September proclaimed alligator month

The Louisiana Legislature has proclaimed September as American Alligator Resource in recognition of the significant contribution that industry makes to the state's economy. Louisiana leads the world in the production of farm-raised American alligator hides for the classic leather market, and a significant number of wild alligators are harvested in the state during September, according to Extension aquaculture agent Mark Shirley of the LSU Agricultural Center.

Farm-raised alligators posted a value of $11.4 million for meat and hides in 1997, and wild alligators harvested were worth another $8 million. "Louisiana is recognized worldwide for its conservation efforts with the American alligator as a renewable natural resource," Shirley said, adding, "The swamps and coastal marshes of Louisiana provide an ideal habitat for a thriving population of American alligators."

The state Legislature also recognized the alligator's importance, proclaiming, "The commercial use of the American alligator resource in Louisiana supports and promotes the conservation of the species as well as its productive wetland habitat."

The alligator industry - both farm-raised and harvested from the wild - employs people throughout Louisiana as trappers, farmers, processors and in many other ways.

In addition, since 1979, when the Louisiana Health Department first allowed the sales of alligator meat, its value has steadily risen from just over $128,000 in 1979 to more than $6 million in 1996.

"Alligators are important not only to those involved in the alligator industry but also the entire economy of the state," Shirley says.

This year's harvest of wild alligators begins Sept. 2 and runs through Oct. 1. The harvest season is tightly regulated by the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries, which issues a limited number of tags to hunters based on evaluation of the alligator's habitat.