Crawfish harvest delayed by cold

Baton Rouge, La. (AP) — The recent cold weather will cause a temporary halt in the crawfish harvest but isn’t expected to cut a total expected to hit 100 million pounds.

Before the cool temperatures set in, aquaculture specialist Larry de la Brettone of the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service predicted that crawfish would be in stores by late November or early December.

“Anytime you get cold weather, it is going to slow things down because the crawfish is a cold-blooded animal,” said Tommy Hymel, associate agent of fisheries for St. Martin and Iberia Parishes.

Crawfish will be dormant while the water is cold and will finish growing once the water is warm again. The harvest ends in August.

Crawfish farming is a $70 million industry. Louisiana, which produces the most crawfish in the world, is the largest exporter of crawfish to Scandinavian countries.

De la Brettone predicted that this will be a good year for crawfish. The extension service has predicted that Louisiana will produce 100 million pounds of crawfish this season, more than half again as much as last year’s 65 million pounds.

Even though farmers in the rice belt of St. Martin and Iberia Parishes have cut back on their crawfish ponds, the wild crawfish harvest will keep the total big, said Hymel.

Perry Lavergne, farmer and service president of the Louisiana Crawfish Farmers Association, said that one reason for the reduction is that crawfishing isn’t as profitable as it once was and farmers are turning their ponds into crops. Sales for soft-shell crawfish tapered off last year, but Danny Moran, Jr., president of the Louisiana Soft-shell Crawfish Association, said the association plans to increase marketing this year to broaden consumer awareness.

In addition, Moran is negotiating deals that, if signed, will boost sales and perhaps double the 150,000 pounds of soft-shell crawfish produced last year.

We are now trying to work on some solutions,” Lavergne said.

Bill Pizzolato, crawfish buyer for Tony’s Seafood in Baton Rouge said he started receiving medium-sized crawfish two weeks ago. He said he expects to pay 80 cents to $1.25 per pound for crawfish this year. Consumers will pay around $1.69 per pound for medium-sized crawfish, he said.

Sales for soft-shell crawfish tapered off last year, but Dr. Jay Huner, director of the Crawfish Center at USL.

“The biggest problem plaguing farmers is the iniquities in the marketplace. The problem is with processors dictating what they’ll pay farmers and commercial fishermen.