

Trial gives Tablelands a coffee break

From LESLENE WOODWARD
Atherton Tablelands

THE successful field trial of a special coffee bean harvester — believed to be one of only three in the world — in the Atherton Tablelands this month has raised hopes for the establishment of a successful coffee growing industry in the area.

The harvester was imported from New Zealand by brothers Dick and Nat Jaques of Paddy's Green outside Marceba, for use on their 64.8 ha coffee plantation.

Here they have 90,000 Arabica coffee trees which will come into viable production in 1983.

The single most expensive part of coffee growing is the harvesting, according to Dick Jaques, requiring large numbers of pickers for several months of the year.

If a mechanical method could be found then a viable industry could be established in Australia, he said.

"We had seen pamphlets of this New Zealand berry harvester," Dick said, "and after making enquiries from the designer and manufacturer, Syd Goldsmith, we decided to buy one.

"Syd made all the special modifications necessary to adapt it for coffee bean harvesting, and came with it from New Zealand for the trials."

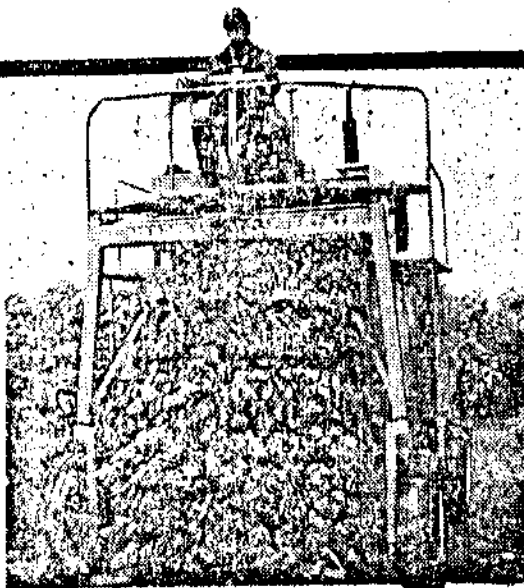
The machine arrived in Cairns at the beginning of the month and immediately began undergoing field trials at the DPI Kauri Research Station, outside Atherton, where there is a small coffee plantation.

The proudest man at the trials was Mr Goldsmith, as it became apparent that the harvester was working successfully.

"This harvester makes the coffee industry in Australia a viable proposition," Dick Jaques commented.

Mr Goldsmith said the machine operated on the 'shaker' or 'agitator' principle.

As it passes down each row, the trees are pushed



Coffee harvester goes through its paces.

through a series of rotating 'fingers' which shake the berries loose from the branches and carry them into the conveyor system.

During the trials, Dick Jaques said, the harvester produced 1.25 kilos of 'clean green bean' — the marketable product — per tree, or 1.7 tonnes an acre. At one stage the yield reached 2 tonnes.

"This is a very acceptable figure," he said.

Mr Jaques said that there are thought to be two other harvesters, based on a slightly different principle, operating in Brazil.

The machine will now go to the brothers' property in preparation for their first harvest next year.

Such is their faith in the future of a viable Australian coffee industry that they have now established a further venture in the same area with limited partnerships being offered to the public.

Tableland Coffee Plantation is to be set up on 44.4 ha of land adjacent to their present property, with about 136,000 trees.

100 shares have been issued in the plantation, of which 20 will be held by the brothers, and the balance sold to investors as limited partnerships for \$12,812 per share.

Each share represents a one percent equity in the assets of the plantation.

Limited partnership-type companies in Queensland require the general partner, in this case the Jaques brothers, to bear the bulk of the company's liability, so management-decision making remains in their hands, Mr Jaques said.

The other partners bear only a limited liability.