

Coffee growing started on Tableland 79 years ago

The report in last week's "Tablelands Advertiser" that the Queensland Water Resources Commission had leased a block in Paddy's Green for coffee growing and processing is not the first instance of the growing of this crop on the Tablelands.

Coffee was grown and marketed in Atherton from 1900 to 1926 by Mr Gerhard Windhaus, father of well-known Fred Windhaus, of Walkamin, on a property adjacent to the present aerodrome.

This was the only plantation on the Tablelands at that time with Mr Windhaus and members of his family undertaking the whole process. The coffee when harvested was pulped and put into wooden vats for a few days to ferment, which process removes the sugar.

It was then washed and dried on perforated zinc trays in the sun which leaves the coffee in the hulks. In that state the product can be kept for three years.

Plants were pruned to keep them within easy reach for handpicking without climbing. The finished produce was sold under the label "Coffee, Guaranteed Absolutely Pure" through two Townsville firms - Burns Philp & Co and Samuel Allens. It became a popular item in grocery stores in the Burdekin, Charters Towers and Townsville areas as well as the Atherton Tablelands and further west.

Mr Fred Windhaus has medals and certificates dating back to 1905 confirming prizes gained at Townsville and Agricultural Shows in other centres. Mr Windhaus, Snr.,

hailed from Germany and after extensive travel through many countries, including America, he decided on Atherton in which to establish his venture. There he grew coffee for 26 years, then later acquired a large tract of country adjacent to the old Morganbury settlement at Walkamin.

He always contended that good coffee could be grown here on the Atherton Tablelands because it was free from frosts. Moving to his newly acquired property he became one of the original tobacco growers in the Mareeba/Dimbulah area but passed away without experiencing the fruits of his labour in tobacco.



AN EARLY PICTURE of Gerhard Windhaus, his wife, Madelaine and their three children. The baby on the right is now the well-known Fred Windhaus, of Walkamin.



Photograph of a poster of the time advertising Windhaus Coffee.



A section of one of Mr Windhaus's coffee plantations - note the rain forest in the background.