BR to get rice bran processing facility

By BILL McMAHON
Capitol news bureau

Baton Rouge will get a pilot plant for further processing rice bran into cooking oil and other products, Commissioner of Agriculture Bob Odom and company officials announced Friday.

Helix International Corp. President Keith Lanneau of Baton Rouge, Odom and agriculture officials announced the proposed processing facility in a news conference.

Rice bran has been used previously for cooking oil, Odom said, but the proposed development would expand the uses of rice byproducts.

Helix International and Dews Laboratories Inc. of Mineral Wells, Texas, are planning the pilot commercial processing plant to process rice bran into cooking oil, health foods and other products. Another possible use is as a protein food in aquaculture, Lanneau said.

Rice bran is the brown, oily coating under the hard outer hull of a grain of rice.

Odom explained that his interest is in developing the processing of agriculture products in Louisiana as an alternative economic base to the state's existing reliance on the oil industry.

"My involvement and dedication is in the further processing of agriculture products and timber," Odom said.

Lanneau said Helix and Dews have yet to decide on what product from rice bran would first be developed. There is a need to focus on a particular product, he said.

He said he would hope that within two years there would be an expansion into the creation of a commercial product.

Part of the problem in earlier developments in processing rice bran for more refined uses — most often used as cattle feed — is that the plants have not been large enough to supply a national market, Lanneau said, using as an example an Abbeville plant that produced a "superior cooking oil" that never became more than a regional product.

Dews, who said his company is primarily a manufacturer and developer, said there has been a need for a high grade protein, which can be produced from the rice bran.

Most protein supplements are now made from soy, he said. For those wanting to use a protein product for weight control but are allergic to soy, the rice bran product would serve as an alternative, he said.

Louisiana is the third largest rice-producing state in the country, Odom said.

"The prospect of developing new commercial products from rice bran could mean a dramatic boost for our rice industry."