

Coffee farming returns — after 50 years!

by **ROBBIE MARSHALL**
pictures: **DAVID MARSHALL**

AUSTRALIANS can now enjoy a brew of top quality coffee — from their own, locally grown beans.

After half a century of political — and climatic — setbacks, Australian coffee is back on the market, thanks to the Jaques brothers.

The two brothers, Dick and Nat Jaques, arrived in Mareeba, North Queensland five years ago, with the dream of starting again a nearly forgotten industry.

Nat Jaques is experienced in managing a farm, while his brother Dick brought in a degree in psychology and many years experience as a store manager.

They combined their skills and knowledge and with the help of their wives and other Mareeba shareholders started Australia's first coffee marketing industry since the depression.

Dick and Nat planted the best coffee, Coffee Arabica, "The King Of Coffee". They also adopted the best irrigation and fertilisation procedures.

But Australia is a different place to Tanzania, and harvesting the beans was a major

★ **BELOW:** Dick's wife, Allison, tests the latest product, "Jaques Bros. coffee essence", on the market soon.



★ **DICK (left) and Nat Jaques with their coffee — from tree to packet. The new straddle harvester is in the background.**

obstacle to financial success.

Ripe coffee berries are traditionally picked by hand. This worked well in a third world country like Tanzania where labor costs are low, but in Australia it couldn't be done.

New technology and many innovations of their own made it possible.

Within a 77 ha (190 acre) property, Dick and Nat planted 240,000 coffee trees close together in rows.

Next, they modified a 44Kw, hydraulically driven straddle tractor so that it could collect the berries from the coffee trees.

The modified straddle tractor became the "Coffee Harvester", which not only collects the berries, it also removes the pulp from around the beans

and then drops the pulp under the trees for mulch.

Through the use of an advanced drip irrigation system, the coffee berries ripen uniformly so that the harvester can remove them efficiently.

The coffee crop has a drip-fertilisation system enabling liquid fertiliser plus nutrients to go directly to the trees.

One of the advantages Australia has over third-world countries is its sophisticated soil and plant analysis. This permits top quality and disease-free coffee beans to be grown.

The Jaques Bros. coffee plantation is probably the only coffee farm that uses a drip-fertilisation system.

After 5½ years the brothers have 240,000 coffee trees growing and producing on one of the most advanced and efficient coffee farms in the world.

Maintenance can be carried out by only two people, and they have their own factory where the harvested coffee beans are cleaned, dried, polished and then roasted and packaged.

Only the best beans are selected by the machinery, while the inferior are rejected.

This quality coffee is marketed in both roasted bean and ground coffee, and at a later stage instant coffee and coffee essence will be sold.

Dick and Nat are taking one step at a time. "We must walk before we can run" they say. Jaques Bros Coffee, in light, medium and dark roasts, is at present only available in Queensland at Gourmet Delicatessen and Supermarket stores. At a much later stage they will go to the U.S. market.

The sweet and pungent aroma of this new Australian coffee is very tempting indeed, but the sweet smell of success is even more gratifying to the brothers. ●

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