and to prevent volunteers from becoming overwhelmed.

VOLUNTEERS

You will need a big crew to do this up right. Eastern Local scheduled 5 volunteers per day and 8 for the Saturday plus additional help for setting up the booth the Monday before the IPM and tear down after. Eastern invested 225 volunteer hours in total not counting commuting time to the event and pick up / delivery of "stuff" needed for the booth display. To put that in perspective that equates to \$2700 at a labour rate of \$12/hour. The big thing with the volunteers is to treat them right and let them know they are genuinely appreciated for their efforts. None of our volunteers were out of pocket for helping (except lost wages if they took time off work) and none of our full day volunteers went hungry. IPM issued us 3 passes per day (specific to our group – other groups only received 2) so any additional volunteers that paid at the gate were immediately reimbursed in cash as soon as they arrived at our booth. Several volunteers were half day shifts so they could look around a bit but the full day volunteers received a per diem of 10 bucks toward lunch. I say "toward lunch" because the food prices were so high we weren't buying them lunch, we were only subsidizing it. The toughest but most important part for volunteers is to have at least one person involved the entire week. You need the continuity of having at least one person that knows all the daily set up, tear down, how everything works, where stuff is, and to manage the cash box throughout. A new volunteer showing up one morning needs someone to run them through all the details and show them around a bit to make them feel comfortable. Where are the washrooms? Where can they get lunch? What are we

selling and for how much? How do you want sampling done? Etc... This same person should oversee the continual facing and straightening of brochures and other supplies by keeping racks full and the tables free of drinks, coats, bags, or items left behind by visitors.

BOOTH SPACE

The days of being able to tie up a banner and leave a few brochure racks on a table are long gone. If you are going to display at IPM you need the WOW! factor or don't bother. There is more than a full day of stuff for visitors to see so they move fast looking for what catches their attention. Figure out ways as maple producers that you can draw them in to take a closer look and try to think of some new and/or interesting ideas. Our booth was in the history tent and we had a huge display of old taps but we were also sampling maple sugar, we had a real life dripping sap bucket, two 14' live maple trees (in pots), a table top sized working evaporator, and a cross cut of an old tapped tree. Try not to do the typical tables across the front of the booth but rather something inviting to walk into or around and get rid of any chairs. If your booth is slow enough you can sit down go outside and find one of the many benches or straw bales rather than having a chair under your feet. You will need lots of supplies to keep things stocked so find a way to hide them from view or better yet keep them easily accessible but out of the booth. You will also want a way to keep your supplies up off the ground. Some IPMs are notorious for essentially being monsoons. Prepare in advance to keep all your stuff dry in case of really bad weather. Small signage is vital. Signs can be just printed off on a home printer on card stock and posted everywhere. Eastern added signage to the cookbooks as "Best Seller" and add the "Special IPM Price" below that title. We had signage on the OMSPA evaporator inviting people to come into the tent to the maple booth if they had questions about the evaporator or how it worked. Signage for anything for sale, anything that needs explaining, and anything that may not be obviously free is helpful. Be prepared to cover your displays each night with at least some light grade plastic. Given the cool weather there was a large amount of condensation raining down from the tent ceiling each morning. Based on our experience I can guarantee that where ever you put out all your brochures is where it will drip the hardest each morning.

SAMPLING

After two years of experimentation our Local has found that sampling granulated maple sugar is both the most economical and most productive in promoting local producers. IPM 2015 saw close to 100,000 visitors and about 10,000 came through our booth. In that time we sampled 3,600 samples of granulated maple sugar using 3" long plastic sampling spoons. When it was all done it was the equivalent of 4 liters of syrup converted to sugar with no hassles from the health inspector and we tendered it out to our members getting a low bid cost of \$45/gallon for the sugar. Maple has a specific exemption within the health code for sampling requirements so you do not need the usual 3 sink food prep type set up but you will need sampling gloves, alcohol wipes, and a sealed container for the sugar. What you want to avoid is the chance of visitors double dipping. Eastern allowed seconds for those that asked but a new sampling spoon was used every time. The member providing the sugar provided 2 gallons of sugar but only charged for 1 at wholesale cost for the syrup and donated the labour of making sugar to "the cause". The second gallon of sugar was provided to create volume for our display and was returned to the producer after the event without cost to the Local.

PROMOTIONS

In addition to promoting Ontario producers we also promoted Info Days across the province. We had one page flyers ready for our local Info Day but asked where producers were from and promoted other "maple workshops" if they were outside our local region. 9 contacts were sent out to other locals for people that were interested in attending a local Info Day in their area of Ontario.

SUPPLIES

To help estimate the amounts of supplies you will need the following was used by Eastern Local for the 2015 IPM;

160 Simply Maple cookbooks

**** Cookbooks were actively sold rather than just left on display****

- 1,200 OMSPA bags
- 2 full plastic brochure racks of membership forms
- 100 Info Day flyers
- 1 case of each Foodland Ontario recipe card (4 different cards)
- 1 gallon of maple sugar (2 gallons on display)
- 3,600 3" long plastic sampling spoons
- 1 box sampling gloves
- 1 box alcohol wipes
- 1 case bilingual nutritional info rack cards
- 1 case OMSPA brochures (pre-loaded into the OMSPA bags and on tables)

Eastern used far less OMSPA bags than we estimated due to many other large businesses also giving out their own branded bags at the event. We had a very small collection of maple stickers which were popular with the kids. Many showed up with other producer group stickers already on their shirts and they loved to add to their collection. OMSPA donated a full case of colouring books for the event but we found this was a wasted resource for IPM. By the end of the first day we had blown through a full case mostly due to seniors grabbing them for their grandkids with little or no maple interaction.

BRANDING

We had stickers and signage made based on the Sweet Ontario branding which ended up on truck bumpers, trailers, in our booth, on our glass jar for maple sugar sampling, and given to daily volunteers. We also had matching shirts made with the Sweet Ontario logo silk screened on them. It's an added expense but be sure to have at least most volunteers wearing matching branded shirts or other items. They can be just t-shirts or vests but anything will do. To keep costs down go with a one-size vest that can be passed on to the next shift of volunteers. We found that unless volunteers were wearing branded products they were mistaken for just someone else interested in the booth. With all the big business wearing branded clothing at IPM we cannot afford to be unprofessional or we look like rookies.

CONTACTS

Another aspect of IPM is the contacts your Local and OMSPA provincially can make for future promotional activities. You will meet business leaders, politicians, and organization representatives during the event so keep an open mind and think creatively. Be prepared to take contact information and look for future opportunities to promote local maple or our association that may be a little different. You will want to have some business cards of some type on hand. You do not need a run of 500 but if you can use some Local or OMSPA cards that would be great. If needed head to Staples and run a few generic Ontario Maple cards off on your printer just to have them on hand. In 2015 Eastern Local met with the Grand Chief of Akwesasne (a large First Nations reserve in our area), several MPs & MPPs, the general manager of a large hotel and conference center, and a few IPM volunteers involved with other large events and they were all interested in partnering with maple producers in some form.

FUNDING

Depending on what is required for your Local to participate you may need additional funding to cover costs of participating at IPM. Costs such as booth displays, branding, sampling supplies, admission for volunteers, etc. may be more than what some Locals can afford but there are other options that may help. IPMs are announced two years or more in advance. When the event is planned for your Local approach the OMSPA board to set aside some funding in the budget to help out and use this to top up your Local funding. Check with your local Conservation Authority for small woodlot or conservation type grants. Many conservation groups have small \$200~\$500 grants for events like IPM. Display their banner, write them a quick report, and they will provide a few hundred dollars toward expenses. Corporate sponsorship is another option to help cover costs which Eastern used to upgrade the quality of our event shirts. Talk to local dealers, wood lot groups, and businesses to see if any kind of partnership can be arranged. Perhaps someone will provide your shirts or vests if they can put their logo on it for example.

REVENUE

Eastern unfortunately missed out on a good revenue stream at IPM 2015 by not having generic "Ontario Maple Sugar" ready for sale at our booth. Up until two weeks prior we

were not allowed to sell anything but in the final weeks that was relaxed to we could sell anything except maple syrup (IPM had their own branded syrup in their gift & souvenir shop). When we sampled the maple sugar in our booth the first question was usually “Where can we buy some?” This was answered by referring people to the www.OntarioMaple.com website to find their local producer but if we had sugar packaged and ready to go we could have offset many of our expenses from the sales. Our suggestion to any other Local planning on sampling sugar at IPM is to have lots on hand packaged in the \$5 & \$10 range. Label it as “Pure Ontario Maple Sugar” along with the OMSPA website address. This way all of your members that sell to the public will benefit and your Local will earn some much needed income providing you can tender the sugar at a reasonable cost.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

International Plowing Match website

<http://www.plowingmatch.org/>

Photos of the 2015 OMSPA IPM booth

<http://www.omspa.ca/gallery/ipm-2015-finch-ontario/>

Contact Eastern Ontario Local for additional information

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