Greg Faulkner is ready to introduce a new invention to Louisiana crawfish farmers. He calls it a “crawfish skimmer.”

Faulkner said it will save farmers money when they harvest the last crawfish as the season ends and the catch is down.

The skimmer seines crawfish instead of catching them in traps.

Most of the year, Faulkner is a civics teacher at Comeaux High School in Lafayette. He also has interest in other spare time he makes nets and other kinds of fishing gear. He said he gets orders from both the east and west coasts from people looking for nets, or asking him for a specially made seine. He makes nets for Memphis Net and Twine Co. Faulkner and his wife Debra have turned a part-time job into a business.

Using the shrimp trawl as inspiration, Faulkner worked with Jay Huner, crawfish specialist at the University of Southwestern Louisiana, in fabricating the skimmer. He and Huner tested it in ponds at USL’s experimental farm. A grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Southern Regional Aquaculture Center supported their work.

Faulkner’s device consists of a metal bar mounted across the front of a boat of the kind used to go to the fishing grounds.

Measures of crawfish show difference in catch between baited side and unbaited side of the skimmer’s path.

Skimmer

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commonly used to run traps in shallow ponds and rice fields which are flooded after the rice harvest to grow a crop of crawfish.

Polyethylene nets are suspended from the bar on either side of the boat. Weights take the nets to the bottom and other pieces of the device keep them spread open.

One person can use the trawl. But in a demonstration of the trawl, Faulkner and Will Bernard III, aquaculture technician, took the boat out for a few minutes. Worker Henry Janssen helped empy the catch.

They caught a netful of crawfish on one side of the “harvest lane” of the pond, but few on the other side. The difference in the catch is that only one side of the lane was baited for the demonstration, according to Huner.

Huner said bait is put into the path of the boat about an hour before the trawl. The bait lures crawfish from the sides of the pond to the middle, where the nets can get them, he said.

Bait lures mostly hardshelled crawfish, Huner said. That’s a plus, he said, because the soft crawfish are a waste because the trawl tears them up. Crawfish go through a soft, fragile stage when they shed their shells as they grow.

“I designed it to take out crawfish at the end of the season when the price is low and it is not economical or feasible to use bait in traps,” Faulkner said.

“The point is we were trying to develop something for cleaning up crawfish at the time when prices are very low, and it was impractical to harvest from traps,” Huner said.

Faulkner said a rice farmer using the skimmer would have to cut a clean swath of low stubble through a rice field he had turned into a winter crawfish pond. A rice combine leaves tall stubble as it threshes the heads of the grain. Tall stubble would thwart the net.

Huner said he believes innovative farmers will use the trawl right away, and it will be used generally in the next five years.

Faulkner stressed the importance of polyethylene over nylon for the seine. He said he has been told by experts that only nylon will work for nets, but he said nylon collects mud and debris.

Huner said one concern he and Faulkner have is that some people will use nylon for the seine. It won’t work, he said, and then they will say the method is faulty.

Faulkner said the system costs well under $1,000. “One of the basic things we did at the outset was to keep it simple,” he said.