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Taking a chance on chocolate

A Big Isle company bets that chocolate made entirely in Hawaii will command top dollar

Rod Thompson / Star-Bulletin

KAILUA-KONA Five years ago, Bob Cooper did not know that chocolate grew on trees.

Today he knows that so much work is needed to turn a chocolate bean into a chocolate bar that some people just leave the beans on the trees to rot.

But Cooper has pushed ahead, almost single-handedly creating the Original Hawaiian Chocolate Factory. It's "the original" because it's the only chocolate company in the state that grows, processes and markets its product entirely in Hawaii.

From a single acre of cacao trees at his home in Kailua-Kona and another



Bob Cooper surveys bins of cacao beans ready to be opened to begin the process of making chocolate.

14 acres on the other side of the Big Island at Keaau, Cooper makes milk chocolate and dark chocolate, in quarter-pound and 1-pound bars.

"It's a cottage industry," Cooper says, and his factory indeed has the size and appearance of a cottage, although one with \$250,000 of equipment stuffed into it.