Alligator meat company heads ‘hot list’

A local alligator company landed atop the “hot products” list at the nation’s largest food show in Chicago last week, with smoked, barbecued and canned alligator meat.

Jack Montoucet, owner of Jacques Crocs in Scott, found himself in the enviable position of explaining his products to the likes of CBS Morning News, CNN, and other national news organizations.

“They tasted my samples and they were really excited about them,” Montoucet says. “As for me, that’s the kind of exposure I couldn’t find or buy in a lifetime.”

Montoucet was one of 15 Louisiana food companies exhibiting products at the U.S. Food Export showcase, a part of the Food Marketing Institute’s national food show. More than 1,300 American companies exhibited food products for some 30,000 national and international food buyers.

The how is held each year at Chicago’s McCormick Place, occupying some 1.3 million square feet of exhibit space.

“This is one of the biggest and best food shows in the world, bringing together U.S. food sellers and buyers from this country and around the world,” according to Louisiana Agriculture Commissioner Bob Odom. “In talking to companies from Louisiana, every one of them had told me they are tremendously satisfied with the amount of interest and the number of trade leads they have had …”

Odom said.

No one was happier than Montoucet. Making it on the “Hot Products” list was a real coup and singled out his company for special attention among the exhibitors.

Montoucet moved from alligator skins to alligator meat in a last-ditch effort to save himself financially several years ago.

“Actually, my getting into the alligator meat business was an effort to save my farm when the skin prices crashed a few years ago,” he said. “My main goal was to expand my meat sales to try to offset my expenses and losses from the skin side of the business.

“And the truth is the meat has proved to be much more lucrative for me than the skin business,” he said. Besides barbecue, smoked and canned varieties, he also has alligator sauce piquant, etouffee, sausage and corn soup.

While his prepared alligator products drew much favorable comment from those who stopped by for a taste test, the innovation which is likely to draw the most permanent interest is his canned product.

“It’s being canned by a well-known company that cans tuna and salmon, so the technology is there and the quality is there,” Montoucet says.

“The interest from foreign buyers has been unbelievable,” he said. Although buyers from a number of European countries made inquiries, many of his prospective customers were buyers from Russia, South America and Africa.

“We don’t really appreciate it in this country, but most of the world doesn’t have refrigeration. My canned meat doesn’t have to be refrigerated. This is a major selling point that seems to be bringing buyers from those countries to see me,” he says.