

Mission Beach pair taste sweet victory in France

Isabell Champion

FIVE years on from the day they planted their first seeds, Mission Beach chocolate makers have won one of the world's most prestigious food awards.

Australian Chocolate, best known for their popular Charley's Chocolate brand, was named as one of 18 recipients of the Salon du Chocolat International Cocoa Awards in Paris on October 30.

Owners Lynn and Chris Jahnke bought the Maria Creek property and made the move from Melbourne, where Ms Jahnke worked in retail, five years ago.

"We had never farmed in our lives," she said.

"I sold handbags for a living, but we came here for a Melbourne Cup weekend five years ago and planted our first seeds," she said.

"We harvested for the first time in 2014 and in 2015, we produced our first run of 50 chocolate bars.

"We are thrilled, this award is a really big deal.

"Never in our wildest dreams did we think this would happen — we made the top 50 in August which we were gobsmacked about, so we thought forget about the 18, we were happy with the top 50.

"It's just amazing."

The process of judging the beans was very precise and they were up against 166 other entrants.

"They take beans from 40 countries and analyse them and send them to the governing body," Ms Jahnke said.

"Then the best of those beans are sent to Paris and turned into chocolate, then they analyse the chocolate."

Every short-listed entrant received a chocolate flavour profile to help growers improve or maintain their practices.

"When we looked at the profiles, we thought it all looked pretty well balanced and maybe we were in with a

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Chocolate maker Lynn Jahnke

chance, but we never really thought we'd get it," Ms Jahnke said.

"We were up against the traditional cocoa producing countries — this is the first time Australia has won.

"This is a world-class award. It's good for Australia, it's good for the Cassowary Coast and it's good for Mission Beach."

"It will put us on the map, and it's good to have some good news stories coming out of Mission Beach."

The award is just one more in a long list of accolades they have received this year.

At the Australian Fine Food Awards, the Jahnkes won four medals — gold for their Mount Edna Australian-grown single origin chocolate, silver for King Ranch Australian-grown single origin and Karkar Island PNG-grown single origin and bronze for Cocoa Crunch from their Plus range.

Charley's Chocolate Factory takes around 120 people a week on chocolate tours, and the couple are now calling on locals to help them raise the funds to expand the business with plans to build an Australian Chocolate Centre already approved with the Cassowary Coast Regional Council.

"Currently we are at capacity making 600 bars a week, and we are hoping to make 2000 bars a week to keep up with demand," she said.

"We are looking at doing some crowd-funding to help us expand.

"We're ready to go, we've got 8000 trees in the nursery, we just need some funds."

If built, the centre will employ 65 people over five years.



Mission Beach chocolate makers Lynn and Chris Jahnke won a prestigious award in Paris after cocoa was one of 18 selected from around the world to be made into chocolate as part of the of Excellence competition.

Picture: STEWART

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