Lafayette-based Aquaculture Technologies Ltd. has opened discussions to determine whether the LSU Agricultural Center could participate in the training and research needed by a joint venture between ATL and an international firm.

The joint venture calls for ATL and Taylor Woodrow PLC, a $2 billion British construction and real estate firm, to build enclosed fish tank-farms for European investors.

"Europe is where the high-priced fish market is," ATL Chief Executive Officer Jack Summers said. Summers comments came during a meeting with agricultural center, cooperative extension service and experiment station administrators, faculty and state government officials.

H. Rouse Caffey, chancellor of the LSU Agricultural Center, said he will form a smaller group for follow-up discussions with ATL on LSU's prospective role.

Summers said ATL has entered a joint venture agreement with Taylor Woodrow to build the enclosed fish farms - referred to as Intensive Culture Integrated System - on a "turnkey" basis for investors. Taylor Woodrow has the option of remaining as a joint venture partner on individual projects or turning the entire project over to investors.

Summers said ATL, which has a $250,000 prototype in operation on its 9,000-acre farm in Lebeau, has prospects for 27 projects worth $500 million.

He said ATL and Taylor Woodrow will begin the engineering and construction this year for three systems in the United Kingdom, Malta and Newfoundland.

Summers said systems would encompass a 300,000-square-foot tank system covering 1½ acres for breeding, hatchery and production facilities.

Summers said ATL will build its own $1 million, 10,000-square-foot enclosed tank system to grow striped bass in Lebeau.

Summers said LSU can participate in joint training programs for operating enclosed systems, which could attract foreign students to the university and open the door for endowments and fellowships.

Summers listed veterinary science, pharmacology, nutrition, marketing, animal science, genetics and other biological sciences as training needs.

LSU also could participate in research in advanced technological developments for enclosed systems, genetics and new species development, and preventive medicine and nutrition for fish raised in an enclosed environment.

"That's beyond our capability 100 percent," Summers said.

While LSU has played a major role in research and development of land basin aquaculture systems, Ag center chancellor Caffey said there is a gap in the program when it comes to enclosed systems.

The new technology opens a "whole new arena" for LSU, Summers said.