Crawfish Promotion Panel Favored

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Urged on by the fast growing new industry of commercial crawfishing, the House Agriculture Committee on Friday approved a bill creating a board to promote the marketing of the state’s favorite delicacy.

“In order to make a profit, we must increase promotional efforts to find new markets and it’s that simple,” said Rep. Jimmy Martin of Welsh, chairman of the committee and chief sponsor of the measure.

The market already is expanding, surprising many longtime fishermen who had made a living selling their catches for the thousands of crawfish boils that occur in neighborhoods throughout the season and to restaurants.

Many who caught the ugly mudbugs in the Atchafalaya Basin and other favorite spots now have gone into what is known as aquaculture, the commercial raising of crawfish.

A recent Louisiana State University report said privately managed crawfish impoundments on agricultural and forest lands “has pushed total acreage near the 80,000-acre level, up about 25 percent from the amount of acreage just one year ago...Professionals who work with the industry estimate a current-year production capacity between 20 and 40 million pounds. This implies a $30 million industry.”

Martin said a Louisiana Crawfish Promotion and Research Board could help expand the industry even more, which could make the once simple pastime of crawfishing one of the most viable industries in Louisiana.

“Look what we did years ago by establishing the sweet potato board,” he said. “Now our sweet potato industry has international recognition and we are second in national production.”

The state association of commercial crawfish fishermen want the bill, said a spokesman.

The board will be funded by the fishermen, who will pay 25 cents for every 100 pounds of crawfish bait they buy.

Sixty percent of the proceeds will go for promotion and 40 percent for research, said Martin.

The eight member board would be appointed by the governor.

The bill, being pushed by the state Department of Agriculture, was approved 8-2 and sent to the House floor where it probably will be debated early next week.

On file in the Senate is a bill to make the crawfish the state crustacean.