Crawfish Farming Rapidly Expanding

“Crawfish farming is rapidly expanding in Louisiana, and management procedures for new ponds are important,” said Max Baer, district conservationist with the U.S. Soil Conservation Service, assisting the Lafayette Soil and Water Conservation District.

Louisiana is currently the leading state in crawfish production, with about 60,000 acres in ponds. A high percentage of these ponds have been built in recent years.

A newly constructed crawfish pond should be stocked with 50 pounds of adult brood crawfish per acre. The pond should be flooded and stocked sometime in May. The “stocked” crawfish should be placed on the interior levees of the pond. Water in the pond should be maintained for two weeks, then slowly drained from the pond over a 10-15 day period. The crawfish will burrow in as the water recedes.

The next important consideration is growing a food supply for the crawfish to feed on in the fall, winter, and early spring. According to Billy Craft, State Biologist, SCS, rice is currently the best plant to grow in a crawfish pond. Alligatorweed, smartweed, water primrose, and other similar types of native aquatic plants can also be used.

Flooding of the pond is the next step, and should be done the last week in September or the first week in October. The pond should be flooded to an average depth of 18 inches. This will flush the crawfish from the burrows, and October is one of the months when a lot of crawfish are hatched.

Shortly after hatching, the young crawfish will start feeding on the tender vegetation and the small organisms attached to the vegetation.

Water quality should be closely monitored at this time. Dissolved oxygen should be checked regularly and levels maintained above 3 ppm (parts per million). Additional water can be pumped into the pond periodically to “flush it.” This will help maintain a desirable water quality, especially as to dissolved oxygen.

Periodic samples of the young crawfish should be taken, and trapping can usually start around Christmas. Most crawfish farmers use from 10 to 30 traps per acre to remove the crawfish that are going to market.

In the winter months, trapping success is best when “warm spells” occur. Then daily trapping can be done in March, April, and May. The pond should be slowly drained in early June, and the production cycle starts over. For more information on crawfish pond management, contact Baer at the local Soil Conservation Service office.