Jean-Christophe Arbrun (seated) is spending an interesting month with the Charles J. Dupuis family of Cecilia as part of the CODOFIL student exchange program. Standing from left are Mr. and Mrs. Dupuis and their children, Aimee and Eric. (Staff Photo)

French/Cajun youth enjoys Cecilia farm work

By Martha Aycock

Cecilia - CODOFIL's student exchange program has brought a youngster from the countryside near Paris to a place atop a tractor in a Cecilia field-apparently none the worse for wear. Jean Christophe Arbrun, 14, came to live with the Charles J. Dupuis family here on July 17 and will return to France this week. The Dupuis' 14-year-old daughter, Aimee, a prize-winning French student at Cecilia Jr. High, has just returned from a month-long stay in Belgium, also part of CODOFIL's student exchange.

Certainly tourist attractions were part of both trips, but mainly the program encourages students to learn about the lifestyles of the parts of the countries they visit. Thus Jean-Christophe has helped Dupuis in preparing his fields for planting and has visited with friends and relatives of the family in various parts of Acadiana.

Rice and gravy with just about any kind of meat seem to appeal to the young man's appetite as well as a breakfast of cush-cush and milk. Jean-Christophe, says Dupuis, who is also an instructor at the St. Martin Parish Career Center in Breaux Bridge, has really fit into the family's relaxed lifestyle and appears to enjoy life in the country. An experienced traveler, having spent month-long vacations in both Germany and England, the youth says that he is coming back to Cecilia next summer.

Aimee is equally enthusiastic about her trip abroad. She stayed for 10 days each with three Belgian families, in Neuf Maison, Dour and DePanne, made trips to Holland and France and learned that she didn't like clams, horsemeat or wine... but confessed that the beer wasn't too bad. "Everything, though is served at room temperature. Nothing is ever really hot or cold," she said.

And the crawfish she discovered in DePanne didn't taste like those that come out of the Atchafalaya Basin. The people were wonderful, even if sanitary conditions sometimes left a little to be desired. The last family she stayed with had no bathtub and only bathed once a week. Refrigerators kept butter and other items cool but there was a "special kind of milk that needed no refrigeration... it just didn't spoil."

She says she loved the countryside, lace-makers and the horses and buggies which jaunted along brick roads, picturesque perhaps, but hard on the backside, she recalls.

Neither of the youngsters were prepared for the weather. Jean-Christophe did not bring enough cool clothing and Aimee says that she had no umbrella or the heavy coat she needed. Next time both will be better prepared for their adventures. But even if they have been a little too hot or a little too cold, they've learned much about the way another culture lives, perhaps enriching their appreciation on their own lifestyles.