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# Trophy winning chocolate rewards trellised **COCOA** **PRODUCTION** at Mission Beach



**Chris and Lynn Jahnke**  
*Cocoa growers*  
● Mount Edna, Qld

**Cocoa growers, Chris and Lynn Jahnke are very excited about their win at this year's Royal Melbourne Fine Food Awards.**

Their Charley's Chocolate Factory Premium Single Origin Dark Chocolate, grown and made on their property at Mount Edna, Mission Beach, won the overall Royal Melbourne Agricultural Society Trophy this year. It smashed a field of 96 other chocolate entries which included chocolate made from some of the best cocoa from right around the world.

The same chocolate also won a Gold Medal for its category and two of their other chocolate bars won Silver Medals.

The Jahnkes originally grew beef cattle (and before that worked in city retail

jobs) but moved into cocoa growing and chocolate production at Mission Beach several years ago after investigating a range of likely tree crops.

"We wanted to grow a high value crop and completely integrate our process from the paddock through to the finished manufactured product," said Chris Jahnke.

"After a lot of research we found that cocoa would enable us to do that. We can be independent from the supply chain. Selling direct to the consumer online and through specialist retail outlets has enabled us to become price givers rather than price takers."





The Jahnkes are well aware that they live in a cyclone prone region and have done what they can to plan for the next one.

"Winds of 340 km/hour are very powerful learning tools and we had that with Cyclone Larry and five years later with Cyclone Yasi. We saw a number of farming enterprises utterly devastated for a long time after Cyclone Yasi," said Chris.

"And it's not 'if' but 'when' the next cyclone comes," he added.

Strategies to plan for the next big blow include introducing trellising to help protect the trees; building relationships with a network of other cocoa growers to meet production requirements; and establishing a tourism business as another income stream.

Lynn explained that growing cocoa on the V shaped Open Tatura trellis system was a world first.

"The system was originally designed over a period of 40 years by Bas Van den Ende at Tatura in Victoria. A number of tropical fruit have since been grown on it but nobody had done cocoa before so it's a work in progress," she said.

"We work closely with DAF at South Johnstone. We are ultimately aiming to produce less height for easier harvesting with more canopy at the top to prevent sunburn. Training the young trees to grow on the trellis is relatively easy and does not sacrifice any wood needed to grow the fruit. In fact the tree puts more energy into producing fruit rather than having to keep itself up. We are getting in excess of four times the average yield of a free standing tree," said Lynn.

Production waste is returned to the paddock as trash blanketing around the trees which keeps weeds down. As a result, few agricultural chemicals are needed. Fruit spotting bug is a problem



at the moment but fortunately has not affected the cocoa beans inside the pod.

"People are obsessed with the aesthetics of fruit in the supermarket - which unfortunately causes terrible food wastage - but we are interested in what is inside the fruit so looks don't matter," said Chris.

To produce their chocolate the Jahnkes source some of their cocoa beans from other growing areas in Australia, the Pacific Islands (the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu) and Papua New Guinea. This gives them insurance to meet requirements for their manufacturing business in case of future shortages after a cyclone at Mount Edna.

The tourism business has been an unexpected bonus to their cocoa production.

"We didn't realise how fascinated people would be in how cocoa is grown," said Lynn Jahnke.

"Everybody eats chocolate but few people have seen it grown. We get full bus tours here and it has turned out to be a profitable adjunct to the business."

The couple now aims to build an Australian Chocolate Centre in the region with plans approved by Council. From a trial of 2000 trees on one hectare, production will increase to 40 000 trees on the new site.

"The Centre will be part tourist, part manufacturing and processing facility, all in one place. The Centre has received overwhelming support from the local community as it is expected to provide jobs for 40-50 local workers. We are now looking for capital backing to get it under way," said Chris.

"We believe there is a good future in 'Bean to bar' chocolate with big markets already established in the United States and the United Kingdom," said Lynn.

The chocolate is delivered by Australia Post in small polystyrene boxes with an accompanying icepack.

"We've had an icepack which was still frozen on delivery to Germany!" said Lynn.

If you'd like to sample the award winning Charley's Chocolate Factory range visit [www.charleys.com.au](http://www.charleys.com.au)