



The Jaques brothers' new coffee harvester with Mr Nat Jaques at the controls.

DOES THE WORK OF HUNDREDS OF HANDS

Coffee was harvested mechanically for the first time on the Atherton Tableland last Friday.

It was, in fact, the first time that coffee has been picked by a machine anywhere in the world except in Brazil.

The magic machine that did the job, 'outstandingly well' according to its inventor, Mr Syd Goldsmith, from Christchurch, New Zealand, was a brand-new shiny blue straddle tractor.

It straddled the rows of coffee trees, enveloping each bush singly and shaking off the bunches of red-brown cherries.

Off 25 mature trees, the machine 'picked' about 200kg of berries.

Owner of the \$70,000 machine, Mr Dick Jaques, did a quick calculation.

"That's about 1.25kg per tree of marketable green coffee beans — 1.7 tonnes to the acre," he said. "Pretty good considering the condition of the trees."

The trees were more than 30 years old and had not been pruned for mechanical harvesting. They were growing at the Department of Primary Industries' Kairi Research Station.

As they were the only mature trees growing in a plantation on the Atherton Tableland, Dick Jaques and his brother Nat 'borrowed' them to

demonstrate their new machine.

PIONEERS

The Jaques brothers, who came to Australia from Tanzania, East Africa, where they worked a family coffee plantation, are pioneers of the Tableland's infant coffee industry.

Their Mareeba Coffee Estates, at Paddy's Green, 8km west of Mareeba, now has 90,000 three-year old Arabica coffee trees established on 31½ hectares.

The brothers expect to start harvesting coffee next year.

As well they are launching a second plantation, the Tableland Coffee Plantation, also near Mareeba, in which they are selling shares.

The new plantation will consist of 40.5 ha, planted with up to 136,000 coffee trees.

The brothers will manage the plantation and they will retain a 20 per cent equity in it. They have put 80 shares, each worth \$12,212, on the market.

"We have already sold 30 shares," Mr Jaques said at Kairi on Friday.

He and his brother had called for investors in the new plantation, he said, because they had insufficient capital to develop it on their own.

They lease their Mareeba Coffee Plantation land from the Water Resources Commission. Establishing their trees had cost them more than \$200,000.

"We are looking at 160 hectares of coffee to spearhead the coffee industry in the north," Mr Jaques said.

The industry's viability in Australia, he believed, was dependent on total mechanisation. "In Tanzania," he said, "we employ 200 or 300 people at the peak of the harvest."

The brothers have already completely mechanised coffee tree cultivation — and it seemed on Friday that they had the answer to mechanically harvesting the coffee beans.

Their new machine was developed in New Zealand by Mr Goldsmith originally from a blackcurrant harvester designed at the New Zealand Engineering Institute.

Mr Goldsmith makes harvesters, big and small, for blackberries, blueberries, boison berries.

Recently he modified his biggest berry picker to meet the Jaques brothers' requirements to handle coffee.

The tractor-picker arrived in the north last week.

"It's very exciting. I'm delighted," said Mr Goldsmith, after its trial at Kairi.