Skin game

Alligator hides glut market

Louisiana’s alligator skin industry, which enjoyed a boom during the 1980s, is choking on a glut of hides from the United States and abroad, state and industry officials say.

Prices for skins of farm-raised alligators dropped from a high of about $36 per foot in 1990 to as low as $28 per foot this year, said several owners of Louisiana alligator farms.

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—Report

Alligator farmers break even when skins sell for about $30 per foot or more, Shirley said. When prices drop below that mark, many farmers cannot recoup their expenses on feed, heat, insurance and skinning, he said.

Since 1984, farms registered with state officials have increased from seven to 140. At the same time, alligator farms have opened in such countries as Australia, New Guinea, the Philippines and in South America and Africa.

Some Louisiana farmers expect the market to tighten, which could force some out of business.

“It was just a matter of time,” said Steele McAndrew, who produces alligators near Ville Platte. “I thought it was going to happen last year. It’s just one of those things.”

But prices for the 25,000 skins taken from wild alligators during a month-long harvest last fall have remained strong.