Agriculture Today: Crawfish guides eyed

By BOB ODOM, Commissioner
Crawfish processors, LSU Cooperative Extension seafood experts and Louisiana Department of Agriculture weights and measures officials recently met with Commissioner of Agriculture Bob Odom to discuss guidelines and regulations on the allowable amounts of fat and liquid in packages of processed crawfish.

The meeting has been given the responsibility of devising guidelines and standards for crawfish packaging and processing to be recommended to the Commissioner.

Federal and state government have no set guidelines for packaging of crawfish, and the trend to packaging crawfish for volume sales has only recently made packaging a source of concern. Since Louisiana is the number one crawfish-producing state, we have the opportunity to devise guidelines we can live with and work to have them adopted by the agencies which will govern the industry not only here at home, but in other markets as well, Odom said.

There has been some discrepancy in the past among processors as to the required net weight of meat in processed crawfish packages labeled "1 lb." Inspectors for the Louisiana Department of Agriculture have discovered varying amounts of meat in the one pound packages, the remainder of the contents being comprised of water and crawfish fat. Whether or not fat should be considered an integral part of the crawfish product and be counted as part of the product's net weight.

According to Moody, FDA's standard considers salmon oil to be an integral part of salmon naturally found in the meat, and is allowed as part of the product if found in proportions that would normally occur in nature.

Processors on the committee, Roy Robin of Breaux Bridge, Mac Atteberry of Eunice and Andrew Blanchard of Metairie, pointed out that processors must pay their peelers for the fat on the crawfish they peel, and the processors must be able to sell the fat as part of the product to make a fair profit. Some processors have been adding extra fat or liquid has been added to packaged crawfish to increase its net weight. Processors on the committee, pointed out that processors must pay their peelers for the fat on the crawfish they peel, and the processors must be able to sell the fat as part of the product to make a fair profit.

To determine the actual average percentage of fat which is naturally found on crawfish, Moody will undertake a year-long study to examine what the natural average levels are. Once these levels are set, inspectors will be able to determine if extra fat or liquid has been added to packaged crawfish to increase its net weight.

Phl Stagg, head of the department's weights and measures division, said one of the department's chief technical interests is an inspection procedure that can easily be adapted to standard techniques currently used by state inspectors.

The problem, though complicated, is actually one which should affect only fresh packaged crawfish sold within the state. Processors and experts agree that crawfish for shipment out of state would probably be frozen, washed tail meat with no fat attached. The fat has a tendency to accelerate spoilage of the meat and reduce its shelf life.

Consumers in other regions do not have the tradition of cooking crawfish with the fat, as many consumers in this region do. Being unaccustomed to using the fat as a seasoning agent, consumers in other areas would not object to its absence.

Meanwhile, consumers at home will be able to enjoy their crawfish with its fat for seasoning, confident that new guidelines will assure them of the label-stated amount of crawfish meat for their money.