

Hawaiian delegation on tour of Jaques coffee plantation



One of the visitors from Hawaii, Rick Robinson (left) presents Dick Jaques with a souvenir of the groups' visit. It is an imitation coffee bag from the Kona Coffee plantation in Hawaii.

A delegation from the Hawaiian Island, Kona, made a visit to several Tableland agricultural industries last week as part of a study tour designed to improve their farming techniques in Hawaii.

The major stop of the tour was an inspection of the newly opened Jaques Brothers coffee plantation to the southwest of Mareeba.

The delegation which was made up of coffee growers, macadamia farmers, agricultural experts and farm financiers were shown over the plantation, which is recognized as one of the most modern in the world.

The organizers of the tour were the Kona Coffee Council.

The main difference that the 19 person delegation saw between the techniques used by the Jaques Brothers and those employed in Hawaii was the extent to which mechanisation was used at the Jaques Brothers set-up.

According to Rick Robinson, a coffee farmer on Kona, and a member of a Farm Credit organization, what Dick and Nat Jaques have is far superior to the Hawaiian industry.

"In Hawaii we are what you would call a third world country as far as coffee production techniques are concerned," he said.

"At the moment everything is done by hand. Picking, watering, the lot. So it is quite impressive to come here and see how the mechanisation of the industry can work."

As to how applicable such mechanisation would be to the Kona coffee industry, Rick was not sure that wholesale adoption of the techniques used would work.

"Kona is an island, and as such there is not

a great deal of the gently-sloping pasture land that is evident here."

"Much of the coffee grown on Kona, is grown on steeply graded, rugged hill sides, so a lot of the machinery that the Jaques Brothers use would not be suited at all."

There were areas however, he said, that would be suited to the techniques used here.

He said that there were examples in the actual roasting and packaging which made comparisons a bit difficult, and this had to do with rainfall.

He said that the rainfall in Kona was quite

"An example of this is the sugar industry on the island. They are facing the same problem that your sugar industry is, and the prospects look dim."

"They are in a heavily subsidised industry, and the trend appears to be to get out of it. The land is used for the sugar industry would be ideal for the setting up of a plant such as the Jaques have."

Another member of the group, Mr. Norm Bezona, an agricultural agent, outlined other aspects of the tour apart from the coffee.

He said that other stops on the itinerary included the Speewah Plantation in Kuranda, from where Evonne and Dennis Wallace joined the tour for a short while.

Visits were planned to the Research Station at either Kairi or Walkamin, to Don Lavers avocado farm, the Nerada Tea plantation and sight-seeing tours of several falls including Mungalli and Millaa Millaa Falls.

The group stayed on the Tablelands until last Friday, from where they travelled south, and would be leaving Australia from Brisbane in several weeks time.

Dick Jaques said the visit by the delegation was a good experience, with the coffee growers from Kona also providing, he and his brother with a different angle on the coffee industry.

consistent and it was very hard to control the amount of water a crop would be getting.

However, in Mareeba, with its relatively low rainfall, the amount of water given to the crop could be controlled. This was a tremendous benefit in that with the control of the amount of water, came control of the building of the crop.

"The Jaques Brothers use a system they call water-stressing, which involves irrigation at a certain time for a certain duration.

By doing this they can bring their crop to bloom at about the same time."

"In Kona we have our crop budding more erratically, which means harvesting is a bit more difficult."

"We often have ripe, half ripe and green beans throughout our coffee crop," he said.

On the future of the industry in Kona, Rick said there were several directions the industry could take.

He said that rising costs of production were pushing the industry towards mechanisation, and that this would be inevitable in the long run.

Another possibility was the chance that alternative crops in Kona would turn to coffee as their present crop became more unstable.