Block on Chinese crawfish awaits Foster’s approval
$350,000 of proposed state budget earmarked for efforts

By M. Scott Morris
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HENDERSON — Officials with the Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry are waiting for Gov. Mike Foster to sign the state budget before proceeding with efforts to block Chinese crawfish imports.

The state budget contains an amendment that would provide $350,000 to “pursue all legal options available” to stop Chinese crawfish from flooding the domestic market. W.G. ‘Bud’ Courson, assistant to Agriculture Commissioner Bob Odom, said the commissioner will not announce plans for the money until the budget is signed.

Max Turnipseed, an international trade expert who has been working with local crawfishmen, processors and buyers, said he expects Odom will meet with industry representatives in the next two or three weeks to discuss ways of using the money.

St. Martin Parish Police Jury President Scott Angelle has requested that the meeting be held in St. Martin Parish because any decision will impact local producers.

“I don’t know how many times the Legislature will provide $350,000, especially if we fail,” Angelle said.

Angelle said the money will probably be used to pursue an antidumping case.

The antidumping law would require tariffs against imports that are “dumped” on the market at prices lower than they cost to produce.

Industry representatives would have to file petitions with the United States Trade Representative and the U.S. Department of Commerce. It could take up to 15 months to complete the process and get a ruling.

Turnipseed estimated that an antidumping case could cost more than $350,000.

He said members of the Louisiana Crawfish Coalition have been compiling information for the past several months to show the impact the Chinese crawfish have had on local producers.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 583,947 pounds of processed Chinese crawfish imported to the U.S. in 1993, and that amount had increased to 2,804,962 pounds by 1995.

Gabe LeBlanc, co-chairman of the Louisiana Crawfish Coalition and manager of the Acadiana Fishermen’s Cooperative, said he hopes industry representatives will be able to meet with Odom sometime after the Fourth of July holiday.

“Things are going fine. We’re gathering information. We’re just waiting to see if the governor is going to sign the budget,” LeBlanc said.