State's diverse seafood almost unknown here

Louisianians owe it to themselves to explore the gastronomic delights of amberjack, yellowfin tuna and other species that abound in Louisiana's offshore waters, especially in light of the commercial ban on redfish and limitations on speckled trout.

"Amberjack and yellowfin tuna and some other species are excellent for grilling and even blackening," says marine economist Dr. Ken Roberts of the Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service. "And commercial fishermen have been increasing catches from far offshore. Seafood lovers owe it to themselves to explore these fish and the many ways they can be prepared. Programs of the Louisiana Seafood Marketing and Promotion Board are helping restaurant chefs and consumers gain more confidence with the species."

Roberts says that amberjack, tuna and other less publicized species are available from many seafood markets, but sales probably are not as good as they could be because customers do not view them as products from Louisiana's Gulf waters. Knowing that the fish are part of Louisiana's vast marine resources will stimulate sales, he believes.

While commercial redfish landings were climbing from 2.9 million pounds in 1985 to 7.8 million pounds in 1986 and then falling to 4.4 million pounds in 1987, yellowfin tuna catches zoomed from 227,000 pounds in 1985 to 5.6 million pounds last year, and amberjack went from less than 100,000 pounds in 1985 to more than 400,000 in 1987.

However, lawmakers at the recent session of the state legislature imposed a complete ban on commercial fishing of redfish for three years and established an annual maximum quota of 1.25 million pounds of speckled trout.

Sportsmen's limits under the new law include five redfish per day and only one exceeding 27 inches, and 25 speckled trout, with none less than 12 inches and no maximum limit on size.

"The yellowfin is a high-seas tuna. Often called the steak of the sea, it has red meat that looks like steak. It's cut across the loin like steak and is almost boneless, excellent for grilling," adds Roberts.

We think you can take the popularity of redfish and diversify it into four or five different types of fish to keep from putting pressure on any one species," says restaurateur Todd Gerald of Ralph and Kaco's seafood restaurant in Baton Rouge.

A member of the Louisiana Seafood marketing and Promotion Board, Gerald says that merely transferring the pressure off redfish onto another species would just endanger the other species. By satisfying seafood lovers' palates with tasty creations using such species as amberjack, mahi mahi (bull-nose dolphin), flounder and yellowedge grouper, he says that the demand will be shared among more than one type of fish.

While admitting that he has found no comparable replacement for the trout, he has been offering flounder fillets on the menu as flounder almonds and meuniere.

"We serve a stuffed flounder that is split down the middle with bones in. But what do you do with flounders that are too big or small for stuffing?"

"We take those and fillet them out. There are some people who can't handle the bones, anyway. These dishes have gone over pretty well."

He says that amberjack he prepared was well received at a press party prior to the River City Blues Festival in Baton Rouge a couple of months ago. He also prepared it on the cooking segment of a local television show.

Gerald says that popularity of the blackening style of fish preparation, which is not limited to redfish, has really fallen out. The texture and taste of amberjack is promising and to familiarize his customers with it, the whole fish is displayed in the restaurant's seafood market in the lobby. Waiters, too, are well schooled on its features.

"That's the only way to do a product justice," he concludes.

4-H'ers place in poultry, egg confab

All of Louisiana's 4-H Club members who competed recently in contests at the 1990 National Poultry and Egg Conference in Louisville, Ky., placed in the top 10 — including Evangeline Parish's Chris Reed who finished eighth in chicken barbecue.

Competition was held in categories of poultry judging, egg preparation, chicken and turkey barbecuing, and a quiz bowl. The event was held in conjunction with the North American International Livestock Exposition.

Reed also was a Louisiana team member in the Avian Quiz Bowl which finished eighth.

The state's poultry judging team was seventh in production judging and 10th in the overall poultry judging competition.