

SEARCH

[« back to results](#)

- [Search](#)
- [Search Tips](#)

TOOLS

- [Customise Search](#)
- [Customise publications](#)
- [Create Sub-Accounts](#)
- [Reports](#)
- [Change Details](#)
- [Change Password](#)

TOP-UP

- [Top-up](#)
- [Pricing](#)

LOG OUT

- [Log out](#)

The Australian

Edition 5 - Generic PreprintsFRI 28 OCT 2005, Page 026

COFFEE IS PERKING UP

By Jo Studdert

The growing of coffee beans is spreading south and taking hold, writes Jo Studdert

PURISTS often hold that the best coffee grows within a few degrees latitude of the equator. Clearly, they have yet to taste the produce of northern NSW.

Although well south of the Tropic of Capricorn, which is generally seen as the southern limit to which coffee can be grown, the district has a protected tropical microclimate that allows the production of coffee beans. And the region is producing beans without reliance on insecticides and other chemicals.

Andrew Ford, who owns **Mountain Top Coffee** near Nimbin, says coffee is one of the most important food crops in the world and that Australian coffee doesn't have any of the diseases that normally blight crops. Local harvests can be made without the use of these chemicals. The Australian coffee industry began in the late 19th century around Mareeba in Queensland, where until 2000, 80 per cent of Australia's coffee was grown, but has since been overtaken by its tropical counterpart.

Parliamentarians have had practical aid to offer the industry.

In June 2003, Senator Judith Troeth, the parliamentary secretary for Agriculture and Forestry, announced a five-year research and development plan for the industry. It was developed by members of the coffee industry and the commonwealth's Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation. At that time, there were 740ha of coffee planted and production was expected to reach 2008 and NSW by itself is now expected to top 750 tonnes by 2007. Research indicates that about 2000ha in Australia is suitable for coffee, which could produce about 6000 tonnes for growth: the country imports over 55,000 tonnes of coffee a year, most of it from Brazil and all of it subject to global commodity price swings. What small Australian growers and consumers is extremely high-quality, chemical-free Arabica coffee is not so subject to price swings.

Others think there is promise in the sector, too. Coffee Management Australia is a government scheme for coffee plantations. It has 75ha of trees near Casino in northern NSW. A 2002 study indicated a likely crop of 800g of coffee per tree for 10 years.

Because Australian plantations are small, producers are inclined to add value through processing and roasting the beans and selling their coffee into the premium export market. Mountain Top's environmental credentials offer a marketing strategy. It has rejected synthetic inorganic fertilisers and chemicals and uses no pesticides, insecticides or fungicides. But, more importantly, it has cut its water usage by 90 per cent. Research funded by the Environmental Protection Authority at **Mountain Top Coffee** suggests that even a small cherry that comes into a mill produces the equivalent environmental waste of 3000 people.

"It is the biological oxygen demand (BOD) of the waste that causes such problems. The oxygen from the water, starving the water and subsequently plant and animal life. Annual production of 500 tonnes has the BOD of Brisbane and we had to do so. Mountain Top installed purification and recycling systems to address these problems. The extracted wastes are used as composts. "We have cut our purchase of chemicals by 60 per cent and further cut the amount of irrigation water needed."

Initially, Mountain Top needed 10 litres of water to process every kilo of coffee cherries. Now it needs only 1.5 litres and by next year will need less than one litre. All Mountain Top coffees are exported; none is sold in Australia. But Ford believes the only way the industry will flourish is if it becomes a co-operative system. Individual processing and individual marketing and recycling infrastructure too under-utilised now.

Caption: Quality: Andrew Ford

Illus: Photo

Column: Entrepreneur

Section: FEATURES

© Copyright. All rights reserved. Most articles on Newstext are copyright News Limited. Some copy rights are held by other parties. You may read this article on-screen or print it once for your own personal use. You may not forward it by email, post it on an internet or intranet site or make any other use of it without written permission. If you have any copyright licensing queries should be sent to us at newstext@newsfld.com.au

 [Printer-friendly](#)
 [E-mail this article](#)
 [Reprints](#)

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.