Besides the economic threat from imported crawfish what else is happening in the crawfish industry, Mike Moody, LSD Extension seafood specialist, was asked.

"Grading is the big change," Moody reported. Nearly all of the crawfish are being graded (sorted according to size.) This step in distribution developed as a result of selling crawfish to the Scandinavian market. The Scandinavians only wanted large crawfish.

The large crawfish command a premium price, and docks are willing to pay fishermen and farmers more money for the large crawfish. While some sorting is done by hand, most of the crawfish are sorted in converted cucumber grading machines.

Crawfish are sorted into three sizes or grades:

- Large or Select — these crawfish average 9 to 15 count per pound. These are the crawfish exported to Scandinavia.
- Consumer — these crawfish are for the live or boiler market. They average 16 to 25 count per pound.
- Peeler — these crawfish are small, over 26 count per pound and are intended for tail meat processing. Almost 20% of the small crawfish is tail meat.

While the grading has helped the export market, it has affected the price and marketing of Louisiana crawfish within the state.

Grocery stores in Baton Rouge are advertising specials on crawfish tails for as little as $4 a package. For the price to be that low this early in the season and at the height of the Lenten period indicates there is a surplus of peelers on the market.

Crawfish used to be sold by the sack, and a sack would contain crawfish of all three sizes. The sack crawfish now tend to be smaller, and more crawfish are being sent to peeler plants.

Some seafood markets and crawfish dealers say they have had to change their buying methods in order to obtain large crawfish for their customers.

Desi Kent of Bocage Seafood says he's buying only "live select crawfish . . . primarily from sources at Bayou Pigeon. The crawfish have been raised in aerated ponds or in the wild. These are large, quality crawfish," Kent said.

Bill Pizzolato of Tony's Seafood on Plank Road says that while grading is a way of life, it hasn't been good for some markets in the state.

"When I realized about five years ago what was happening with the grading," Pizzolato said, "I changed our buying procedure. We got four large, refrigerated trucks and started sending our buyers to the docks.

"We buy only ungraded crawfish," Pizzolato said. "We wanted to continue to sell the traditional mixed size assortment of sack crawfish. If we don't go to the docks and fishermen ourselves, we won't get the larger crawfish."

Pizzolato and Tony's Seafood made the adjustment in their buying habits, but many of the buyers for New Orleans markets have not. "It's hard to find large crawfish for boils in New Orleans," Pizzolato said.

Karl Turner, head of the Louisiana Seafood Promotion and Marketing Board, confirmed what Pizzolato reported. Turner lives in New Orleans and says he has noticed the abundance of small crawfish in the city. In fact, he put some of the small crawfish in his freezer last week to take out later.

Pizzolato thinks the small crawfish in New Orleans are going to hurt the overall market. People are going to buy a sack a couple of times and be disappointed with the size, Pizzolato said, and they won't buy more.

In addition to grading, Moody expects more processors to institute seafood safety programs. Many will be computer controlled and follow a federally recommended Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points (HACCP) inspection procedure.