

# Lambhill Station forges ahead

"Beef cows shouldn't be treated as second-class citizens on hill country — here at Lambhill, they are a crucial part of our profitability."

Lambhill Station, in the steep hills of the Taieri Gorge, is an environment that can challenge both man and beast. The 22,000 stock unit property covers 4550ha of steep, exposed hill country with a growing season that stops abruptly in May and does not resume until September.

The passion and pride that the Thomsons have for the land, livestock and their community is clearly obvious. With 13 years at the helm of Lambhill, Chris and Lucy Thomson — along with Archie (15) and Zara (13) — have a lot to be proud of in a list of achievements over this time.

The productivity gains at Lambhill are impressive, and due to an uncompromising focus on pasture and animal performance.

The Three O'Clock River splits the station in two, with altitude rising from 180m to 700m above sea level, and snow a frequent visitor in winter.

Alongside 10,800 ewes, Chris and Lucy run 750 mixed-aged Angus cows, including 200 yearling in-calf heifers.

The Lambhill mixed-age cows recently scanned 97% in calf.

Their yearling girls well and truly pay their way, going to the bull at 350-390kg LW — an impressive feat given Lambhill's challenging climate. "We have bought over 40 Fossil



**Uncompromising . . .** Lucy and Chris Thomson, of Lambhill Station, place importance on herd performance year in, year out. PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Creek Angus bulls since we took over the management in 2005. These genetics are bred in the hills of North Otago and well adapted to this tough environment.

"We have a very rigid selection criteria, with a focus on maternal

traits, positive fats, longevity, reproduction, and moderate mature weights to keep our cows efficient.

"It may seem like a long list, but we need the whole package of traits in order for our stock to both survive and thrive at Lambhill, and Fossil

Creek Angus delivers this for us."

Chris and Lucy are positive about the future of the sheep and beef industry, and given the current regulation challenges and costs that are being thrown at farmers, they believe it is important that each and

every animal on the property pays its way. The Angus breed is delivering this for them.

Their aim has always been to push production in a way that suits the challenging topography, not turn Lambhill into an intensive finishing property, so robust genetics, a simple system and early decisions have been the key to success.

The short growing season at Lambhill makes growing a sizeable area of winter crop a necessity. Turnips on 250ha or second-crop kale drive an impressive regrassing programme on the 1100ha of cultivable area. This is good, dry wintering country, with the ground generally only requiring a spray and direct drill following winter grazing.

A further 350ha are developed through the spray and pray method, lifting productivity through a doubling of pasture production to 12,000kg DM/hectare/year once developed.

Getting ryegrass established in this environment is difficult — "either the drought, the grass grub or the porina will get it" — so tailoring the best pasture mix and utilising a cocksfoot base is the key.

"Just like choosing Fossil Creek Angus for our beef breeding programme, we have to source the best pasture species that can perform in this environment, no matter what the climate throws at us."

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[www.FossilCreekAngus.co.nz](http://www.FossilCreekAngus.co.nz)

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