Diversity

key to state seafood harvest

By Jim Bradshaw
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Report

Louisiana’s seafood industry, “by conservative estimate,” employs at least 20,000 people — most of them in south Louisiana — and has an economic impact to the state of over $2 billion annually, according to a just-released study.

The study was conducted by Dr. Walter Keithly, a LSU marine economist, and was commissioned by the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board.

The study says that Louisiana’s national reputation for its shrimp, oyster, crab and crawfish products make it among the national leaders in the quantity and value of seafood harvested each year — and that this harvest has been augmented more recently with production of high-valued species such as spotted sea trout, tuna, grouper and swordfish.

In addition, these fishermen help provide jobs in other industries, including boat building, equipment repair and the service business; as well as for processors, wholesalers and distributors; and others.

According to the study, the Louisiana fisheries harvest, including alligator and other farm-raised species, had a $350 million value in 1989, the last year studied.

In recent times, Louisiana’s annual harvests from natural fisheries have exceeded a billion pounds each year and are often closer to the two-billion-pound mark, the study says. The dockside value of these harvests since the mid-1970s, adjusted for inflation to 1988 dollars, has generally fallen in the $250 million to $350 million range.

Menhaden (pogie fish) have traditionally made up a large percent-age of Louisiana’s annual commercial harvest. These fish are used for pet food and for oils used to make a variety of industrial products. But, the study says, “edible seafood” landings in Louisiana have also been on the increase.

During the early 1970s, for example, edible seafood landings averaged about 120 million pounds annually. By the 1980s, these landings had increased to about 150 million pounds. Since 1986, seafood harvests have averaged well over 200 million pounds and have in some years approached the 250-million pound mark.

The dockside value of these harvests, adjusted for inflation to 1988 dollars, has also been increasing. Before 1976, the dockside value of Louisiana’s edible seafood harvest generally fell in the $100 million to...