

VEGETABLE CO-OPERATIVE

AT OKSAPMIN

By Nancy Birge, O.I.C. Publications Section
Education and Training Branch, D.P.I., Konedobu



The committee members and the didiman discuss the distribution of vegetables

Food import replacement is high on the list of national priorities. The Oksapmin Sub-District in the remote highlands of the West Sepik is doing much to help achieve this goal through the production of vegetables.

A commercial vegetable project has been in existence for five years in Oksapmin. Until recently, the buying and selling of vegetables and the distribution of seeds was done by the Government. In the middle of 1979, the R.D.O. in charge of Oksapmin, Nicholas Cape, helped to set up a co-operative so that the project would be under

local control. It would then have the possibility of greater continuity than if it were run by public servants who may be transferred out of the area at any time.

The co-operative had its second monthly meeting in September 1979. There were 13 committee members at that time and a representative from the Bak Valley was expected to join them at the next meeting. The actual running of the business is carried out by the three paid officers: the chairman, Minan Grin; the secretary, Habat Namdat who was trained in agri-



Vegetable Market building at Oksapmin. This is where the cooler is kept and where the vegetables are bought from the villagers.
Photo: S. Weeks

Villagers selling their vegetables to the co-operative



Vegetables being loaded on the plane for Vanimo



The seeds are measured out for each committee member to take back to his own area.

culture at the Christian Leadership Training College at Banz, and the treasurer, Babiok, who was the vegetable buyer when the project was government run. Nicholas Cape provides advice and assistance both to the co-operative and to individual growers.

The business has been going well. In 1978, a cooler was bought with Rural Improvement Programme funds and New Zealand aid, and it is now operating. At present about 650 kg of vegetables are sent out of the valley by air each week. The main buyers are Steamships Trading Company Ltd, the army base in Vanimo and the Catholic Missions at Kiunga and Wewak. A wide variety of vegetables is grown: cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes, French beans, corn, pumpkin, carrots, English potatoes, celery, spring onions, cucumber, globe onions, turnips, beetroot, parsnips, mild radish, radish, zucchini, peas and capsicum. The greatest volume is in cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes and French beans. The vegetables

are bought from the farmers at 20 toea a kilogramme. The difference between this price and the selling price goes to pay the officers and to cover operating costs such as the buying of fuel for the cooler and the buying of seeds. Any profit made will be distributed to shareholders each year.

At the September meeting of the co-operative, a plan was drawn up for the committee to start a demonstration garden. The garden will help ensure a constant supply of all the vegetables grown, and any money earned from sales can be used for buying more seed. The produce from the demonstration garden will not be sold until all the vegetables supplied by the villagers have been bought. Each fortnight, two of the committee members will work in the garden and they will be given some pay for this part-time work.

The co-operative bought a buffalo from Banz at the end of 1979 and it was flown into

Oksapmin on a chartered Nomad aircraft. The buffalo can be used to greatly speed up the preparation of the gardens.

Willie Nitkel has been trained to handle buffaloes at the Village Motivator Course at Banz. The course is run by the Yangpela Didiman Centre, which is sponsored by the Lutheran Church. The men who go on the course, which lasts for ten months, are encouraged to take

their wives and children with them.

Willie is one of four men from the Oksapmin Sub-District who were sponsored by the British Voluntary Service Organization to go to Banz and learn about Agriculture. They will be able to use their knowledge to improve vegetable growing and subsistence gardening in Oksapmin.



The September meeting of the Oksapmin Vegetable Co-operative