Crawfish show draws hundreds to Lafayette

LAFAYETTE (AP) — Racing crawfish, boiled crawfish, crawfish etouffee, crawfish traps and imaginary crawfish drew hundreds of people interested in farming, processing or just eating Louisiana mudbugs to a hotel here Saturday.

The crowd included Agriculture Commissioner Bob Odom, said Jane Barnett, spokeswoman for the Louisiana Crawfish Farmers Association, which put on the first crawfish tasting and trade show.

"We're having as many as five- or six-hundred at a time go through. It's a constant turnover. We've got 'em leaving and we've got 'em coming right behind them," David Hammond, general manager of the Lafayette Hilton, said about 90 minutes into the 10-hour show.

"We've got the parking lot full, too."

Parking lot attractions were an exhibit of crawfish harvesting techniques and five-foot-high kettles full of crawfish boiling with hot spices.

Inside, about 20 restaurateurs dished out plates of traditional dishes such as jambalaya, crawfish etouffee or crawfish bisque, and more exotic fare such as beignets — the square doughnut-like pastries usually found sprinkled with powdered sugar — stuffed with crawfish.

Terryl Hebert of Michael's Catering estimated that he had sold 100 dishes of crawfish salad, crawfish with mustard sauce, and crab and corn bisque between 10 a.m. and 11:30 a.m.

Cooking demonstrations were scheduled every half hour from noon to 6 p.m. — except at 2 p.m., when the crawfish races were to be held.

"The racing commissioner from the Breaux Bridge Crawfish Festival is here, with the crawfish queen and the ecrevettes — her entourage," Ms. Barnett said.

Contestants start in the center of a 10-foot circle, and the one that scuttles to the edge first is the winner.

About 20 booths spotlighted crawfish farming techniques, she said.

In addition to companies hawking plastic bags for peeled crawfish meat, crawfish traps or other wares, there were exhibits by LSU, the University of Southwestern Louisiana and Southern University, all of which have crawfish research centers.

The show was put on to let restaurateurs and food buyers around the country know that crawfish farmers can supply the tasty crustaceans year-round, Ms. Barnett said.

Until recently, almost all crawfish were caught in the marsh. But over the last four or five years, more and more farmers have been flooding their rice paddies to grow crawfish during the off-season.