Crawfish Shells
Spawn New Industry

By GUY COATES
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BATON ROUGE (AP) -
Crawfish tails are a mainstay to Cajun diets. But
the leftovers are a $1 million garbage problem in
Louisiana, and a researcher wants to turn the mess into a
new industry.

Eighty-five percent of the
crawfish cannot be eaten, so
tons of stinking heads and
shells are thrown away each
spring. In St. Martin Parish,
for example, it costs $200,000
a year just to bury the waste.

Samuel Meyers, a pro-
fessor at Louisiana State
University, has been working
on the problem for years and
said he may have found a
way to convert the stench
into the smell of dollars:
make chicken feed or fish
feed out of the leavings.

St. Martin Parish is work-
ing with LSU to finish the
research that has been un-
derway for nearly a decade.
They hope they'll know in six
months if the project will
work.

Meyers, a food and marine
scientist, has been working
under the Sea Grant Pro-
gram on means of using the
new feed in the so-called
pond farming.

Meyers already has sent
some of the product to the
Northwest and he said salmon
farmers are overjoyed. Shipments also have gone to
Japan for pond operations
involving Sea Bream.

Pond-grown salmon don't
have the natural pink color of
those from natural streams
and the pink color helps
growth and flavor.

That's where the crawfish
comes in.

"We extract the pigment
from the crawfish," Meyers
said. "The pigment is oil
soluble. We use soy oil in the
process and end up with
pigment-rich oil. It's a cook-
ing, grinding type of extrac-
tion and we end up with a
meal.

"The protein-rich meal can
be used for various livestock
diets, diets for poultry, for
the pet industry as well as for
fish. The pink pigment
has an effect on growth and
reproduction and helps the
flavor of the meat.

"You might not know this
but flamingos would be white
but their diet includes so
many crustaceans that they
turn pink."

The problem now is to
determine if the process can
be cost-efficient on a large
circle.

St. Martin Parish is one of
the few places in the nation
where there is enough waste
to make such an industry
profitable, said Meyers.

The parish has 29 pond
farms and ends up with tons
of crawfish waste. It
accounts for much of the 20
million pounds of crawfish
harvested in Louisiana each
year. Of that total, 18 million
pounds is waste.

Synthetic pigment now
sells for $400 a pound, LSU
officials said.

Meyers said a processing
business might be able to net
$500,000 for every 10 million
pounds of waste. "I believe
that's a conservative
estimate," he said.

A processing plant would
need only 10 or 15 employees,
he added.

Under the agreement with
the parish governing
authority, the 29 pond farm-
ers in St. Martin would have
first crack at a co-op plan.

"Through our pilot study
we hope to have some figures
for them in six months, in
time for the 1984 season," said Meyers.