In late March or early April, rice is planted in the fields that will later be used as crawfish ponds. When the rice grows to a height of about a foot, some time in early May, the ponds are seeded with crawfish.

During the summer months, the fields are drained and the rice is harvested. When the fields are drained, the crawfish burrow underground. In September or October, the fields are flooded and used exclusively as crawfish ponds.

The crawfish eat the decaying rice stalks, explained E. J. Cormier.

Craig Cormier said the public usually starts looking to buy crawfish around November. But the best quality crops aren’t ready until January, he said.

“We start putting our traps down after Christmas,” he said. The crawfish season runs from January until June.

Late in the season, farmers like the Cormiers must compete with fishermen who work the Atchafalaya Basin, where crawfish grow naturally. Before crawfish were raised in ponds, the Basin was the sole source for commercial crawfish production.

Because of the Basin’s swift moving water and abundant food supply, Basin crawfish have the reputation of being larger than pond crawfish and are often asked for by patrons of local restaurants. While pond crawfish can grow to the size of their Basin cousins, crawfish in the wild grow faster and consistently larger than the pond variety.

Craig Cormier said the price of crawfish drops around April when Basin fishermen start bringing their catches to market. The supply increases, he said, therefore the demand decreases.

Given the physical labor and high operational costs, what are the benefits of running a crawfish farm? The Cormiers responded in different ways, but it all boiled down to the same thing. “They taste good,” said Curtis Cormier.

Added his brother, “You can holler barbecue and cold beer, and there’s a good chance no one will show up. But you holler crawfish, and the people – they’re gonna show up. I guarantee.”

E. J. Cormier, who noted that his sons are “next to experts” at cooking crawfish, said his business is still brings the family together just as it was 40 years ago.

“It’s still the same …” he said, “the whole family coming together for a boil. It’s just like a family reunion, and the crawfish is kind of what makes it happen.”