

CO-OP AT CHETICAMP

The September 1959 issue of "Trade News" tells the story of a little community nestled on the west coast of Cape Breton Island and the contribution its fishermen are making to Nova Scotia's expanding fish industry.

It is the story of the fishing folk of Cheticamp who have joined hands with a fishery co-operative to increase production four-fold within a decade. Last year the fishermen and their sturdy boats, which were built in Nova Scotia shipyards, put \$850,000 in the co-operative till and this year they hope to reach the million dollar mark. Only 10 years ago a year's business was less than \$200,000.

The success of this venture is due to the energy and progressive spirit of the fishermen and the co-operation of both federal and provincial fishery agencies, which have encouraged the fishermen to apply diversified techniques to boost their catches.

One of the latest advances has been the development of Danish seining operations which, in only a few months, has paid off far beyond the expectations of its most optimistic promoters. While this method of fishing is by no means new -- it was invented by a Danish fisherman in 1848 -- it is new in Cape Breton. Within the last few months six boats have been fitted with the gear and two more are in the process of being fitted.

An enthusiastic exponent of that method of fishing is J. Denis Aucoin, Manager of a plant at Cheticamp. Here is what he has to say: "Adoption of Danish seining has been one of the best things to happen to Cheticamp. It couldn't have come at a better time. With the present lack of cod in our waters, longliners are having a hard time even to make expenses. Our Danish seiners have been spared that grief. With the new gear there have been steady and large landings of flounders. It not only has brought substantial profits to the skippers and their crews, but it has enabled us to keep our plant going full bang. If we had been dependent on cod this summer, the picture would be bleak indeed."

With flounder catches remaining high, the economy is booming in the pretty community settled by Acadians who migrated nearly two centuries ago from the Isle of St. John, now Prince Edward Island.

This feeling of security created by prosperous fishing is reflected in the hearty attitudes of the village folk. Fishermen, shopkeepers, fish-plant workers, taxi-drivers, hair-dressers, in fact all the community, are sharing in this wealth brought in from the sea. The fish plant's annual payroll of \$125,000 is likely to increase this year.

Credit for the development of Danish seining in Canada goes to the federal Department of Fisheries' scientific arm, the Fisheries

Research Board of Canada, and the Provincial Government of Newfoundland. It was in 1951 that the Newfoundland Government conducted investigations to determine if that method of fishing could be employed in Newfoundland waters. A Danish seine fishing ground for witch flounder or grey sole was discovered on the Province's south coast, and commercial exploitation began in 1952.

In 1953-1954 fishery scientists, using the Newfoundland exploration vessel "Matthew II", continued the research off Newfoundland and in Gulf of St. Lawrence waters west of Cape Breton. Results in the latter case were excellent. Near the shore of Cape Breton is a deep channel, the western side of which slopes gradually toward the Magdalen Islands. In the area was found a large expanse of sea bottom suitable for Danish seining. Experimental sets made in depths up to 40 fathoms produced excellent catches varying from 4,000 to 9,000 pounds of witch flounder and plaice.

Development of Danish seining by fisherman Jans Vaever in 1848 proved to be a technique so popular that it soon spread to other countries in Europe, including the British Isles, and in more recent years to Australia and New Zealand. It is now one of the more important forms of fishing, employing thousands of fishermen who catch a wide variety of fish.

The seining operation is relatively simple. It consists of surrounding a large area of sea bed with two very long ropes -- each is almost a mile in length -- and a net, in such a way that when the ropes are pulled in and the area enclosed by them becomes smaller, fish on or near the bottom are driven into the centre where they are collected by the moving net. It can be operated only on grounds that are smooth and free of strong current and obstacles.

Actually, there are two forms of Danish seining, anchor fishing and fly dragging. In the former, the gear is out from an anchor to which the boat, after laying out the ropes and the seine, returns and ties up for hauling. This type is used by Cheticamp fishermen. In fly-dragging a buoy is used instead of the anchor and, after the gear has been set out, the boat picks up the buoy and cruises slowly ahead while hauling the seine.

It was the technological investigation that sparked Nova Scotia's interest in the seining technique. Potentiality of that type of fishing in Nova Scotia waters was immediately evident to the Industrial Development Service of the Department of Fisheries and also the Fisheries Division of the Nova Scotia Department of Trade and Industry.

Brian Meagher, a former fisherman of wide experience and now Director of Fisheries for the provincial government, started the promotion of this type of fishing.