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AN HISTORIC YARN

The daughter of a woolgrowing family is the face of a winter fashion campaign that aims to invigorate local appreciation for a fibre which is worth \$3 billion a year in exports

WORDS ROXANNE WILSON

PICTURES TOM HUNTLEY

Andrew Morphett reckons sheep get the rough end of the stick. People joke about them and think they're stupid. But, he says, the fluffy ruminants are more interesting than most people realise.

Despite their desire to be part of the mob, Morphett insists sheep are individuals. And they're curious creatures which "have their very distinct differences".

He should know. Morphett is a woolgrower and owner of Anlaby Station, said to be one of the country's oldest continuing merino studs, founded by the Dutton family in 1839.

And whatever the truth about their character, sheep drive an industry worth billions to the Australian economy. The annual raw material export value of wool is estimated at \$3 billion, according to the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

And while wool mostly sells in the northern hemisphere – in North America, the UK, Europe and increasingly China – there is potential for growth within our local fashion industry, bolstered by modern consumers who want to know the story behind the clothes on their back.

It's a movement the Westfield shopping centre empire has tapped into through its new winter fashion campaign, a collaboration with The Woolmark Company showcasing winter apparel worn by real sheep-shearing families – including international model and a woolgrower's daughter, Stephanie Field – at Anlaby Station.

For Morphett, who took over the historic station with fellow owner Peter Hayward in 2004, opening their doors for the campaign was a no brainer.

After all, their property in Hamilton, about 120km northeast of Adelaide, is steeped in

wool-growing history and continues to create luxury products, such as scarfs, children's blankets and wraps.

Home to 500 merino ewes, the 202ha pastoral property – which once sprawled across 60,703ha – has been around for more than 175 years and is said to have created the

first shipment of wool sold in London from SA. "The Anlaby stud is one of the most enduring bloodlines in the country ... the sheep are important," says Morphett, who left a job in financial services in Sydney to move to rural SA more than 10 years ago.

"They are the many great-great-granddaughters of the sheep that were walked across in 1839. We have an obligation to continue that and bring that forward. It is just such a special thing.

"We shear them ... (the wool) is scoured at Michell's in Adelaide, goes to Victoria where it is turned into tops, it goes to Tasmania where it is spun and woven, and then it comes back to us.

"The context of Anlaby is that it is only here because of the sheep and the wool, and it is only going to be here if we can continue to provide a wool business that sits underneath that and makes it relevant.

"We weren't looking to get into the history and immerse ourselves in the wool industry as we have, but the opportunities Anlaby has given us ... how can you not be inspired?"



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INDUSTRY & FASHION

SAWEEKEND MAY 13-14, 2017

“They are the many great-great-granddaughters of the sheep that were walked across in 1839.”

The campaign was also a chance for the Anlaby owners to show off their vast property, featuring a 23-room homestead as well as a number of other buildings, such as a shearing shed and quarters, glasshouses and even a slaughterhouse.

But the animals, Morphett says, could not be ignored.

“When we were doing the shoot, the lambs were coming up and talking to the models,” he says.

“They were a bit, ‘hmm, I’m not sure I’m ready for you to touch me’ but once they were picked up they were happy to be patted and looked after, and they were wanting to know what was going on.

“They are much more interesting than you would think.”

Woolmark Company managing director Stuart McCullough – also the chief executive of Woolmark’s parent company Australian Wool Innovation – says they see wool as an “uber trend”, especially with younger fashion consumers.

“Once upon a time it was said Australia rode on the sheep’s back. I mean, why should we care about wool?” he says.

“Increasingly with the modern consumer, the Gen Ys and the Gen Zs that are coming through, they are going to be increasingly interested in ... the nature of wool.

“People are now starting to look at where their garments are made and they want to know what the story is behind those garments – where they came from, how those animals were treated, how the other processing was done and not only that, but after they’ve finished with it, what happens with it.”

Mr McCullough says woolgrowers have



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seen a “great resurgence” in the price of Australian greasy wool – it has doubled in the last seven years to about \$15/kg.

“We are seeing huge amounts of it come down the catwalks, which means it has got longevity,” he says.

For 21-year-old Westfield ambassador Stephanie Field, who left life on her family’s farm in rural NSW to take up a modelling career which has seen her walk runway shows for such fashion powerhouses as Celine and Valentino, the campaign was an opportunity to support an industry she loves.

It also allowed her to work with family, including her mother Angela Field and seven-year-old twin cousins, who also took part in the photo shoot.

“I know I’ve shot a lot of times before but ... being able to promote wool is huge,” she says.

“It is just something very scary because I want to do it proud because my parents are in the wool industry as well, so you just want to make sure you put a good image forward.”

Field attributes some of her modelling successes to her country roots, saying it’s a “different” story and one that has helped ground her.

“It puts a lot of things into perspective,” she says. “Your families work so hard and you get to see the harsh environment that these sheep go through, and then for the beautiful knits, the end product, it is such a natural fibre and seeing that process was one of the most amazing things as a child.

“(Wool) is such a huge part of Australia and the rest of the world. I think it is very important to keep it going and to keep everyone interested because some people don’t realise how far it has come.

“People will open their eyes and be like, ‘Oh my God – this is Australia, this is part of our culture, this is what we are.’” ●

Westfield’s Autumn/Winter 2017 campaign launches this weekend to coincide with Wool Week Australia. Wool Week events will be held in Westfield shopping centres across the country until May 21.





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1 Westfield ambassador Stephanie Field at Anlaby Station wearing a Country Road slip dress, \$199, Dotti lace top, \$19.95, Mimco hat, \$99.95, and Sportsgirl Emilia sling bag, \$39.95
2 Factorie bodycon dress, \$39.95, Bianca Spender charcoal Wallis jacket, \$695, and Rubi Shoes "Bianca" boot, \$69.95
3 Anlaby Station owners Andrew Morphett and Peter Hayward - Morphett wears a Saba check shirt, \$149, RM Williams Howe sweater, \$179, Witchery Oakland overcoat, \$399.95, and Johnny Big pant, \$99.99; Hayward wears a Johnny Big floral shirt, \$89.99, Rodd & Gunn knit, \$229, Sportscraft pea coat, \$499.99 and Johnny Big pant, \$99.99. All retailer's items are available at Westfield

