Economy changing La. crops

Vegetable farms expanding slowly

By DICK WRIGHT
Advocate staff writer

Mrs. Jerry Hoyt believes fields of broccoli can be grown at a profit in Rapides Parish. She is getting money into that conviction.

By the fall, she hopes to have a freezing plant in operation near Lecompte, and have farmers under contract supplying fresh broccoli.

She is considering processing other vegetables as well.

In northeast Louisiana, farmers have launched a large-scale fresh vegetable growing enterprise. They are still learning hard lessons about getting cucumbers and squash from the field to the supermarket, but they intend to grow vegetables again this year.

Louisiana has long grown an abundance of vegetables and fruit — peaches at Ruston and Clinton; strawberries in the southeast; shallots in St. James Parish; sweet corn, shallots and cabbage in Lafourche; a wide assortment of vegetables in Plaquemines; bell peppers and other crops in Tangipahoa, to name some. Selling them ranges from the front-yard roadside stands to big contracts with supermarkets.

Now some farmers who ordinarily grow fields of rice, cotton or soybeans are trying vegetables on a commercial scale.

James Boudreaux, vegetable specialist at the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, said farmers in Morehouse Parish are growing vegetables in addition to their large field crops.

Broccoli will be the mainstay of the Rapides freezing operation, but Hoyt expects the freezing plant to process green, string bean, squash and possibly other vegetables. Processing of some vegetables could start as early as summer.

Selling the product is not expected to be a problem, since Hoyt already has a buyer. Farmers also will know before they plant what price to expect, she said.

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