LSU Gets $44,000 Grant To Make Crawfish Study

In spite of the long-time popularity of crawfish in south Louisiana, food scientists know little about the nutritional value, keeping qualities, chemical composition or microbiology of the tasty little crustacean.

Because this knowledge is necessary before the potentially big industry of crawfish processing, preserving and retailing is developed fully, the Economic Development Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce has awarded Louisiana State University a $44,000 research grant.

The 18-month study, underway now, is under the direction of Dr. Richard T. Lovell, assistant professor of food science. Assisting him in the research are Dr. Fred H. Hoskins, assistant professor of food science, and Dr. Robert M. Grodner, associate professor of food science.

Dr. Lovell said the study will involve both basic research, for little is known about the crawfish right now, and applied research. "The Department of Commerce is interested in the expansion of the crawfish industry in Louisiana to create more jobs," Dr. Lovell said. "Louisiana, potentially, could increase crawfish production many times over its present rate. From an economic standpoint, crawfish could become as important a food product as shrimp."

Dr. Lovell said personnel in the Soil Conservation Service and the Department of Wildlife and Fisheries are working on research involved with raising crawfish.

"Many rice farmers already are rotating their crops between rice and crawfish," he said, "and this year, more crawfish are being marketed from domestic crawfish operations, raised in controlled flooded areas, than from natural sources."

He said supply could not meet demand right now because "there just aren't any crawfish in the Atchafalaya Spillway this year."

But increased production through commercial crawfish farming is just the first step, Dr. Lovell said. "The next step is to establish new markets, for demand for crawfish is now primarily in south Louisiana. If new markets are established, there must be research in the processing of crawfish," he said.

Right now, scientists don't know the nutritional value of crawfish, or the chemical composition, which would have a bearing on which kind of processing and preserving are best. Little is known about the bacteria which affect crawfish and lead to spoilage. Knowledge of the bacteria count is necessary for quality control. At the present time, no one knows whether crawfish can be frozen for six months and still be a marketable product."

Dr. Lovell said these are some of the basic research questions which will be studied. His research team will also attempt to learn the best forms of marketable crawfish dishes and answer such questions as "Does a bisque require too much hand labor to be profitable as a canned or frozen product?"

At the end of the 18-month study, Dr. Lovell will present a feasibility report on proposed methods of crawfish processing to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Graduate students assisting in the research project are John A. Barkate of Sulphur; Nelson A. Cox, Napoleonville; James R. LaFleur, Opelousas; Scuddy J. LeBlanc, Morganza and George J. Flick, New Orleans.