Crawfish Production Profitable Business for Area Rice Farmers

Crawfish production has become a profitable business for some rice farmers, according to Donald Landry of the Soil Conservation Service. Some are able to make as much with crawfish as they made with the rice crop the year before. This is usually not the rule, but it is possible.

In March, 1964, Floyd Vigneaux of the Cow Island community, opened 30 acres to crawfish fishing. In the following two months, hundreds of people paid him for the privilege of catching crawfish. It provided many hours of recreation and many pounds of food for the table. It is estimated that about 700 pounds per acre were harvested.

Dudley John LeBlanc on the Coulee Kinney Road about one mile north of Abbeville operates 11 acres for crawfish production. Unlike Vigneaux, who opened to public fishing, LeBlanc’s two teen age sons harvest the crawfish and places orders with people in Abbeville. In the last three years, they haven’t had any trouble selling all they could catch. This system has a higher return per acre but requires more labor.

This is only two examples of the many farmers now doing crawfish farming in the rice section, Landry stated, for rice and crawfish production go together. The needs of the crawfish for survival and reproduction (an abundance of organic matter for food, shallow water and periods of dryness) are ideally supplied by rice cultural methods.

“At best, raising crawfish is a ‘hit and miss’ proposition”, stated Landry, “but there are a few basic things than can be done that will help make it a success.”

Carl Thomas, Soil Conservation Service biologist, made field studies of the crawfish and developed a few rules to follow. He recommends that crawfish should follow a rice crop and the field selected at least one year before production is anticipated. The fields most likely to succeed are those with a past history of crawfish, fairly heavy soils, level, without too many rice levees and can be easily flooded with a well or pump. An early maturing rice variety should be planted because the earlier the field can be flooded, the sooner the crawfish will be large enough to harvest.

No special treatment is needed except maybe stocking a field with crawfish soon after the first flooding. The crop is produced as usual and the field flooded with about four inches of water after the rice is harvested. Gradually the water level should be raised until the levees are full and maintained that way until harvesting is completed. Harvesting can usually be started in February or March. There are some instances where harvesting was begun as early as January.

The most successful crawfish ponds have followed a rice crop. Attempts to raise crawfish on idle rice land or permanent pastures have not proven too successful.

For further information, contact the Soil Conservation Service office assisting the Iberia - Vermilion Soil and Water Conservation District, located in the courthouse in Abbeville.