

Australian coffee makes comeback

THE first commercial coffee production in Australia since the early 1930s will come from a plantation being established in the Mareeba district in north Queensland.

The revival of interest in coffee is being spearheaded by brothers Dick and Nat Jaques, who have had considerable experience growing the crop in their native country, Tanzania.

Gearing up

At least one other Mareeba district property is gearing up for a coffee plantation, and the developments are being watched with interest by northern tobacco growers who view it as a possible alternative crop.

The Jaques brothers have spent more than 12 months setting up a 65 ha property in the Paddy's Green district for their coffee plantation.

A plant nursery was established first and the job of planting out 40 ha with year-old trees is expected to be completed by the end of the year.

Coffee was grown on the

Atherton Tableland from about 1900 to 1930, with up to 150 ha established at one stage.

However, the industry died out through lack of technology, labor and frost damage.

The Jaques brothers are confident the industry can be revived with modern growing methods and the introduction of mechanisation.

The Mareeba block was carefully chosen for its north easterly aspect to minimise frost, soil type and access to irrigation.

Careful attention has been paid to soil conservation, with the property surveyed and contoured prior to plantation establishment.

Irrigation

A drip irrigation system has been installed, drawing water from the channel system fed from Tinaroo Dam.

The plantation is currently being established with trees planted 1.2 m apart in 4 m rows, giving a density of about 2500 plants a hectare.

The brothers plan to establish Verano stylo in the inter-row spaces to help stabilise the soil and control water run-off during the wet season.

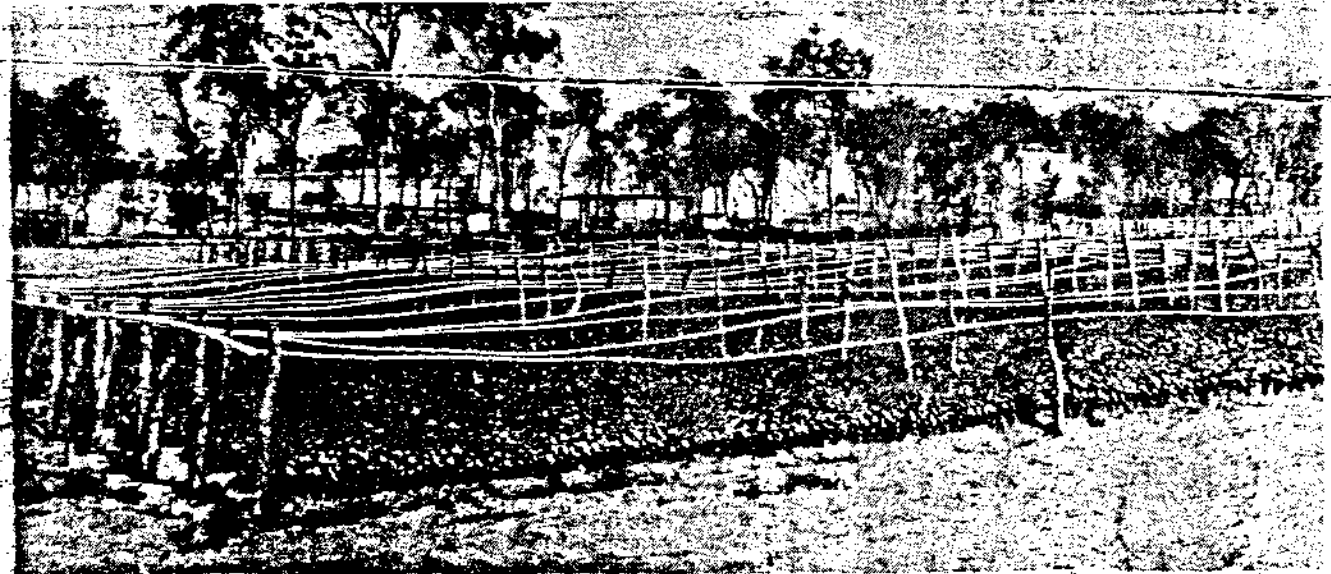
About 25 percent of the seed required to establish the nursery was obtained from the Department of Primary Industries research centre at Kairi, with the balance selected imported varieties.

Harvest

First coffee from the newly-established plantation should be harvested in three years, with full production achieved in five years.



BROTHERS Nat and Dick Jaques, Coffee Estate, North Paddy's Green, Mareeba, with some of the 12-month-old coffee trees which are ready to be planted out.



THE nursery at the Coffee Estate, North Paddy's Green, Mareeba, owned by brothers Dick and Nat Jaques.