Domestic Catfish Said To Be More Productive

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BATON ROUGE — A Louisiana State University fisheries experiment has indicated that fish farmers who raise wild catfish might boost their production by some 30 percent by producing domestic catfish instead.

Domestic catfish are those derived from commercial hatcheries and wild from lakes, rivers and streams.

Directing the research, believed to be the first comparing the two types of channel catfish, was Dr. James W. Avault Jr., associate professor of fisheries in the LSU School of Forestry and Wildlife Management. Farmers raise both types in impoundments.

The LSU Agricultural Experiment Station project was conducted in cooperation with the Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries Commission at the Rockefeller Wild Life Refuge in Cameron Parish.

Three ponds were stocked in March with fingerlings of a domestic catfish strain and three others with the young of a wild strain. At harvest in September the domestic averaged 2,000 pounds per acre and the wild 1,550 pounds. Both received the same rations, the content and portions of which were in line with regular commercial catfish operations.

Dr. Avault said this extra 450 pounds per acre, based on a price of 70 cents a pound to the farmer, would represent an additional annual yield of $12,600 in a 40 - acre operation and $31,500 in a 100 - acre operation.

He explained that although it had already been known that domestic catfish outyield wild strains, the research provides better insights on just what variations can be expected in production yields.

LSU fisheries graduate student Marion Burnside of Boling Green, Mo., carried out the experiment with the help of Guthrie Perry of the commission.

The popular domestic strain was obtained from a commercial fish farm in Mississippi and the wild strain from Lac Des Allemands in southeast Louisiana. The former is a product of 10 years of mass selection of channel catfish originally obtained from the Yazoo River.

Others contributing to the project were Dr. Kenneth L. Koonce, associate professor in the LSU department of experimental statistics, and Dr. William A. Johnson, professor and nutritionist in the department of poultry science.

The project is part of a comprehensive LSU multi - department catfish breeding study, which in turn is part of a state regional research program on catfish headed by Dr. Avault.

The results of the experiment adds promise to the main aspect of the LSU breeding study, Dr. Avault said, where two strains of domestic and two wild are being used in crossbreeding and selection to develop a superior catfish.

If the Mississippi domestic strain, developed by mass selection, outperforms the wild strain by such a margin, he said, then the more scientific LSU endeavor should also have possibilities in producing a still better catfish.

He said although it usually takes years to develop superior strains, noticeable progress has already been made in the two-year-old LSU catfish breeding program.