

Cane Growers' Loss Feared

By DON LEWIS

If the price of raw cane sugar continues at its present low level through the next harvest season late this year, "a significant number" of sugarcane growers in Louisiana will go out of business, an official of the American Sugar Cane League said Tuesday.

Thomas M. Warner, information director for the league, added: "If they have to go through another bad year like they did this past year, it's going to really set them back."

He said he and the league are "cautiously optimistic" President Carter will act in the next week or two to curb foreign imports.

In an interview, Warner said the price of raw cane sugar now stands at about the 11 cents a pound. Last year, he said, the price was even lower — nine or 10 cents a pound.

"We need 15 cents or above," Warner said.

In a speech last Wednesday, James Thibaut, outgoing president of the Louisiana Sugar Exchange, expressed the belief that Louisiana will make it through "this current price catastrophe," but not before a lot of hard work is exerted.

Thibaut also said, "I believe the good sense of our government will intervene and not allow this chaotic situation we are now in to continue.

"However, in the meantime, I call upon all segments of our industry to hang on. Pinch the hell out of every dollar. Save every rusty bolt and nut. Make your people understand this is a matter of life and death.

"Double crop if you can," Thibaut said. "Be satisfied to use the fewer workers you may have and

work longer hours, if necessary."

Warner said what the sugar industry wants is a federally-imposed curb on the import of foreign-produced raw sugar.

Big foreign producers of cane sugar are the Philippines, Dominican Republic, South Africa and Australia. Louisiana ranks third in domestic cane sugar production behind Hawaii and Florida and ahead of Texas.

Speaking from the league offices in the Whitney Building, Warner said the International Trade Commission (ITC) recently conducted "an intensive study" lasting several months on the domestic sugar industry to determine if imports of foreign raw sugar were injuring the U. S. sugar industry or threatening to do so.

"Just recently," Warner said, "the commission voted that the foreign imports are indeed a threat and are injuring the domestic sugar industry."

He added, "This report was considered in the past week or two by President Carter's economic policy group. The ITC report recommends that raw sugar imports be cut to a level of 4.275 million tons annually, down from the 4.7 million tons imported last year."

The report has been sent to the President, Warner said.

Last Monday, several senators from the sugar-producing states, including Russell B. Long and J. Bennett Johnston, met with President Carter to discuss the problem.

"And," Warner said, "we feel that perhaps sometime this week he will announce if he will follow the ITC's recommendation or decide to do nothing or perhaps take another approach to the problem."