The exchange of ideas continued last week at the USL Experimental Farm in Cade as Arne Fjalling of Sweden's Board of Fisheries, Australian Andrew Cameron, and USL professor Jay Huner conducted experiments aimed at streamlining crawfish harvesting.

"There's no way we can afford to pay for this kind of expertise, considering the lack of funding from the state," said Huner. "We're fortunate to have these people come in and work with us. They can look at our problems differently than we do and offer solutions we had not thought of."

A cooperative effort between USL and LSU helped bring Fjalling and Cameron to the area, Huner said.

Fjalling has spent some of his time at the USL farm testing net configurations for catching the crustaceans. He's already drawn some conclusions: Nets for Swedish crawfish don't work on Louisiana crawfish, and vice versa.

"I'm looking at the technical aspects of trapping the crawfish, and I brought my traps to make some comparisons," said Fjalling.

Huner pointed out that improving the efficiency in harvesting crawfish will have a positive impact on profit, since 80 percent of crawfishermen's costs are in harvesting.

Cameron, whose Mulataga Aquaculture Co. operates out of Perth, in the state of Western Australia, says he has developed a new, secret net that works well.

"It improves efficiency by 50 percent," Cameron said.

How?

"Well, I wouldn't like to say more than that it takes into consideration the behavior of the Yabby," he said.

Originally a "wild native crustacean, the Yabby is one of the largest crawfish in the world. About 10-15 percent of the harvest grows to a foot long, according to Cameron.

Mulataga has developed a packing system whereby the Yabbies can be transported live for 50 hours to markets in Europe and Asia, thousands of miles from Australia.

"We have a 100 percent survival rate," said Cameron, a marketing director for the company.

He said Mulataga hopes to bring the Yabby to the American market, although no timetable has been established.

Australia's crawfish industry boomed over the last five years, he said, and the Yabbies are produced and harvested at a cost of about $1 U.S. each.

"Traditionally, Australians prepare crawfish similar to Louisianians; they boil them," Cameron said. "And we eat them with lots of beer."

But not lots of crawfish, at least not the quantity eaten in a sitting here.

"In Australia you would never sit down to that kind of volume, simply because of the costs. It would be quite horrifying," Cameron said.

Fjalling said Swedish crawfish are actually Signal crawfish, a North American breed taken to Sweden after a fungus wiped out its native crustacean.

"The industry is picking up again, and so the government wants to develop efficient management and harvesting techniques," Fjalling said.

Both Fjalling and Cameron said they were impressed with the information they gathered from the crawfish industry. . . .

Cameron said they were pleased with the image of the product is everything.

"Purging is not an option; it's essential," he said. "Consumer image of the product is everything."

Also, consumers prefer larger crawfish, making another demand on crawfishermen, he said. Growth rates and feeding techniques will have to be developed to grow the larger crawfish, he said.

Both Fjalling and Cameron said they were pleased with the information they gathered from the conference in Baton Rouge and their visit to the southern Louisiana crawfish industry.

I have some ideas," Fjalling said. Cameron said they were pleased with the information they gathered from the conference in Baton Rouge and their visit to the southern Louisiana crawfish industry.

"The setup for the development of ideas through the study of international exchange," he said.

"It's been an enormous benefit to me," Cameron said. "I'll be going home with a few things in the back of my mind to devil with. And I'm sure I left a few ideas for others to devil with."