



ABOVE: Ready to sprout a harvest of red coffee beans, the summer sun shines on some of the 90,000 trees on Dick and Nat Jaques's coffee plantation at Mareeba on far north Queensland's fertile Atherton Tableland. It's the birth of a new industry, helped by the latest in overseas automated farming techniques. Inset: Nat Jaques on the tractor does a round of weed control.

Photographs by Russell Francis

**Look out Kenya! Look out Brazil! If the busy Jaques brothers have their way, soon there'll be . . .**

## **AN AWFUL LOT OF COFFEE IN MAREEBA**

By HELENE STACEY

**A**CROSS the upper slopes of a gentle valley overlooking Mareeba stretches one of the world's most automated and up to date commercial coffee farms.

Farming coffee in Australia in the labor-intensive traditional way of Third World countries — the main producers of commercial coffee — would be "economic suicide" according to brothers, Dick and Nat Jaques, formerly of Tanzania, where they worked on their father's coffee plantation.

To harvest 40 hectares of coffee in Tanzania, in East Africa, they used a permanent labor force of 50 with up to 200 casual employees at peak times during the five or six months of the picking season.

"You would not even contemplate doing it that way in Australia," Dick Jaques said. "The labor costs would make the coffee far too expensive for people to buy."

To overcome the labor problem the Jaques brothers have developed an automated harvester that does the work of 200

pickers and a sophisticated irrigation system that one man can operate to water and fertilise 240,000 coffee trees.

Their farm is one of the few fully automated coffee farms in the world. "We are looking at taking the industry right from growing the crop to the final product stage, which is the roasted coffee in a package," Dick said.

It all started back in 1978 when Nat Jaques left his father's plantation in Tanzania and, with his wife, Linda, moved to Western Australia.

Dick and his wife, Mariolyn, were working in Sydney. The four of them decided to join up and go to Queensland to find a place to grow coffee.

The Queensland Water Resources Commission offered them a choice of 10 Crown land properties in the Tinaroo irrigation area on the Atherton Tableland.

They did a thorough research on the climatic conditions for the last 50 years in several possible locations and they talked to nearby farmers to find out how much, if

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