EGGIO — Area alligator hunters displayed the results of their labor to gator dealers here Tuesday, one day after Louisiana's 31-day alligator season came to a close.

Wesley Perez of Yscloskey took 17 skins to the Southeast Louisiana Alligator Hide Auction in his remote St. Bernard Parish town and drove away with a smile on his tanned face and a $5,555.55 check in his pocket.

Perez and nine other alligator hunters met four gator dealers at Sebastian Roy Elementary School in Reggio, about 25 miles east-southeast of New Orleans.

Perez, who purchased 17 of the 26,000 alligator tags issued at the start of the 1986 harvest season, watched closely Tuesday as two Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service officials measured each of his salted reptile hides.

Perez's catch totaled 117 feet, and New Orleans gator dealer Michael Fonseca outbid his three competitors by offering the Yscloskey fisherman $77.40 per foot.

"Yeah, I'm going to take it," he said. "I thought it would be a little bit higher, but I'm happy. I was hoping to get $50.

Perez's 117-foot total was a whopping 34 feet better than last year's tally with 17 alligators.

"It was a good year, one of the better ones," said Perez, 42, who has been hunting gators since the age of 15.

"It's a lot of work, but I have fun too," he said. "I like to eat the meat. I've got a freezer full of it."

Kenny Boudreaux's 10 alligator skins, one of which stretched 10 feet two inches long, totaled 77 feet and earned him $3,723.75 — or $48.75 per foot.

The Des Allemands resident, who said he could have stayed home in St. Charles Parish and sold his hides for the same price, was shooting for $55 a foot at the auction.

"I'm disappointed," said Boudreaux, 35. "I've been out here since 9 o'clock. Now it's 1 o'clock. Time is money too."

Boudreaux, who admitted his take was "a nice month's work," has been tracking gators in the marshes of St. Charles for about 10 years in a 15-foot aluminum flatboat.

"This has been my best year so far," he said, before the bids on his skins were unsealed.

Boudreaux remembers landing his biggest alligator on the season's opening day, the day after Hurricane Florence passed over southeastern Louisiana.

The burly reptile swallowed a large metal hook baited with a raw chicken back, climbed out of the water and settled on a levee bank. When Boudreaux went to check his lines, he found the gator and shot him. Boudreaux and a friend tied the gator's jaws shut with rope, loaded him into the boat and headed back to the dock.

As they reached the shore and the motor slowed, the angry alligator — thought to have been killed by the gunshot — lunged for the water.

"He decided to just jump up and try to get out of the boat," Boudreaux recalled. "I grabbed him around the belly and wrestled him into the boat. I just knew I didn't want to lose this big alligator."

Raymond Couture Jr., 43, confidently predicted that one of the gator dealers would pay $84 a foot for his 17 hides acquired from the marshes around St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes.

Later, the Delacroix native said he was "a little disappointed" with Fonseca's high bid of $1,477.75 — just $45 a foot and only $3 above last year's going rate.

Fonseca said alligator hide prices were inflated during the early part of the season, because of the overseas demand for skins, but have begun to stabilize.

"Prices have been a little higher than the market," he said. "The hide market has been on the upswing the past couple of years," said Mark Shirley, associate county agent in Vermilion Parish.

Warren Mermillod, county agent in St. Bernard Parish, said Tuesday's auction was "more designed for the little guys who have to peddle their skins."