

CRAWFISH

A COMMODITY FACT SHEET COMPILED BY THE LOUISIANA AG IN THE CLASSROOM PROGRAM



HISTORY

Native Americans in the area were the first credited with harvesting and consuming crawfish even before the Cajuns arrived on the scene. They used to bait reeds with venison (deer meat), stick them in the water and periodically pick up the reeds with crawfish attached to the bait. By using this method, the Native Americans would catch bushels of crawfish for their consumption. History records show that sugarcane plantations in New Orleans in the late 1700s used small ponds to grow crawfish.

Although crawfish had been consumed for centuries by both native Americans and Europeans, commercial sale of crawfish in Louisiana only began in the late 1800s. At that time, supplies of wild crawfish were harvested from the natural waters of the Atchafalaya Basin.

During the 1930s, with the development of improved transportation and cold storage, crawfish markets in Louisiana shifted from local consumption in rural areas to metropolitan areas such as Baton Rouge and New Orleans. During this same period, the adoption of crawfish nets resulted in much more efficient harvest methods.

By the 1950s, the crawfish trap was widely used and the practice of re-flooding rice fields after harvest became commonplace as a method to produce crawfish for harvest during the autumn, winter and early spring. This practice of crawfish 'farming' eventually spread to impounded woodlands and marshland as well. By the mid-1960s, acreage had increased to approximately 10,000 acres of managed crawfish ponds. At this point, an industry based on peeling crawfish became established, which in turn fueled further expansion of both crawfish farming and wild harvests. Acreage continued to increase, from approximately 44,000 acres in the mid-1970s to current levels of roughly 116,000 acres. In 2006, the crawfish harvest in Louisiana increased to about 70 million pounds of pond-raised crawfish and 8 million pounds of wild crawfish.

Limited harvests of farmed crawfish occur in other states, such as Arkansas, South Carolina and Texas. Official estimates are not available, but industry observers suggest that Louisiana typically accounts for 90 percent of total U.S. production, depending on the season in question.

FACTS

Crawfish (*Procambarus clarkii*), also called crayfish, crawdads, and mud bugs, are freshwater crustaceans found on every continent except for Africa. In appearance they greatly resemble the lobster, but are much smaller. Crawfish range in size between 3 to 10 inches depending on the species and the location. They grow throughout a series of molts by which they shed their exoskeleton and produce a new one. A crawfish nearly doubles its size with each molt.

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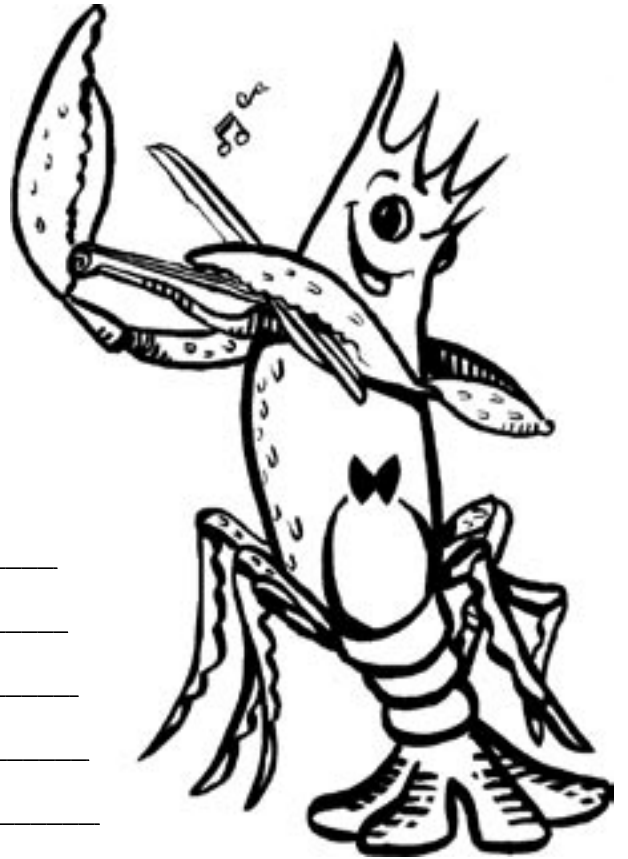
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SING ALONG! "CRAWFISH ARE CRAWLING"

(Sung to: "Frere Jacques")

Crawfish are crawling, crawfish are crawling,
On the ground, on the ground.
Watch out for their pincers,
Watch out for their pincers.
Snap, snap, snap; snap, snap, snap.

Source: Kindernature.storycounty.com



Facts about Crawfish

(Unscramble each word in bold.)

1. I have long **eannetna** instead of pincers. _____
2. I have sharp **snorh** over my eyes. _____
3. I can snap my **atil** to protect itself. _____
4. I have **oruf** pairs of legs for walking. _____
5. I have one pair of legs for getting **doof**. _____
6. I can walk forward, **adiewyss** or backwards. _____
7. I can find food far away with my special **snoress** on my antennae. _____
8. I have two pairs of **sleefre** and **wot** eyes, which are on stalks. _____
9. My enemies are large fish such as Grouper, octopus and **leoppe**. _____
10. I can shed my outer **leshl** or molt from time to time for a larger one. _____

PRODUCTION

Crawfish are both fished — from natural rivers, bayous, swamps, and lakes — and farmed. The main farmed species in the U.S. is the red swamp crawfish. Crawfish aquaculture in Louisiana involves two species: the red swamp crawfish and the white river crawfish. Both species are native to the region and well-adapted to coping with the wet-dry cycle found throughout much of the Gulf coastal plains.

Crawfish ponds are usually flooded in late September or early October. Harvesting crawfish from ponds is very labor-

intensive and costly. The most efficient trap for ponds is the pyramid trap. A crawfish combine is a specially-equipped boat with a hydraulic wheel powered by a small gasoline engine that pulls or pushes the boat through the pond. As the boat moves through the pond, the fisherman picks up the trap and empties the crawfish.

The U.S produces 60,000 metric tons of crawfish annually, with 90 percent of that coming from Louisiana. In a typical year, 50-60 percent of all crawfish produced in Louisiana come from aquaculture ponds.