Crawfish As 'Crop' May Prove Boon To Economy

By JOHN BARBOUR
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OPELOUSAS - Louisiana crawfish, that delectable, pincered creature esteemed throughout Acadian land in his- tory, etouffee or boiled, has ceased to be a mere gour- dent's delight.

While still maintaining its pro- perties place on the dinner table, it is beginning to leave its mark upon the economists table of figures that reveal the state's upward march in dollar pro- grams.

Putting it succinctly, crawfish and the serving of the cre- crevise is becoming big business. State Rep. Steven Dupuis of St. Landry parish, who was instrumental in cementing area producers and processors into an organization to encourage research into the raising and marketing of crawfish, sees the poten- tial of the crustacean as the greatest single boon to the econom- of Louisiana since the dis- covery of oil.

"At the present time it is estimated that the total income from crawfish is about $3 mil- lion per year with a large portion of that money coming from Southwest Louisiana. 'Hit - Or - Miss'

"Here's the important thing - the money is going into the market from a product of which nobody knows much about. The amazing thing about crawfish raising - some call it farming - is that many of our area people are making a good living from what is still a hit-or- miss proposition," Dupuis said.

"With proper research revealing to us what can be done and what should be done in crawfish raising, marketing and cooking, the potential is unlimited."

Both Dupuis and St. Landry County Agent A. K. Smith see crawfish raising as the perfect crop for complementing and supplementing the farmers' in- come.

"Crawfish raising is ideal for the rice farmer," Smith said.

"To begin with, there is a rice allotment which definitely limits the amount a farmer can plant. If he already has the fields, the levees, the pump and the hands to work, what's going to hinder him from making additional money from land that would lie idle otherwise?"

Crawfish Ponds

The two pointed out that when a farmer wants to follow his field, a crawfish pond is perfect for that purpose. It not only allows a field to lie fallow but enriches it at the same time. Also, the flooded field provide good luck ponds on which blinds can be rented.

Dupuis used one farmer as an example of how farm in- come can be supplemented by flooding rice fields for crawfish ponds. "He had 55 acres he devote to ponds," he said.

"From this acreage, he got absolutely nothing from 20 acres. On the other 35, however, he grossed about $5,000.

"Think what could be done if we knew the answers to ques- tions that are posed about crawfish. Think how many hun- dreds of thousands of dollars could be realized from the thou- hands of acres that could be devoted to raising crawfish," Dupuis said.

Both Dupuis and Smith point out that nothing hinders a man from going into raising craw- fish. "He knows just as much, if not more, about it as anyone else at the present time," Smith said. "As county agent, I'm always getting ques- tions such as: How much-