Hints for Crawfish Farmers

By J. AUBREY MIRE
County Agent
Evangeline Parish

Pond crawfish farming has become a million dollar business in Evangeline Parish and surrounding areas. It is relatively inexpensive to grow because rice farmers have already got a lot of the production costs covered in their rice operation. Some crawfish farmers have already begun to flood their crawfish ponds, and others will soon begin flooding and managing ponds.

Crawfish production is a relatively new commodity for most farmers, but for some it's been a way of supplementing farm income for a number of years.

Here are some helpful suggestions or guidelines which should assist crawfish farmers in managing their ponds:

1. Repair levees and drains.
2. Planted vegetation should be mature and dry. If no food (rice) was planted, the tall natural vegetation should be bush-hogged to ensure good water quality. If the vegetation is cut prior to flooding the pond, oxygen from the atmosphere will dry the natural vegetation and speed up the decomposition process, thus lessening the potential for poor water (oxygen depletion) after flooding. Oxygen supply in the water is of prime concern. If you flood when the weather is too hot, you will rot the vegetation in the water and this saps the oxygen needed by the crawfish.
3. Crawfish trapping lanes and runs should be mowed or disked for greater access to traps and trapping efficiency.
4. If you are pumping water from a bayou or other source, the pump discharge should have a screening system to prevent entry of fish by pumping.
5. Be sure your water source has enough water to fill the pond once pumping begins. It can be a disaster to get a pond half full and run out of water or have a pump failure. Delay pumping if you feel this may occur.
6. If pumping from a rice well, be sure to have enough screens to break the water in as small droplets as possible to ensure sufficient oxygenation (aeration) of water as it is being pumped into the pond. If your rice well has a high concentration of iron, have the water run 40 or 50 feet before entering the pond in order to deplete the iron supply from the water. Iron will reduce oxygen levels when in high enough concentration.
7. Crawfish growth depends on flooding early, mild temperatures, ample food, and cool water quality. Flooding should take place from September 15 to October 15. Since this has been a fairly hot season, you may want to wait until late September.
8. Pond water should be recirculated (exchanged) beginning one week after flooding (once per week) and continued until cooler weather sets in. After the first frost, pumping should continue since the additional dead vegetation will be a major cause of low oxygen supplies in the crawfish pond.
9. Be sure water source is of good quality and free of insecticide runoff. There are certain pesticides which should not be used on rice fields which are to be followed by crawfish. The County Agent's Office has a list of pesticides which should not be used.
10. Before trapping begins, check the eggs in the female crawfish. Some early trappers may be harvesting females with eggs ready to be laid. Generally, the females are flooded from their burrows with the initial (first) flooding and will reburrow at the water level when the pond is filled (usually by November). The eggs have color changes from white to yellow to tan to brown. The eggs are not laid until they are brown. You can locate the eggs by splitting the tail and head. Pull the head open. At the top of the head is the liver, etc. and at the lower part are the legs and gills. The eggs will be at the bottom of the head on the leg side. They should be the size of number 7 buckshot B B's. If three or four out of twenty females have eggs, do not harvest for another two or three weeks.
11. Levees should be constructed to hold eighteen to twenty-four inches of water.
12. Traps should be inspected and repaired if necessary and should be dipped to increase trap life.
13. Locate a bait source now so that you will not be caught short later on in the harvest season. According to LSU researchers, black plastic wire traps will catch much more crawfish than galvanized wire traps. The most crawfish are caught by three and four hole black plastic wire traps then by one or two hole traps. There is no difference in catches between pillow-type traps and up-right traps.

LeFermier

Hints for Crawfish Farmers

By J. AUBREY MIRE
County Agent
Evangeline Parish

Pond crawfish farming ... 6 p.m.

More crawfish are caught when there are 20 to 30 traps per acre rather than the customary 10 traps per acre.