By PAT PARISH

After 285 years, the United States is purchasing Louisiana all over again. Consumers across the country have discovered that Louisiana products mean good food.

In New England, consumers buy flash-frozen crawfish at the supermarket. Californians can visit Cajun festivals, complete with Louisiana food products. Louisiana-style mixes and frozen entrees appear in kitchens throughout the country, and restaurateurs are buying Louisiana seasonings to spice up their menus.

Louisiana companies are both fueling the boom and responding to it by coming out with new products to augment their existing lines, and stepping up their marketing.

This latter-day Louisiana purchase is a financial boon to the state. For instance, last year agricultural food production contributed $7 billion to Louisiana's economy.

The Louisiana seafood industry "is on a roll," said Ken Roberts, marine economics specialist with the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service and the Seagrant Program.

"People are interested in seafood and they're interested in eating it the way we like to prepare it," he said. "Louisiana now has four No. 1's going for it," he said. In addition to being the No. 1 producer of both shrimp and crawfish, the state has recently become No. 1 in blue crab and oyster production also, he said.

A lot of people are going to be looking at us, naturally, for seafood supplies. And when they come looking, they find a lot more of our companies that are processing entrees," he said.

In addition to frozen entrees such as Frey's Cajun Classics that are marketed in the United States, Roberts said several Louisiana companies are now shipping prepared crawfish dishes to Sweden for sale in supermarkets.

The so-called Cajun craze is one factor in the expansion of Louisiana's seafood industry, but not the only one, Roberts said.

"We have very progressive, well-organized people in the business now. Otherwise we wouldn't have been able to capitalize now on the Cajun craze."

Other industries have also profited from the nation's interest in Cajun cooking. The market for seasoning sauces (mainly hot pepper sauces) had remained stable for 10 years, then in the mid-1980s production increased more than 40 percent.

Catalogs selling Louisiana products are doing well. Community Coffee is projecting a 40 percent increase this coming season.

Some Louisianians are concerned about those bad-tasting foods being called Cajun while others resent the loss of the dollars going for so-called Cajun cuisine from somewhere else.

During the recent session, the legislature passed a bill that will license products as authentic Cajun. Sponsored by Rep. Francis Thompson, D-Delhi, HB1517, and now governor-approved Act. 325 provides for the state to develop a Cajun logo, register it as a trademark and license its use.

Regulating the products labeled Cajun will be done by the Marketing Commission headed by Bob Odom, commissioner of Agriculture and Forestry, and made up of people in the industry — manufacturers, processors and growers. The bill that passed the Senate and the House of Representatives, with no dissenting votes, also provides for an advisory panel with people on it from eight specific parts of the food industry, such as seafood and meat.
Cajun Creole: a card game featuring 12 well-known Louisiana food products, known on the market. A objective on the "Go Fish" card game, the game is designed for the tourist trade and includes the food company names and addresses to the food products can be ordered from out of state.

Products featured in Bayou Kingfish Mix, Brown's Velveteen ice cream, Carmella red beans, Keywest rice, Savannah's sausage, Boeuf's cayenne syrup, Tabasco pepper sauce, Tasso, Dosta king cake, Trappey's yams, Billy's potato chips, and Zatarano's crawfish, shrimp and crab boil. Recipes featuring Louisiana products follow.

Quick Cajun Loaf

Boutique pork loin
Italian sandwich
Thick, unrefried or brown sugar

1. Cut pork loin into (2-inch) slices.
2. Combine sliced pork and brown sugar and place it in the mixture.
3. Put strips of sliced turkey using Cajun Sweet Smoke pecan sauce and turn frequently for approximately 45 minutes.

Cajun Rice-Eye Steak

Ribeye steaks
Thick, unrefried or brown sugar

1. Marinate steak for at least 30 minutes.
2. Place steak on hot grill using Cajun Sweet Smoke pecan sauce and turn frequently.

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