Jerome Caraguel of Roggwiler Tannery of Louisiana inspects the different colored finished hides in “the ban” at the company’s plant in Lafayette. These 3-foot skins from farm-raised alligators caught last season can cost up to $300 each.

Alligator prices up 30 percent over last year

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GRAND CHENIERE — Paul Canik is a commercial hunter and was out Sept. 1 on opening day of Louisiana’s alligator hunting season.

“Last year, we had an OK season,” he said, “but a lot of people had a horrible season.”

Canik lives about a half mile from the waters that he fished.

With raw chicken, a big hook and a .22-gauge rifle that his grandfather gave him when he was a boy, he needed little else to haul in one of the world’s most feared beasts. But it’s all for good reason.

The monthlong harvest keeps the alligator population in Louisiana under control.

Between the commercial fishermen and the Rockefeller Refuge Center between Pelican Island and Grand Cheniere, there is little mystery left to the alligator. Alligators cannot breed in captivity, according to Canik, and therefore their eggs are harvested from the marsh, then the animal is raised in captivity.

“The demand is greater overseas for high-quality gators.”

Stephen Sagrera

TAGGED and returned to the wild. It is a carefully managed process.

About 15 percent of the farm-raised alligators are returned to the wild.

The harvest ends on Thursday. High price on this day: $22 a foot.

Prices in 2004 are 30 percent higher than last year, officials said.

“Thedemand is greater overseas for high-quality gators,” said Stephen Sagrera at his family-owned processing plant and alligator farm in Esther.

Kenneth Vicknair has worked at the plant for 15 years, skinning alligators. His advice, as he pulled the skin from the gator like he was taking off a sock.

“Pull. Yank. Tear. Don’t cut the hide.”

That’s so Sagrera can get the best possible price at the tannery. His biggest customers: Singapore, France and Italy.