Crawfishermen hard to keep
Pond owners say hard work, snakes major drawbacks

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MORGANZA — Angela Rimmer says some people just don’t like hard work, but the crawfish pond owner admits the reason a lot of workers quit could be due to the snakes.

Rimmer, who runs Hank’s Crawfish Pond with her husband, Hank, ran a classified advertisement in the newspaper to attract workers for their 260-acre pond. The Rimmers received so many responses that they have a waiting list of about 40 people, but Angela Rimmer says it’s tough to keep steady help.

“Some of them have not crawfished before,” she said. “They usually work one day and quit. They say there are too many snakes or it’s too hard. Some don’t say anything. They just don’t come back.”

Two newcomers recently spent the day crawfishing and never returned to collect their money.

“They had two snakes in their boat,” Rimmer said. “I don’t know if they are coming back, but I heard they had to fight the snakes.”

For some fishermen, the sensation of walking through 3 feet of muddy water to check traps is all too familiar.

“Yeah, it’s a nasty job,” commercial fishermen Lonnie Fitzgerald said. “It’s like walking 12 miles through quicksand.”

Crawfishing at Hank’s Pond involves wading in 3 feet of murky water, lifting galvanized steel traps into a bucket and cleaning weeds out of the boat motor. The task is made even more difficult because the traps cut, crawfish pinch and the boat wanders. Occasionally, snakes drop from trees.

Hank’s, located on La. 1 just north of Morganza in the Atchafalaya Spillway, is open seven days a week during crawfish season. The pond is divided into nine sections. Two people usually set and check traps in each section for half a day.

Hank’s provides the boat, bait and traps. Workers are paid a flat daily wage plus set fee per pound of crawfish.

Crawfish isn’t the only game to be caught at Hank’s. Workers may hunt for bullfrogs, but they have to give half of their catch to the management.

Commercial crawfish ponds should benefit this year because low water levels in the swamps caused a poor wild crawfish season, Rimmer said. Hank’s pond is producing crawfish later than other ponds, so it should yield crawfish until June, she said.

“This should be our best year,” she said. “There aren’t any wild crawfish this year. Our pond is late this year. Right now, they aren’t biting too much because we have too much vegetation or natural food. So they have enough to feed on instead of bait.”

One woman who fishes at Hank’s said the worst drawback to working the pond is hunger.

“We have one small problem,” she said, looking wistfully at sacks of crawfish. “We don’t get to eat them.”