Louisiana crawfishermen are soliciting federal intervention to halt the influx of Chinese crawfish. Congressman Billy Tauzin’s aides predict it will be a hard sell. These Vermilion Parish farmers check their traps near Erath. Pond-raised crawfish harvesting began in mid-November and will continue until May.

Protecting La. crawfish a hard sell

By Jonas Breaux
Staff Writer

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Getting protection for Louisiana crawfish under the 1995 Farm Bill is unlikely, says an aide to Rep. Billy Tauzin (D-Chackbay).

However, there are other alternatives, according to Tauzin aide Ken Johnson.

Scott Angelle, vice president of the St. Martin Parish Police Jury, said Tuesday that he had contacted Tauzin and fellow Congressman Jimmy Hayes to seek their help in trying to find ways to slow the influx of cheap Chinese crawfish tail meat into this country.

However, Johnson told The Advertiser Thursday that trying to get crawfish on the Farm Bill is very unlikely.

"Congressman Tauzin plans to meet with Rep. Pat Roberts to discuss the problems associated with imported crawfish," Johnson said. "I don’t want to deceive anyone. It is going to be a tough sell."

Roberts (R-Kansas) is chairman of the House of Representative’s Agriculture Committee.

"The mood here in Washington is to cut programs instead of adding things to them," Johnson said. "To expand programs under the Farm Bill is honestly going to be pretty hard."

Louisiana crawfish processors have been steadily losing customers to cheap imported tail meat over the past five years. Some industry analysts have said that Bayou State processors already have lost huge chunks of markets they developed west of the Sabine River.

"It’s not just tail meat markets in this country that we have to worry about," Frank Randol, of Randol’s Restaurant in Lafayette told The Advertiser recently. "Markets that we have developed in Europe are being flooded with Chinese crawfish and we stand a good chance of being pushed out of this market."

Johnson said going the Farm Bill route for relief is very unlikely but that there are other options Tauzin will look into.

"(Tauzin) feels our chances for relief are more likely through an import fee," Johnson said. "Other options include statutory law or a mechanism involving the President issuing an administrative ruling concerning imported crawfish."

Johnson said Tauzin plans to call a meeting with U.S. Trade Representative Mickey Kantor to lay out what the problem is.

"We are going to jump through hoops ... go through the chain of command and do whatever we have to do to get something done about this problem," Tauzin’s aide said.

Last spring, state Agriculture Commissioner Bob Odom toured the state calling on Louisiana consumers to boycott Chinese tail meat which at times during the crawfish season can be purchased for half the price of locally processed tail meat.

"Imported tail meat is really hurting processors in our parish and throughout Acadiana," Angelle said. "This is a very serious problem that needs to be addressed now before it’s too late."