BATON ROUGE — As spring nears, prospects appear favorable for a good harvest of crawfish, those horrible looking things that taste so good, an expert says.

Crawfish have been available since November but most of the crop has come from commercial ponds.

A plentiful supply depends on what happens in the Atchafalaya Basin, says Robert Romaire, a fisheries assistant professor at Louisiana State University.

"Right now, things are looking pretty good," Romaire said Wednesday. "There has been a lot of precipitation in the upper Mississippi River Valley and the Atchafalaya Basin is beginning to flood."

He said crawfish available through mid-April will come from commercial ponds while the wild crop from the basin should begin to come in from early to mid-April.

"The wild crop looks more promising than the last two years," he said. "Last year was a very poor year."

A dry summer, wet fall and mild winter are needed for a good crop, he said.

Also, fresh water is needed in the spring to supply oxygen and to expand the range where crawfish feed, he said.

And because of the unpredictability of the basin, crawfish ponds will be the primary source of the crustaceans for the next five to 10 years, Romaire said.

"In 1979-80 season, 70 percent of the crawfish supply came from ponds and in the 1980-81 season, 85 percent came from ponds," Romaire said.

"A bumper crop will have 80 percent coming from the basin."

He said the number of crawfish ponds in the state has grown to about 60,000.

As ponds increase the harvests of crawfish, Romaire added, prices will become more competitive.

"Prices may come down some, but will never again see the days of crawfish selling for 35 cents a pound," he said.