

Beans means coffee !



**BUSINESS & FINANCE**

# Coffee picker proves a success

**MAREEBA** — An important step towards the re-establishment of a viable coffee industry in North Queensland was taken last week when field trials on one of the few mechanical coffee harvesters in existence were successfully completed on the Atherton Tableland.

The harvester was imported from New Zealand by the operators of the 64.8 ha Mareeba Coffee Plantation 9 km west of west of Mareeba. Dick and Nat Jaques, to harvest about 90,000 Arabica coffee trees scheduled to come into production by July or August next year.

Dick Jaques said the single most important cost component in the coffee-growing industry was the labor-intensive harvesting — the increasingly high cost of which had led to the demise of North Queensland's original, healthy coffee-growing industry in the period between 1900 and 1930.

Mechanical harvesting was essential for the cost-efficient re-establishment of the industry, he said.

To accomplish this the brothers had purchased a \$70,000 berry harvester and

had it modified for coffee bean harvesting by its designer, the managing director of Peco Ltd in Christchurch, New Zealand, Mr Syd Goldsmith, Dick said.

Mr Goldsmith travelled with the machine from New Zealand to oversee the trials at the Department of Primary Industry research station at Kairi, outside Atherton, where some 30-year-old coffee trees were well-established.

"It's OK for coffee," an elated Mr Goldsmith said last Friday morning following a successful test-run by the machine.

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

Mr Goldsmith said the machine worked on the "shaker" or "agitator" principle.

As the harvester passed down each row of trees, the trees were pushed through a series of rotating fingers which shook the berries loose from the branches and carried them into a conveyor system, he said.

During the trials the harvester produced about 1.5 kg of "clean green beans" per

tree, or about 2 tonnes from each 0.405 ha, Dick Jaques said.

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

Dick said the machine was the only one of its kind in Australia and one of only a "handful" operating in the world — mostly in Brazil.

He said the machine now would go to the Jaques property in preparation for the first large-scale harvesting there next year.

The Jaques brothers recently purchased another 44.55 ha property about 10 km west of Mareeba — which is to become the Tableland Coffee Plantation — and plan to plant another 136,000 coffee trees there.

Partners are being sought to participate in the establishment and development of this new venture, Dick Jaques said.

• Pictured is Nat Jaques, carefully concentrating on his job as he rides the new harvester down a row of coffee trees at the DPI research station at Kairi. — Camera Double OO Photo.



## BHP asks for help

**MELBOURNE (AAP)** — BHP Co Ltd's steel division required assistance to offset the effects of the

