

Mareeba coffee growers aim for national market

From LESLENE WOODWARD
in Mareeba

A NEW product, which will soon be launched in North Queensland, is hoped to eventually take over a major share of a domestic market worth \$205 million annually.

The product is coffee and it is grown and processed by brothers Nat and Dick Jaques on their property 9 km west of Mareeba. It should start appearing on supermarket shelves in early October.

The Jaques factory was officially opened yesterday morning by the Queensland Minister for Northern Development, Mr Bob Katter, who hailed it as a milestone for North Queensland.

The Jaques brothers established their original coffee plantation outside Mareeba five years ago, since then they have expanded considerably. They now have 240,000 coffee trees growing under sophisticated farming techniques on 77 ha of land.

In 1982 they imported a berry picker from New Zealand and had it adapted to pick coffee beans — at the time there were only a handful of automated coffee harvesters operating in the world, all of them in Brazil.

And the development of the New Zealand prototype was hailed

at the time as giving the green light to the establishment of a viable coffee industry in this country.

Yesterday the opening of the new coffee processing factory saw the completion of stage two of the brothers' project which will make them the only processors and exporters of coffee in Australia.

The new factory was built at a cost of \$600,000 and is adjacent to the plantation. It will handle 40 to 50 tonnes of beans this year but production is expected to double next year and triple the following year as more coffee trees begin to bear.

According to the marketing manager of Jaques Bros Coffee Pty Ltd, Mr Jonathan Sutherland, even at this early stage distribution is limited only by the quantity of beans available.

He said the west coast of America and Japan — which buy the best coffee in the world — were both very interested.

"If we had the coffee available we would have it on the plane tomorrow," he said yesterday.

"Distribution will therefore be limited to North Queensland for this year with a small amount going to Brisbane then we will expand into the rest of Queensland next year and we will go national the following year," he said.

Mr Sutherland does not under-

estimate the difficulties to be encountered in marketing the new product.

Potentially there could be problems, he conceded.

"But I think Australians basically support Australian products," he said.

Distribution will be handled by a Townsville-based firm, Classic Coffee Company, and the coffee will be marketed in special laminated packs under the name "Jaques Bros Coffee".

According to Mr Sutherland the gas-flushing system of packaging will be used in preference to the vacuum-pack method to ensure maximum freshness.

"Gas flushing or inserting a small quantity of inert gas into the packages to exclude oxygen is not a new idea but is now becoming more popular," he said.

"The laminated packs lend themselves to this method better than metal containers."

The sorting, roasting, grinding and packaging machinery in the factory were imported from the United States, while the ancillary equipment including augers, troughs, hoppers and tubes were built in Australia.

The factory will use the levitation method of roasting, in preference to the more common drum method, to achieve a superior result.

In the levitation process the beans are rotated on a cushion of hot air rather than being tumbled in a metal drum.

Food service industries in the North should be serving the coffee by the end of this month while it will make its first appearance in gourmet and delicatessen shops and on supermarket shelves early in October.

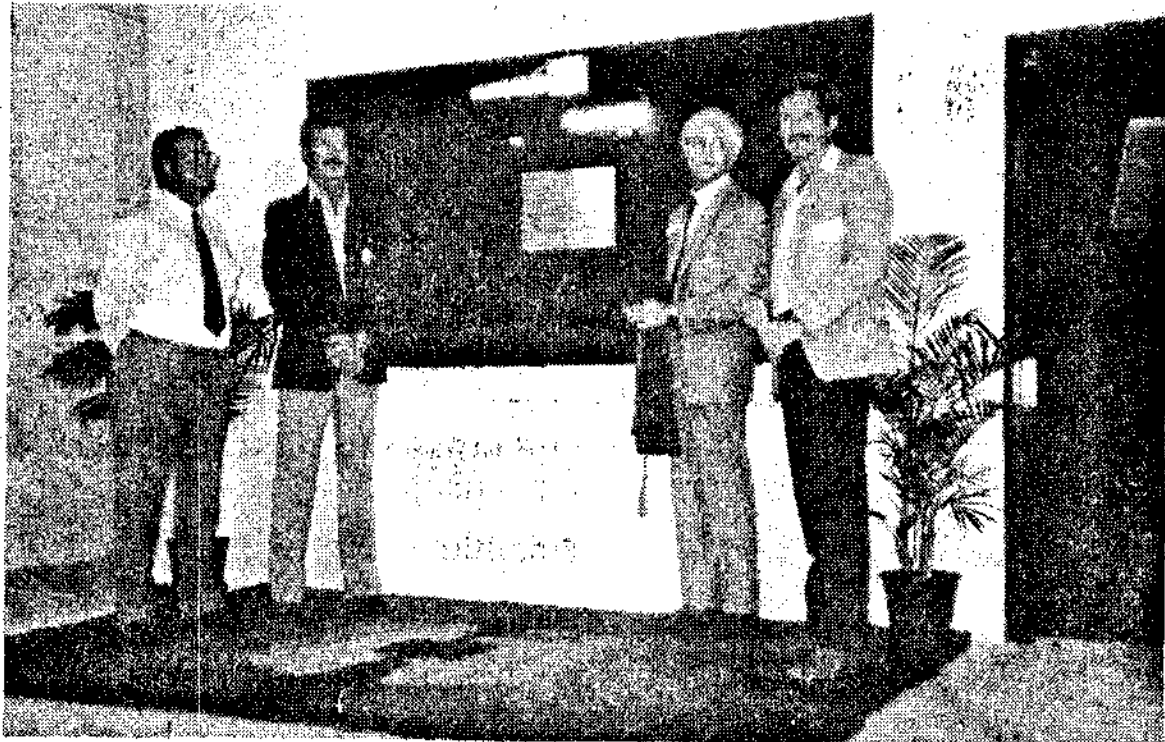
The initial quantity of beans processed will produce about 40,000 kg or 200,000 250g packs.

Although an exact retail price is not yet available it is understood it will be competitive with other leading brands.

Future plans provide for considerable expansion of the existing plant and for the building of a tourist complex to cost about \$500,000, possibly within the next two years.

Coffee is a lucrative market in this country. The retail industry is estimated to be worth \$205 million per annum. Pre-packaged ground coffee is regarded as a growth market segment increasing its share of the market by an average \$2 million annually over the past eight years.

In the 11 months from June 1983 to May 1984, 27 million kg of coffee were imported into Australia. In 1981-82 Australians were drinking 2 kg of coffee per head per annum.



• Pictured at yesterday's official opening of the Jaques brothers new coffee processing factory are — from left — the Minister for the Environment, Valuation and Administrative Services and

Member for Barron River, Mr Martin Tanni; Mr Nat Jaques; the Minister for Northern Development, Mr Bob Katter Jun. and Mr Dick Jaques.