

Louisiana Seafood

As interest in the development of the fur industry grew, so did the interest in a commercial fisheries development. From early colonial times shrimp species were plentiful on the New Orleans market; and no doubt the common names of these, “river shrimp” and “lake shrimp”, originated in that city. The term “lake shrimp” referred to the most plentiful of our migratory salt-water species, the young of which appear in lakes every summer, sometime in great schools.

Early methods of taking shrimp consisted of cutting a burlap sack in half and placing a handful of corn meal inside the sack. The sack was then suspended slightly below the surface allowing the shrimp to enter the sack and feed on the corn meal. Later methods included dipping or dragging hoop nets and the development of the use of seines. The early fisherman would use seines of about 120 feet in length and 10 feet in width. One man with a rowboat would circle out and back to a lugger, trapping the shrimp in a net.

Seiners who ventured outside, along Grand Isle beaches, or near the mouth of Bayou Lafourche at Fourchon, long recognized a small sea shrimp which they referred to as “Six Barbe” or “six whiskers.” This name was gradually corrupted to “Sea Bob”, which is what they are now called. (See [Estuary Live Video Clip](#)) Large catches of Six Barbe or Sea Bob were made by seining the beaches during favorable weather. The bulk of the Sea Bob catch was dried in the sun on the drying platforms, which dotted the coastal bayous and was shipped to Chinese colonies and over the world (See BTNEP Video [Clip 15](#)).

Early shrimp and shellfish were wrapped in moss to keep cool while being transported. Iceboats came after the turn of the century. Also, about this time, gasoline engines slowly came into use. True commercial shrimping did not begin until 1915 with the introduction of the otter trawl from North Carolina. With the advent of power boats and the development of sea-going trawlers, the shrimp grounds were extended, and both drying and canning industries grew by leaps and bounds. Commercial production went from half a million pounds in 1880, to 16 million pounds in 1919, and 32 million pounds in 1920. In 1917, there were 300 seines and only four trawls operating commercially in Louisiana. In 1937, there were 2,313 trawls and 35 seines operating.

Due to the development of refrigeration, new methods of harvesting, canning, packing, new preserving techniques, and rapid transportation, Louisiana shrimp were



reaching world-wide markets never dreamed of before. Today, shrimping is no longer a matter of going out in a small boat and bringing back a payload. Trawler hull designs have been changed, and gear has been developed to handle shrimp faster. Navigation aids such as radar, GPS, fish finders, ship-to shore radio, fathometers, computers, and other high tech gear are now in the reach of not only the big operators, but also the small independents.

Louisiana ranks second in the nation in commercial fisheries production and second in the nation in the value of production. Louisiana's 1980 fisheries production was valued at \$750,000,000. Lafourche Parish 1980 seafood production was 20.3 million pounds and valued at \$34,000,000. This rate has increased to 26 million pounds and was valued at \$31,000,000 in 2002 (LDWF 2002). Out of the Gulf States, which include Florida (West Coast), Alabama, Texas, Mississippi, and Louisiana produces 76% of all seafood production. Louisiana is also responsible for 14% percent of the United States seafood production (Fisheries of the United States 2002). This industry is not based solely on shrimp production. Menhaden, crab, oysters, redfish, speckled trout, white trout, and sheephead are all major contributions to the seafood industry.

These species are also dependant on Louisiana's estuarine coastal marsh, which acts as a nursery ground for Louisiana's seafood industry. Loss of Louisiana's coastal marsh places the entire commercial seafood industry in jeopardy through lowering water quality by allowing faster run-off of domestic pollution, and the physical loss of the nursery and food production areas for commercial and sport species. Fisheries production is related to the acreage of marsh in the estuary. Marsh loss does not correlate one-to-one with fisheries loss. As land loss increases you will notice a temporary increase in fisheries production due to a short-term increase in nutrients provided by the deteriorating marsh.

Residents of Louisiana have long overlooked the value of their coastal marsh. From the time of the earliest settlers, we have attempted to reclaim and manipulate the swamp and marsh areas. The coastal zone area of Louisiana does not easily lend itself to habitation or cultivation. It has become necessary from colonial times to build levees in order for us to inhabit and farm many areas of Lafourche Parish.

