Catfish grow in large ponds at ATL's Lebeau site. Aerator churns water to keep up oxygen level.

The Integrated Aquasystem, as the site is called, brings major fish farming to south Louisiana. Besides doubling the fish farm acreage at the present site, Summers said ATL is planning a processing plant nearby as well as a separate site for growing hybrid striped bass.

Summers said the Lebeau fish farm is staffed by college graduates, refugees from the Oil Patch bust and local unskilled labor, about 100 people in all. One former oil company employee, Tim Leger, is general manager at Lebeau farm. ATL opened the farm to a tour and reception recently, with the LSU Agricultural Center and Agro-Flex, a private organization interested in promoting aqua- and agriculture, as co-hosts for a program on the economic impact of aquaculture.

In a formal presentation, Summers was glowing in his praise for Louisiana as a site for aquaculture, or water farming. And the demand for food fish continues to grow, he said.

Summers foresees south Louisiana farmers going into fish farming when the processing plant is built. He spoke of the spinoff service and equipment industries.

By DICK WRIGHT

LEBEAU - From the air the ponds that make up the Aquaculture Technologies Ltd. fish farm here have the symmetry of giant window panes.

Along U.S. 71 the layout of ponds spreads westward over some 1,900 acres.

Most of the ponds are growing catfish. A few have hybrid striped bass. In all there are 100 ponds with fish, according to an ATL spokesperson. There are also some crawfish, and a building at the site has facilities for soft-shell crawfish.

ATL has built the first sizeable fish farm in south Louisiana, and it is not finished.

"Buildozer's have stripped the flat, black-earth landscape of most of its vegetation and dug ponds and pushed up levees. The catfish ponds are 12 to 14 acres in size, with water four- to five-feet deep.

The water to fill them is pumped from deep wells on the property. It comes from a salty aquifer. Salinity is a plus. The catfish can live in it, and saltiness helps keep down disease in the ponds, an employee said.

"We'll pull about 20 million catfish

In development and marketing the products.

ATL sells its products under the LeTopper brand name. Aquaculture Technologies is headquartered in Lafayette. Besides its fish farming in Mississippi, ATL has marketed its aquaculture technology in Poland and West Africa.

Summers came to ATL with a background in food marketing. According to company information Summers was an "international marketing strategist, a strong specialist in development and marketing of branded food products such as Chevita Bananas and Planters Nuts." He is also a director of ATL.

Other directors are Alvis Lee Timmin, a professor at Redlands University in California with experience in marketing and advertising; Norman Brachfield, a cardiovasculi surgeon; Charles Metzendorf, identified as a New York entrepreneur and financier; Henry Reed Jr., in charge of ATL's Mississippi operations; Elaine Tempelstein, who is involved in management of a family-owned Canadian fish packing and distribution enterprise, and Charles Veerooten, photographer and writer.