Agriculture improvement seen

By CALVIN LEAR
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The state's agriculture industry will have turned the corner to good times if this year's crop is as good as 1988, Bob Odom said Friday.

"Last year was probably the best crop in 15 or 20 years," Odom said in comments to the Louisiana Clerks of Court convention at Hotel Acadiana.

Another year like 1988 and the struggling agriculture industry will be back on its feet and be ready to aggressively diversify, he said.

Agricultural success is key to Louisiana's economic turnaround, Odom said. He said the industry, based on seafood, agriculture and timber, has potential for development and pointed to his efforts in getting alligator tanning facilities located in the state.

"Alligator tanning holds probably the best potential," he said, adding that like many other raw materials, alligator skin is taken out of Louisiana and processed outside of the state and nation. He said efforts are under way to bring Italian, German and French tanning technology to Louisiana.

Diversification is already happening in some areas of agriculture, particularly with the development of catfish farms, Odom said. Over 250 processing plants are now operating.

North and central Louisiana's timber industry must take the next step from simply producing raw materials to turning the materials into furniture. Like most other raw products, timber is taken out of Louisiana and processed, he said.

Odom said the state must continue working to improve its image if it hopes to develop economically.

"A positive attitude is necessary," he said. "We're not going to get anybody to come here if we do nothing but complain. I'm tired of politicians going around the state talking negatively."