Sugar growers and millers have been visiting the production facility of Sterling Sugars in Franklin to see the Cromption Louisiana Low Turbulence Clarifier.

Sugar farmers, millers expect to benefit from new technology

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FRANKLIN — Cane growers and millers from across the Western Hemisphere have been visiting the Sterling Sugars mill in Franklin.

The visitors are coming to witness new technology called the Cromption Louisiana Low Turbulence Clarifier, or Cromption LLT Clarifier — that’s wringing more sugar out of the production process by using two filtration processes.

The first cuts the time it takes to separate sugar from mud and other impurities. The second uses a degassing device — a flash trough — that keeps more air out of the process.

The president and chief executive officer with Cromption International, George Schaffer, said he travels the world to look at sugar mills and he sees a lot of waste.

“They don’t know how much sugar they’re losing,” Schaffer said.

The Cromption LLT Clarifier came out of a collaboration between the LSU AgCenter’s Audubon Sugar Institute and Cromption International, a private-sector business in Baton Rouge that Schaffer started 12 years ago.

Officials tour the production facility at Sterling Sugars in Franklin on Monday.

Personnel at the Audubon Sugar Institute designed the technology, and Cromption buys...
Continued from page 1A

the material, custom-builds the systems and markets the process.

"LSU has been very prominent in the sugar industry," said Benjamin L. Legendre, an LSU professor and head of the Audubon Sugar Institute. "Without that (LSU) research, the industry could go away."
The partnership could prove to be lucrative to LSU, which could share profits with Crampton if the processes become profitable, said Wade Baumgartner, director of the LSU AgCenter Office of Sponsored Programs and Intellectual Property. Patents are pending for both processes.

The Crampton LLT Clarifier was installed at Sterling two years ago to see how well it worked. Besides Sterling, Crampton has installed clarifiers in two of Louisiana's other 10 mills, Schaffer said.
The results have been pleasing: It now takes less time to produce more sugar.

Crampton and LSU believe the endeavor — which both call a successful public-private venture — can help people in the world's poor regions that produce sugar.

"The sugar industry brings a lot to the Third World," Schaffer said, citing infrastructure built to accommodate sugar industries in poor countries.

He said the industry spurs road-building and sewerage systems, jobs and home construction, banking and engineering.

Schaffer said Crampton and the Audubon Sugar Institute hosted visitors from international sugar companies who've visited Sterling Sugars' Franklin plant, which was initially built in the 1800s.

Crampton also is marketing the filtration system in Mexico, which has 56 sugar mills, and in South and Central American countries.
The sales bonanza, Schaffer said, could be in Brazil, where 500 mills operate. Crampton is looking to open a marketing office in Brazil, Schaffer said.

On a blustery, cold Monday, cane trucks and tractors pulling trailers loaded with stalks queued up to be off-loaded at the Franklin site.
The truckers were hauling in some of 2013's last sugar-cane stalks, and some of the stalks were muddy.

Mud in its different varieties is one of the enemies at sugar mills. Whether it's the soft mud of south Louisiana or the red clay kind from up around Bunkie, it must be separated and removed from the sugar during the process in an economically feasible manner.

"We're getting pretty dirty cane from all areas" of cane-growing Louisiana, said Luis Acevedo, chief engineer at Sterling Sugars.

Acevedo said in other areas of the world where cane is grown, farmers stop cutting the stalks when it rains. In Louisiana, he said, farmers must continue cutting and millers must continue grinding in some rain because of the possibility of cane-killing freezes in December and January.