La. may spend $250,000 to push crawfish

By JOHN LaPLANTE
Capitol news bureau

The state is considering spending up to $250,000 a year to tell the rest of the country what Louisianians already know — that crawfish are good to eat.

The Joint Legislative Committee on Agriculture Tuesday endorsed draft legislation that would levy a tax on artificial crawfish bait to finance Crawfish Marketing and Research Board.

The money would be spent on advertising the mudbugs to other markets and for research on ways to raise more and better crawfish.

"The markets are there if we go and get them," Agriculture Commissioner Bob Odom told the Joint Legislative Committee on Agriculture.

Odom said a recent promotion trip to Baltimore brought orders of 2,000 pounds of crawfish tails a week, plus prospects for greater sales.

He said the $5 per ton tax on artificial crawfish bait would have little effect on the consumer price of crawfish. About 40 million to 50 million pounds of crawfish will be marketed in Louisiana this year.

Rep. Sam Theriot, D-Abbeville, said that, during a recent trip to Austin, Texas, lawmakers expressed interest in a steady crawfish supply.

"They're really crazy about it," he said.

A few months ago a Massachusetts economist hired by the Legislature to study Louisiana's financial problems recommended the state develop its underdeveloped resources. He said seafood in general and crawfish in particular could sell well with proper promotion.

Lawrence Adams, a crawfish farmer from Acadia Parish, said 95 percent of the crawfish harvested in Louisiana never leave the state. He said many farmers are producing far less than their capacity of crawfish because they don't have enough customers to buy the product.

Adams is a member of the Louisiana Crawfish Farmers Association, which is sponsoring the legislation. The bill will be introduced in the regular session of the Legislature convening next month.

Adams estimated the tax would bring in $200,000 to $250,000 a year.


"We do have a sweet potato promotion board, but you can't go to Sunset and buy a sack of sweet potatoes," he said.

Rep. Theriot questioned whether the majority of crawfish farmers would be in favor of the tax.

"I don't think you'll find any farmer who would be reluctant to find a way to move his product," Adams said.

The proposed legislation would allow crawfishermen to ask for their money back if they don't like how the program is handled.

The joint committee also endorsed a bill to allow the state to sell bonds to finance lower-interest loans for farmers — possibly lower than 8 percent.

Odom said high interest rates are a major cause of farm failures because farmers must carry over their interest charges when they have a bad year and can't pay off their loans.

Investors will lend the state money at lower rates because they pay no tax on the interest from government bonds.

Odom said the money would be deposited in participating banks, which would pass along the savings when they loaned money to farmers.

Loranger fair slated

LORANGER — The Loranger Volunteer Fire Department will hold its annual fair here June 3-5.

The fair will feature rides, games, contests and shows, and admission is free.

Booths may be rented for $50, and fair proceeds will help the department buy new equipment. For more information, call 878-9219.