Louisiana fisheries leader

A seafood industry study shows that during the 1980s Louisiana consistently ranked first or second among the states in the size of its fisheries harvest and among the top three states in the value of that catch.

The 1.2 billion pounds landed in Louisiana in 1989 accounted for 15 percent of the nation’s seafood harvest and trailed only Alaska in the quantity of output. That catch was valued at some $256 million, eight percent of the nation’s total, behind only Alaska, and, by a very small margin, Massachusetts.

If Alaska were excluded, Louisiana’s 1989 seafood production would be almost 30 percent of the nation’s total in poundage and 15 percent in value.

Four of Louisiana’s seafood ports — Empire, Cameron, Intracoastal City, and Dulac — ranked among the nation’s top ten in the amount of pounds landed and two — Dulac and Empire — ranked in the top ten in the value of landings.

In addition, Louisiana’s once fledgling aquaculture industry leads the nation in production of crawfish and alligators. Its catfish industry produced 42 million pounds of farm-raised products in 1989, fourth among all states. The state also produces significant quantities of soft-shell crab and soft-shell crawfish, and there is interest in production of hybrid striped bass and red drum.

Among study findings:

- The shrimp harvest has been a Louisiana leader, often exceeding 100 million pounds annually. The 146 million pounds caught in 1986 set a record. But rapid increases in shrimp imports during the 1980s have cut sharply into
prices paid to Louisiana shrimpers at the dock;

- Louisiana’s oyster harvest has averaged nine million to 13 million pounds each year. Peak production was in 1985, 14 million pounds. Louisiana’s 11.4 million pounds of oyster meat in 1989 supplied almost 40 percent of the nation’s total;
- Louisiana now produces 50 to 70 percent of the Gulf region’s blue crab harvest and accounts for about 20 percent of the nation’s supply. There were 53 million pounds produced in 1988, up from an average of 15 million pounds in the 1970s;

- Since 1988, the value of finfish landed has been in excess of $40 million. Eight species were valued at more than $1 million in 1989: catfish and bullheads, black drum, black mullet, spotted sea trout, sharks, snappers, swordfish, and tuna.