Prospects seen as good for '93 pecan crop

The 1993 Louisiana pecan harvest is well under way with the expectations of an excellent year.

"Louisiana is expected to produce an above-average crop of 25 million to 30 million pounds," according to Dr. Earl Puis, extension horticulturist with the LSU Agricultural Center. "This is up considerably over 4 million pounds produced in 1992."

Louisiana traditionally ranks fourth in pecan production behind Georgia, Texas and Alabama. This year’s pecan production in the U.S. is forecast at 428 million pounds.

Puis explains that Louisiana produces traditionally two types of pecans, seedling (native) and the improved varieties. Native seedling pecans grow naturally along the Mississippi and Red River flood plains. Improved varieties have been planted commercially throughout the state.

Nuts of native pecans usually are generally smaller and have a thicker shell than their improved counterparts. Pecan varieties have been improved through the years by selection and breeding. Although the largest percentage of production still is the native pecan, improved varieties are gaining a larger portion of the market each year, Puis says.

Pecans are purchased in two forms, shelled and unshelled. Shelled kernels may be the most convenient way to buy pecans, but they are not always the most economical. Pecans will normally shell out about 40 percent to 50 percent kernels by weight. Buying pecans in the shell normally is the most economical.

But before buying pecans in the shell, Puls says always to inspect them for quality. The kernels should be free from blemishes and have a natural amber color. Beware of pecans with external shell blemishes. They may indicate the possibility of insect or disease damage and poor kernel quality.

He says never to buy pecans when the shells have holes, because holes are an indication of damage by the pecan weevil. Any discoloration on the kernels will indicate the possibility of insect damage or poor storage conditions before purchase.

"Pecans make an excellent gift. This will be an excellent year to supply loved ones far away with that favorite Louisiana product - the pecan," Puis says.