

MauiGrown Coffee yields results

This season's crop is 4 times bigger than last year's harvest

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Six years of nursing an abandoned Maui coffee plantation back to health has finally produced a big return for MauiGrown Coffee Inc. owner James "Kimo" Falconer, who announced this season's crop was about quadruple the prior year's harvest.

MauiGrown said it harvested 225,000 pounds of green coffee beans in the season ended last month, up from about 50,000 pounds in the prior season.

"Yield was really good," Falconer said, adding that his challenge now is to find new customers for the pricey coffee in tough economic times.

Falconer established MauiGrown in 2003 on what remained of the business started in 1991 by a subsidiary of former sugar and real estate company Amfac Hawai'i named Pioneer Mill Co. in Kā'anapali.

Pioneer Mill created a 600-acre coffee farm on former sugar land using four coffee varieties, but gave up in 2001 and let the trees grow wild.

Falconer, a former Pioneer Mill executive, restarted harvests on part of the property in 2003 and later arranged to lease much of the coffee acreage from his former employer.

Annual harvests by MauiGrown had ranged roughly from 40,000 pounds to 70,000 pounds on what is now a 325-acre farm.

Falconer said the dramatic improvement this season resulted mainly from the addition of new irrigation and fertilizer invested by an affiliate of Amfac successor Kā'anapali Land LLC that subdivided the coffee farm land into about 50 parcels for sale as million-dollar residential lots amid a working coffee farm.

"Through (Kā'anapali Land's) support, the coffee orchard has thrived," said Falconer, who called the integration of farming and residential real estate development a way to keep productive lands in agriculture for future generations.

With increased coffee production, Falconer said he will primarily focus on exporting more coffee to the Mainland, and may try to enter the European market. Close to half of MauiGrown's coffee is sold in Hawai'i. Prices for most MauiGrown varieties sell for \$4.50 to \$5 a pound, though some sells for as much as \$9 a pound.



Photo by Kathleen Giambalvo

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The Korvan harvester, driven by Ramiro Alvarez, is used to shake or vibrate the trees, which causes the coffee cherries to fall where the machine catches them.