

AGRICULTURE

Coffee is shaping up as attractive crop in the north

COFFEE is shaping up as an attractive investment prospect in North Queensland thanks to the innovative skills of the Jaques brothers who grew up with the crop in Tanzania, East Africa.

The Jaques brothers — Richard and Nat — and another former East African, Jim Watson, have launched North Queensland Coffee Plantation Pty Ltd.

The brothers already have made an impressive start with coffee in another North Queensland project, Mareeba Coffee Es-

tate Pty Ltd, set up three years ago. It now has 226,000 coffee trees planted near Mareeba on the western fringe of the Atherton Tableland.

This complex coffee project features complete trickle irrigation with in-built fertiliser application and a high degree of mechanisation.

Manager and director for North Queensland Coffee Plantation is Jim Watson, an accountant from East Africa who has been in Australia for 15 years. Mr Watson has been in the fast food industry and for the last 13 years held a senior financial management position.

The big breakthrough for successful coffee production in Queensland will come through mechanical harvesting. This has paved the way for a successful domestic coffee industry after more than three-quarters of a century of imports.

Queensland had a significant coffee industry back at the turn of the century. Coffee was grown on the Atherton Tableland from about 1900 to 1930 with up to 150 ha established at one stage.

But labour costs plus some frost damage and lack of experience put paid to coffee growing in North Queensland, leaving Australia to import all its coffee for the next 75 years.

And these coffee imports have cost Australia a hefty whack of overseas exchange. The total import tonnage of non-roasted beans in 1982-83 was estimated at

39,000 tonnes. It would take about 10,000 ha of coffee to meet this local demand, based on an industry average of 3.9 tonnes a hectare.

The Jaques brothers have solved the harvesting problem by importing a \$70,000 New Zealand machine designed to harvest delicate redcurrants, raspberries and blueberries.

The harvester is a 44 kW hydraulically driven straddle tractor with a shaker system of four agitators, a conveyor system and trash removal system. The shaker is the heart of the machine and has different rates of shake with variable speeds.

The Jaques found the machine ideal for coffee and are confident of harvesting up to five tonnes a hectare when the coffee trees reach full bearing.

This will enable them to operate a 40 ha coffee plantation on their own. The alternative without mechanical harvesting would be about 200 hand-pickers. North Queensland Coffee Plantation will use one of these machines to harvest its crops.

Both the Jaques' Mareeba Coffee Estate and the new North Queensland Coffee Plantation are based on Arabica variety coffee which comprises about 50 per cent of total coffee imports.

Average price of Arabica coffee at present is from \$3 to \$4 kg for green beans. Estimated all up cost of production is put at about \$1.50 kg.



PART of the plantation of 250,000 Arabica coffee bushes on the Jaques brothers' Mareeba Coffee Estates. The same variety will be used by North Queensland Coffee Plantation Pty Ltd.

Double cropping chance following prolonged rain

PROLONGED winter and spring rain in many areas of northern NSW and South Queensland have made double cropping from wheat into summer crops a real possibility this season, according to Pacific Seeds agronomist John Slatter.

Mr Slatter said recent widespread rain had ensured good soil moisture conditions would continue even after the wheat crop was harvested.

January rain would join up with present subsoil moisture-making conditions ideal for planting quick summer cash crops.

Mr Slatter advised farmers that

ble would encourage rapid drying which could affect germination.

Farmers should select a planter with good trash clearance and a narrow planting boot. All cultivation times should be removed.

Sunflowers and sorghum could be successfully double cropped from wheat with sunflowers the first choice because January-planted crops would mature in

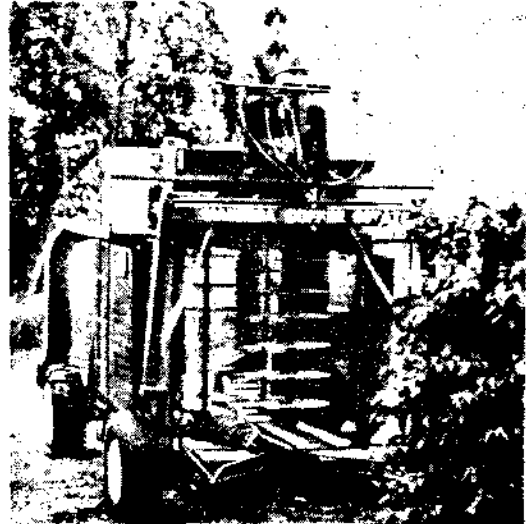
cooler conditions which promoted higher oil yields, Mr Slatter said.

Growers should select a sunflower variety with even flowering and even maturity characteristics to assist with insect and bird control and harvesting operations.

Sorghum growers should select a quick maturing variety with good standability and fast, even

flowering which would minimise sorghum midge damage and chemical treatments, Mr Slatter said.

Standability also was important because of uncertain weather conditions during the autumn period which could require mature crops to be held standing in the field for several days. Mr Slatter said.



THIS \$70,000 New Zealand-designed berry picker has proved to be successful for coffee harvesting on the Jaques brothers' Mareeba Coffee Estate. A similar machine will be used for North Queensland Coffee Plantation.

Careful tillage management to avoid

Cautious crop assessment needed for insect pests

Mr Slatter advised farmers that