Acadiana is crawfish center

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Acadiana has fast become one of the leading crawfish areas in the nation and yielding some 2,000,000 pounds annually.

A growing demand for crawfish has brought about the development of an ever more important industry in Louisiana. Even the Sugar cane farmers, the rice farmers and cattlemen are flooding idle fields to create ponds for the cultivation of the crawfish.

The Atchafalaya Floodway, constructed by the U.S. Corps of Engineers after the disastrous flood of 1927 to contain floodwaters of the great Atchafalaya River, has also played a major role in the development of the crawfish.

The early Acadiana settlers called the hardy crustacean “ecrevisse”, a French word gradually corrupted into “crayfish” or “crawfish.”

Africa is the only continent in the world that does not grow some species of the crawfish. Color of the crawfish develops from the type of water he thrives in. The red crawfish lives in the shallow water of ponds, ditches and marshes, and is also found in abundance. The red crawfish grows larger than the white crawfish. The white crawfish is found mostly in swift flowing streams and less plentiful than the red cousin. The crawfish is a plump, armored inland cousin of the lobster.

Cajun housewives, Creole chefs and negro cooks have filled the kitchen pots with the fragrant, pungent aroma of the crawfish for two centuries.

The red crawfish, native to Louisiana, goes back to the Indian days, who found them plentiful and tasty on the low lands of the marshes skirting Louisiana’s Gulf Coast and was an important source of protein to the famous Indian tribe known as the Houmas.

Not long after the founding of New Orleans, the French Gourmets, on the alert for some fancy new taste, discovered this same crawfish to be a delicacy for the table.

Crawfish bisque became a favorite dish on the tables of early Acadians and like gumbo, it was fashioned with ingredients available almost at the doorsteps; bay leaf, onions, garlic and thyme. The succulent table meat of the crawfish was minced with the spicy condiments, stuffed back into the scrubbed heads and simmered into an unmatched delicacy.

An estimated 90 percent of the state’s wild crawfish catch are farmed by South Louisiana farmers and they are making a careful study and geographic advantages in cultivate this new-found industry.

All through South Louisiana, especially in the spring, it can be heard that we’re having a “crawfish boil”. Hundreds of pounds are boiled in large pots and piled in streaming red mountains on outdoor tables where family and friends gather.

The crawfish eaters pluck the white meat from the tails and suck the flesh from the claws. You can tell a born crawfish eater as he also sucks the tasty fat from the crawfish head.

The normal mating season of the red crawfish begins in April and peaks during the month of May. Egg laying begins in June and continues through September. Experts have stated and believes that each individual female produces only once a year. While laying the eggs, the female forms a cup-like receptacle with her tail into which she deposits some 200 to 300 beady black eggs.

The massed eggs appear to resemble a blueberry and female crawfish with eggs are said to be “in berry.” The eggs usually take a two week hatching period.

Fall and winter temperatures in southern Louisiana are seldom cold enough to retard the growth of the red crawfish. By the end of December each year, the ponds and streams are loaded with crawfish. Growth conditions are best in February and March and by May and June the crawfish population is mostly adults.

The crawfish’s diet consists of small fish, water insects, frogs, snails and aquatic plants.

“IT’S NOW CRAWFISH TIME IN ACADIANA…”