Johnston sees aquaculture as key food source

By CARL REDMAN
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Consumer desire for healthier foods will increase demand for fish and other seafood products so sharply in the next decade that commercial aquaculture will be the only way to keep pace, U.S. Sen. J. Bennett Johnston said here Friday.

The United Nations predicts that the demand for fish and other seafood products will increase by 25 percent by the end of the century, but the oceans' fisheries are already being harvested to their capacity, Johnston told the fledgling Louisiana Aquaculture Association meeting at the LSU Agricultural Center.

"The only way to meet the tremendous demand will be to raise fish, crustaceans and other seafood in ponds, and Louisiana is ideally situated and equipped to be a leader in that area," said Johnston, D-Shreveport.

Aquaculture — farming catfish, bass, crawfish and other seafoods — is a $100 million industry today and it's just getting started, Johnston said.

"We are now stretching the capacity of wild fish, catching fish in the oceans, right to its breaking point," Johnston said. "... We found out what happens when you overfish redfish. When the demand went up on redfish and we had to put the moratorium (on harvesting redfish) on.

"One of the keenest competitions in the world is that which goes on over fishing rights — whether they be for tuna in the Pacific or for salmon up around Alaska... It's one of the hottest diplomatic areas in the world because the fish is in such tremendous demand and we're right at the capacity point in terms of fish (from the oceans)."

Johnston said Louisiana can capitalize on that demand but that more is needed in research and development of the aquaculture industry.

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Aquaculture

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Louisiana Legislature," Landry said. "... We want to provide input on matters that affect aquaculture.

Landry said one of the association's priorities will be to urge the state increase funding for the research work done at the LSU Agricultural Center.

"Without the research and the work that goes on here, our work in the field is totally useless," Landry said. "We're not and cannot fund research. It has to be done here at the university level, and it has to be funded by the state. We want to support that effort."

President Walter Landry, a fish farmer from Jeanerette, said the association was formed so that those involved in raising such products as catfish, crawfish, striped bass and alligators can support such efforts.

Landry said the LAA is a trade association that will allow the varied interests in aquaculture to work together, resolve any differences they have and speak with a single voice on issues that affect the industry.

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