In Finland, crawfish can fetch big money

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CADE — The worst thing about crawfish season in South Louisiana is that it doesn’t last the year ‘round. In Finland, the worst thing is that one crawdad can cost $3.

University of Louisiana at Lafayette aquaculture specialist Jay Huner recently spent a few weeks in Finland teaching short courses on crawfish aquaculture at the University of Kuopio Institute of Biotechnology. He returned with an even greater appreciation for his favorite crustacean.

“Crawfish prices are so high in Finland and nearby Sweden that party-goers are served four to six crawfish each,” Huner said.

A crawfish farmer in Finland was paid about $1.85 per crustacean, Huner said, compared with the Louisiana price of about 4 cents, or 65 cents a pound.

In Louisiana, a crawfish boil is accompanied by corn, potatoes and heaping, steaming mounds of crawfish. It’s a festive event, but it’s taken for granted, Huner suggests.

In Finland, he said, a crawfish dinner is another matter altogether.

“(Finns) fill up on salads, cold cuts and potatoes,” he said. “They then dissect their crawfish as carefully as any freshman biology student and make several small, open-faced sandwiches on buttered, dill-covered bread.

“Each sandwich is downed with liberal amounts of wine, beer or schnapps.”

“Crawfish grow very slowly there in waters covered by thick layers of ice for six months of the year.

“Finns record their crawfish stats in the number of crawfish harvested rather than the weight in tons as is the case in Louisiana,” Huner said.

Finland harvested 4 million individual crawfish in the 1999 summer season, Huner said. Collectively they weighed about 220,000 pounds. Louisiana alone harvested more than 66 million pounds in 1998, according to the LSU Cooperative Extension Service.