Evangeline Parish crawfish farmers produce more pounds per acre than just about any parish in the state, Dwight Landreneau, Cooperative Extension Aquaculturist for a seven-parish area (including Evangeline) told local Rotarians during Tuesday's meeting.

"Statewide, farmers average about 600 pounds of crawfish per acre, but Evangeline Parish produces between 700-750 pounds. Without a doubt, your farmers grow some of the largest crawfish," he explained.

Although its still an infant industry, and subject to great price variations, Landreneau said crawfishing has become a tremendous second crop for area farmers. "It's now considered legitimate by the IRS. It didn't take long for the government to figure out this was a big business," Landreneau reported to the laughter of the audience.

Evangeline Parish contains between 100-125 crawfish producers, each employing between three and five full-time workers.

Louisiana produces 95 percent of the world's crawfish, yet consumes 85 percent of it. The remainder is shipped to other states and also to Sweden, which has a very large market.

Four different categories have been developed for sales:
- Jumbo - 15 or fewer equal a pound;
- Large - 16 to 20 equal a pound;
- Medium - 21 to 25 equal a pound;
- Peeler - 26 or more equal a pound;

Crawfish smaller than peelers are normally sorted and returned to the ponds.

Landreneau, who comes to the parish every Wednesday to work with local crawfish producers, said the key to a good crawfish crop is water quality. "That is the key. Poor water quality can stunt growth."

He went on to add that area farmers have proven to be some of the great innovators of the industry.

"Harry Lee West of Chataignier came up with an oxidation box to help check the oxygen levels in his fields. The levels are measured with a digital meter."

"Adam Reed, whose operation is near Turkey Creek, uses a paddle-wheel to flush his pond. By recycling the same water, he saves a tremendous amount of money," he noted.

An electronic paddle-wheel is used at Richard LaHaye's farm near Reddell. "Fields are usually oxidized at night," he continued.

"Rice is still the number one choice for crawfish fields, but Landreneau said some farmers are turning to Sorghum Sudan grass. It grows extremely fast in conditions that are too dry or too wet, which is usually the case here in South Louisiana. "It's a great alternative to rice."

The harvesting of crawfish has improved by leaps and