Active Crawfish Marketing Now Going On

Commissioner of Agriculture Bob Odom will attend three major food trade shows in Los Angeles, Denver and Baltimore in the next six weeks seeking expanded markets for Louisiana crawfish.

Odom, along with a department marketing specialist, will be at Sea Fare in Los Angeles Jan. 24 and 25, the grand opening of the Baltimore Seafood Terminal Market Feb. 1, and the Rocky Mountain Hospitality Convention in Denver, March 8.

"The rapid and continued expansion of our pond crawfish industry gives us an annual supply we can't possibly consume in Louisiana. We have to move out of the state for our markets," Odom said. "And crawfish has one of the brightest futures of any of Louisiana's cultivated agricultural commodities. I expect to see crawfish become one of the major growth industries in the state in the next five years."

Pond crawfish acreage has doubled in the last two years to nearly 120,000 acres; up from only a few thousand acres ten years ago. It is the state's fifth largest crop and last year Louisiana produced 70 million pounds of crawfish.

"But because of increased public awareness nationwide of the nutritional value of seafood, many states are competing for new seafood markets;" Odom added. "Our experience in crawfish marketing in the last couple of years tells me the potential is there to greatly expand our markets. But we have to get out and sell. There are too many varieties of seafood available looking for new markets to think we can sit and wait for customers to come to us," he said.

Sea Fare in Los Angeles is one of the world's largest seafood trade shows. Every state and many foreign countries will be participating. A preliminary list showed some 1,500 seafood buyers had preregistered to attend, Odom said.

At a food trade show, Odom added, each seller purchases a booth where he displays his products and has samples available for tasting. Buyers tour the booths discussing the products, their availability, price and methods of transportation. The opening of the Baltimore Seafood Terminal Market represents a major facility serving the seafood needs of the east coast. Some 800 buyers are expected to be at the opening event.

"Because of the pollution of some prime east coast crab production waters, retailers are looking for new sources of seafood supply. We will be promoting crawfish as comparable or a substitute for crabmeat in casserole-type dishes," he said.

"On March 10 we will be at the Rocky Mountain Hospitality Convention in Denver. The show is aimed at the Colorado and Wyoming Restaurant Association membership, which is a largely untapped seafood area we would like to develop," Odom said.

The department will attend the Rocky Mountain show in conjunction with Gulf South and Atlantic Fisheries Foundation, a marketing arm of the seafood producing states of the southeast. "We will be marketing not only crawfish but also oysters, shrimp and our other seafood products," Odom said.