

PIONEER DIDIMERI—MRS DESIE WIRUA

By Cecilie Benjamin, Rural Development Officer



Mrs Wirua instructing school children at Ewasse community school on the planting of pineapples.

Mrs Desie Wirua is one of the few women Rural Development Assistants who has ever worked for the Department of Primary Industry. Mrs Wirua was born before the second World War in Vunamami village on the Gazelle Peninsula of East New Britain. She received a formal education to Standard 3 at the Vunamami Methodist Mission near Kokopo before the Second World War. She has two adult children, John and Jenny, who have also worked at some stage for the Department of Primary Industry.

Mrs Wirua commenced her training at Talilgap Extension Centre in 1962. "Desie", as Mrs Wirua is known to everyone, has worked in extension at Keravat and Talilgap on pepper, cocoa and coconuts.

At Napapar, also in the East New Britain Province, Desie worked on pepper, cocoa, coconuts and chickens before being transferred down to the Hoskins Oil Palm Scheme when it was newly established in the late 1960s, and has remained involved with oil palm until her recent transfer back to the

Gazelle and the Lowlands Agricultural Experiment Station, where she will work principally on food crops.

Desie attended the Rural Development Assistants' Extension Course in Tigak near Kavieng in September, 1973, as one of the first women to do so.

Desie has worked with a number of "didimeri" and "didiman" and has taught many an expatriate newcomer how to speak Pidgin, the first thing essential to working with people in the Islands Region. Desie's wide knowledge of plants, fruit trees, bush trees, subsistence food crops, bush craft and vegetable growing has made her a valued information source and communicator of Papua New Guinea methods of food production.

In the Hoskins Oil Palm Scheme, Desie taught many women settlers how and why oil palm flowers should be pollinated, the most essential requirement for successful oil palm production. She also taught the women how

to apply fertilizer to their palms. All in all, Desie has a natural way with agriculture, as was evident in the beautiful round cabbages, carrots, chinese cabbages, parsley, lettuce, egg plants and many other kinds of vegetables growing in the Buvussi demonstration garden on the community centre (Buvussi is the largest subdivision of the Oil Palm Scheme).

Many of the grafted citrus now standing at Nahavio (the Oil Palm Field Headquarters) and Babata Department of Primary Industry Station (Bialla Oil Palm Headquarters) were grafted and maintained by Desie, as well as thousands of other fruit trees such as avocados, five-corners, laulau, rambutans, citrus, guavas and many other kinds of fruit trees distributed all around West New Britain.

Desie's main work in Babata was to establish food gardens as well as future planting material for settlers' food gardens for the Bialla Oil Palm Scheme. These gardens were of chinese taro, sweet potato, taro and bananas etc. Desie also established fruit trees around the station, and was even supervising some road building operations in the area.

Desie's pioneering contribution to women working in agriculture in this country has been considerable. She helped to pave the way for the present situation where Papua New Guinea is training its own women for working in agriculture at Vudal Agricultural College, Popondetta Agricultural College and soon at Highlands Agricultural College.



Mrs Wirua supervising the placement of a culvert under the road at Babata.

GIANT SNAILS—ANOTHER WAY

The giant snail is firmly established and is unlikely to be eradicated. It will probably spread all over PNG in years to come, and wherever the conditions suit it.

Seeing that we are unlikely to beat the snails, why not join them? Probably one of the best ways to create scarcity of any object is to make it desirable, and if possible, valuable financially.

The giant snail makes good eating, providing that they are properly cooked.

So what do we do? Well, we gather enough snails for our purpose and put them in an escape-proof container which has ventilation. There they can remain for a few days to digest any food already eaten, and clean themselves. Keep them moist.

Prepare a salt solution and soak your snails overnight. Make sure the vessel is filled and has a lid, otherwise the snails will avoid the saltwater. Next morning the snails will be dead and will have produced much slime. Once again scrub them under a running tap.

Now boil your snails for about 15 minutes, then take them out and pull out the meat from the shell with a bent wire. The meat will have a small "dirt bag" at the inner end and this should be pinched off. Lightly rinse your snails again.

Place a little garlic butter in each shell. Place the snail meat back inside the shell and top up with garlic butter again. Put the snails into an oven and bake for about 15 minutes. Serve the snails.

M. Mitchell