Crawfish farming may be ray of hope

Crawfish production could be the ray of hope to many Louisiana farmers facing problems with traditional row crops, according to researchers who spoke during the "Crawfish Research Report to the Industry" in Crowley.

The Nov. 13 presentation was sponsored by the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station, Louisiana Crawfish Farmers Association and International Rice Festival. It was designed to provide farmers with the latest information on crawfish research being conducted in the state.

"What we'd like to do is acquaint the public with our campus people as much as possible," said Dr. Marty Brunson, who helped organize the one-day program. "There are 15 to 18 people in the LSU system working on crawfish research.

"What we are trying to do is bring these people out, show our new faces and let people know we are working with them."

Approximately 400 people attended the program and heard reports from 10 researchers and comments concerning the future of the industry.

"Row-crop farming is in trouble in the state," said Larry de la Bretonne, an aquaculture specialist. "We have the land and labor available, so harvesting crawfish has not been a problem in this area.

"The future looks very bright for crawfish as an alternative to traditional row crops," de la Bretonne said, explaining that the space devoted to crawfish farming in the state has increased 15,000 acres to 125,000 acres this year.

Brunson agreed with that assessment, saying the move toward crawfish farming in southern Louisiana was a "natural progression."

However, researchers said crawfish farmers still must work to maximize the use of available resources and to develop new crawfish markets.

"Our problem now is that we consume 85 percent of our crawfish in Louisiana and that means we have a glut on the market when our crawfish start coming in," said de la Bretonne. "That results in a roller-coaster price structure because we have to drop the prices so they will be consumed. "We are working to get them going out of state, where we will have more stable prices, and we hope that will lead to greater price stability here."