

HA Bennett & Son

October 2003

Mountain Top Coffee Field Day - Northern NSW

Andrew Ford from Mountain Top Coffee graciously extended an invitation to HAB to head up to Nimbin in NSW to talk to the local coffee growers in the region. We had heard a lot of things about the coffee in northern NSW and this provided us with the perfect opportunity to meet the growers from the area and to hear first hand what was actually going on. I was going with a very open mind and a keen interest to learn as much as I could about the coffee of Northern NSW.

I arrived at Mountain Top Coffee late one Sunday afternoon in late August just as the sun was about to set. What a view? Hard to believe, the plantation has one of the best views I have seen in years. The coffee looked very young and vigorous with well-groomed rows of mown grass in between the coffee. I drove through the plantation to the dhouse with beautiful views for as far as the eyes could see.

Andrew had arranged a program for the days events as below:

Field Day Program

9:00am Arrive & Coffee

9:30am Open & Welcome by Andrew Ford - General Manager MTC

9:45am Overview of the Australian Market for DGB. DGB trading, what is actually traded & the minimum qualities, inc. samples. DGB quality trends Vs price trends. The coffee trading pyramid from commodity to specialty grades. What the roaster demands. Perception of Australian grown in the market.

Scott Bennett - Managing Director - H.A. Bennett & Sons

30-45 mins

10:30am MORNING COFFEE

11:00am Global market demands for DGB. What is ?Specialty coffee?. Specialty coffee trends globally. Cup of excellence. Purchasing DGB - from a roasters perspective, what are the important issues. Perception of Australian grown from the roasters perspective.

Mr. Instuartor - Managing Director - Michelle?s Espresso

30-45mins

11:45am Producing specialty coffee with a mechanized approached; Mechanical harvesting - the implications.Processing styles. Grades & standards. Understanding & meeting market demand. Milling & storage

Dan Kuhn - Agro-International Coffee Consulting

1 ¼ hours

1:00pm LUNCH

2:00pm Irrigation manual launch - Chris Rolfe - NSW Agriculture 15 mins

2:15pm Mountain Top Coffee? - 2003 operations overview. Procedures, Safety standards, Production aims

Gerard Dwyer - Production Manager MTC 45 mins

3:00pm Field walk & talk 1-2hrs

The final session will be split into two groups for ½ to one hour with each group leader.

Group 1: Mechanized production for specialty coffee production with Gerard Dwyer & Dan Kuhn. This group will look at the harvester wet mill & dryers and participants will have the opportunity to talk about what MTC operations will be doing for the 2003 season and how this compares with Hawaiian and other international producers.

Group 2: Market demands, what's expected & how to meet them with Instuartor & Scott Bennett. This group will have coffee samples from around the world to compare & contrast and participants will have the opportunity to discuss how coffee is traded, what prices can be expected, what volumes are demanded and general trends in coffee around Australia & the world.

Field Day Aim:

Improving coffee quality through mechanised production systems. For Australian growers to be competitive internationally two things must occur, first a fully mechanised approach to production and secondly to maximise flavour & quality. MTC's aim is to focus on both these areas for continual improvement.

Improving supply chain efficiencies: There are many small growers that make up the NSW industry, however, collectively they will produce almost 1,000 tons of DGB coffee annually (by 2008). Therefore it is important that the majority of these growers understand & implement production systems that are focussed towards high quality coffee & also work together to reduce costs within their supply chain.

·Grower education on MTC operations, production demands and market opportunities.

·Networking opportunities.

The day started well from my angle, I said what I had to say and then sat and listened for the rest of the day. Lunch and the afternoon break seemed to allow the conversation to get moving and some very interesting things started appearing.

A few facts and figures: There is currently some 600 acres of coffee under cultivation of which this year is going to be the first year of any sort of production of any volume. There are privately owned plantations and then there are other plantations owned through public investor schemes. The main volume is centralised with some ten plus growers.

The Northern NSW coffee growers association has some 95+ members who grow anything from one tree up to approximately five acres. Nearly all of this production of

coffee is processed in small lots and either sold as roasted coffee under their own private label or to other local roasters.

Nearly all the major growers do not have their own harvester or wet and dry processing mills, they just concentrate on growing the coffee. This is where Mountain Top comes into the picture as they are trying to establish a centralised processing mill for wet and dry coffee sourcing directly from the growers within this region. Mountain Top supplies their harvesting machine for rental delivered to your coffee block with a driver. They have established a network of truckers to deliver the picked coffee back to the central mill where they will process each grower's coffee separately into parchment or even green bean for a tolling fee. Mountain Top is currently establishing new machinery in their dry mill to handle this years intended crop. All the coffee machinery is from Brazil.

They are also currently trying to establish some common standards for the green bean with growers from Far North Queensland, these standards will be drawn directly from Hawaii and will reflect the same standards for quality and descriptions; so Australia may have some international coffee standards.

The main coffee tree variety that is grown is K7, this was chosen after the NSW Dept of Agriculture conducted a research study that concluded that it was the most suitable variety to grow in this region and that it also was suitable for machine harvesting. During the afternoon session the NSW Dept of Agriculture released their latest study paper called Best Management Guidelines for Irrigation of Coffee in the Sub-Tropics. This is currently one of the most innovative research papers in the world for coffee grown under irrigation. It is a very easy to read and well-produced booklet.

How does the coffee cup for NSW? During last years small production a lot of experimentation took place during the wet and dry processes. The wet processed coffee has a nice balance of acidity and flavour. The natural or dry processed coffee's showed promise with quite a deep body and good flavour profile with a low acid and is best suited to espresso. This year's production will only be available around the end of October for cupping but one would expect that with all of the improvements in processing and handling the coffees should improve again this year.

Scott Bennett

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