Pete Sclafani inspect one boiled crawfish from a platter at his New Orleans seafood store. While the price of meat is soaring, Sclafani is glad to report that the price of the Louisiana mudbug is going down during a price war.

Crop Has Right-of-Way on Busy Highway

By BILL CRIDER
Associated Press Writer

Though the price of meat and everything else has been going up, there's good news in the Cajun country: The price of crawfish is coming down.

"They got a price war on them right now," said Pete Sclafani, who keeps scarlet mounds of boiled crawfish on the counters at his seafood store.

"Prices are really dropping," he added. "Last week the wholesale price was 40 cents a pound, now it's down to 23 and I've heard of 19."

The competitors are the owners of the swampland "ponds," where crawfish are a crop, and the fishermen from the spillways, swamps and drainage ditches where crawfish swarm wild.

Ponds Closed Down

"Some of the ponds have closed down," said Sclafani. "They can't make it at these prices. But several are sticking and say they are going to match anything they have to match."

"I have seen crawfish sell for seven cents a pound some years back," he said, "but we will never see any more of those years...."

Actually, like the best things in life, the delicacy is free to a lot of hungry Cajuns.

Crawfish thrive in shallow water everywhere during spring. You see family groups, equipped with nets, seizing them out of every roadside ditch.

Where possible, crawfish have the right-of-way in their mysterious migrations from one side of a highway to the other. It can be an awesome sight.

Millions of them

"I was driving on Airline Highway once and came upon a state police roadblock," one crawfish lover said. "That four-lane highway was black with crawfish. It was like a big rug being pulled across the pavement. The rug was about 600 feet wide. Millions of them. We were held up about 30 minutes, then the cops went along, kicked a few stragglers out of the way, and lifted the roadblock."

A crawfish, known as crayfish elsewhere, looks somewhat like a lobster except that its succulent tail is not much bigger than our thumb.

Oddly enough, in other parts of the country, they are not considered eligible for the table — a prejudice that baffles all Cajuns.