Agriculture will continue to remain a strong economic force in Acadiana and the rest of Louisiana, according to an agricultural specialist.

Outside influences, particularly among developing East European nations, may be a very important factor on agriculture during the 1990's, said James Trahan, county executive director for the Lafayette Parish Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service.

"I think that things happening in the world, especially the nations in Europe starting to become more democratic, will affect our agriculture," Trahan said. "I think you are looking at some possible new markets for Louisiana products."

Also, as the world's population grows, more food sources will be sought and that also will affect Louisiana's agricultural industry, Trahan said.

The upcoming decade, though, will produce few changes for Acadiana's agricultural interests, Trahan said.

The recently enacted 1990 Farm Bill will help produce a "fairly stable environment" for farming interests through at least 1995, Trahan said. Congress enacted the program to help move the U.S.'s agricultural concerns in a more market-oriented direction.

"For the next five years, at least, crops in this area will be stable" because of the Farm Bill, Trahan said.

The geographical location of Lafayette Parish, located near the edge of several crop belts, will also help insure agriculture's continued presence as an economic force, Trahan said.

"To the south and west we have the rice belt and to the east the sugar cane belt," Trahan said.

Trahan identified three major crops that will continue to maintain a significant presence in the region — cattle, rice and sugar cane.

Sugar cane, he said, is heavily grown in New Iberia and St. Mary parishes while rice continues to be strong in parishes to the west. Cattle ranching is spread out among the parishes to the west, he added.

The Gulf War has had an impact on the Louisiana rice market, according to some experts. Through the 1990s, Trahan said he doesn't see a return to the smaller, family-owned farms of the past.

"That's mainly because of economics," Trahan said. "It's too much of an initial investment to get started.

"I just don't see a return to the smaller farms."

Another bright spot in the state's agricultural future is aqua-farming, Trahan said.

"As farming becomes tougher and tougher, I see farmers looking towards other things such as aqua-farming," Trahan said. "As long as we don't make the same mistake that we've made in the past, that is of saturating the market, I think that aqua-farming will become a very strong farming interest in Louisiana."

The overall outlook for agriculture in Acadiana in the 1990s is "very good. I think it will continue to be a very strong influence in this region for some time," Trahan said.