Crawfish Center's work continuing

By DICK WRIGHT
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LAFAYETTE — Like many university people in Louisiana today, crawfish expert Jay Huner wonders if he will be on a payroll much longer.

In the meantime — while the governor and the Legislature wrestle with the state budget — Huner remains director of the Crawfish Center, part of the University of Southwestern Louisiana’s contribution to aquaculture research.

In fact, Huner and a technician are the Crawfish Center.

Huner uses borrowed lab space, but he also has a spread of ponds on the USL Experimental Farm at Cade, south of Lafayette, where he can conduct research — and which provide income for the center through crawfish sales.

Asked if his own small setup is subject to budget cuts, he replied:

“Yes it is. We have not heard anything in particular, but the entire university is on pins and needles as to what will happen.”

But Huner said Ray Authement, USL president, has put a priority on agriculture as a renewable resource. The Crawfish Center is part of the College of Agriculture.

“The president wants USL to be part of the economic rejuvenation of Acadiana,” Huner said. At present, the Crawfish Center has a number of research projects under way in conjunction with other Louisiana university research. Huner emphasizes cooperation between his work and that of the aquaculturists at LSU and other schools.

Huner left Southern University for the USL job last September, but continues crawfish feeding research with Southern’s Center for Small Farm Research.

He also continues to study crawfish harvesting methods in conjunction with LSU researchers. As with all the projects, there are “private cooperators,” or crawfish growers and others in related private enterprises.

Soft-shell crawfish research, focusing on crawfish

Land

contracted in the areas around Baton Rouge proper than I have seen in probably as far back as eight to 10 years.”

Haik’s agency, Farm and Country Realty, deals in farmland in a cluster of prime Louisiana agricultural parishes — West Baton Rouge, Pointe Coupee, Avoyelles, Iberville and St. Landry.

Farmland sold for industrial use goes for considerably more than land that will remain in farming, according to Haik. He said farmland sold for the site of an industry went for $2,000 an acre.

Haik said he knows of land sold as farmland elsewhere in the area going for $650 to $750 an acre but also as high as $1,100 an acre.

Business has picked up in farm sales, he said.

“This is the best year I have had since 1979,” Haik said.

The Agricultural Statistics Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, reported that nationwide farm real estate debt is down 5 percent in 1988 from 1987, and down 27 percent from its peak year of 1983.

“The ratios of debt to equity and to net cash income declined in 1988, indicating that the financial capacity of some producers to buy land increased,” the service said. “Yet nominal interest rates on farm real estate loans averaged a half a percent higher in 1988. Because most of the increase occurred in the last six months, its impact, if any, on land values may not be realized until later this year.”