Graded crawfish have become a major factor in pond farmers' quest for a fair return on their production dollar in recent years, according to the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service.

"Size really has become an important factor since we started exporting large crawfish to the Swedish market," LSU researcher Robert Romaire told a session of the Louisiana Aquaculture Conference recently. "We’ve changed our research activity and management systems to produce large- and medium-size crawfish."

"About 10 years ago, we managed for yield because there was no grading, no better price for the bigger crawfish. But with the price differential paid for graded crawfish, we’ve changed our management strategies, our harvesting strategies to go for yield and size," he said.

A survey of grading stations at three locations in the crawfish production area last year showed good returns for large and medium pond-raised crawfish from a sampling of 1.5 million pounds, Ken Roberts, extension service marine economist, said.

Twenty-seven percent of the crawfish graded out as No. 1 or large, 32 percent as medium and 41 percent as peeler grade, he said.

Large graded crawfish brought a weighted average of 88 cents a pound in the survey of January through May sales last year, the news release said. Selling prices ranged from 79 cents to $1.02 for those graded large. Mediums had a weighted average of 59 cents a pound in a range from 42 cents to 65 cents. Peelers averaged 30 cents a pound, with prices running from 20 cents to 42 cents.

There was a large variation in prices by grading locations, Roberts said.

The figures showed large crawfish brought twice as much revenue per pound to the industry than poundage figures would lead one to believe, he said. Mediums also yielded more revenue than indicated by poundage alone, he said.

Even ungraded field run crawfish from farm ponds averaged 45 cents a pound, while the commercial catch of wild crawfish from the Atchafalaya Basin averaged 33 cents a pound. "The message is that when you listen to these biologists talking about forages, flooding, stocking rates and harvesting, there’s always some advantage to shooting for the large crawfish," Roberts said.

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There is no table present in the document. The text is about the importance of size in crawfish production and the financial benefits of grading crawfish. The text is clear and understandable without the need for further clarification.