

## Stewardship for the Next Generation

Beau Bendigo comes from a long line of men and women who relied on the land for their livelihood. His Grandpa Garreau raised and trained teams of workhorses for farmers across the state. His parents, Ursula and Larry, raised cattle on native prairie bordering South Dakota's Cheyenne River where he and his wife, Susanne, and their children, continue the ranching tradition today.

Bendigo, 46, is proud to continue his family's ranching legacy. However, when it comes to making management decisions, he isn't afraid to break tradition and implement new practices or try different products.

**"I have never been a fan of doing something a certain way, 'because this is how we have always done it,'"**

explains Beau Bendigo.

A father of four, when it comes to making management decisions, he is constantly thinking ahead to the next generation—even if it's someone else's child who ends up taking over the ranch—he is always considering land stewardship, efficiencies and the ranch's bottom line. "A rancher today has to do everything they can to stay in the black. If that means thinking outside the box on different ways to improve the land and use livestock to make this place profitable, then I'm willing to do that."

Bendigo and Susanne have been ranching fulltime since he took over his mom's 8,000-acre tribal land lease in 2003 when she passed away.

Members of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, the family has leased land from the Tribe since 1966. When Ursula passed, the Tribe awarded the lease to Bendigo. "I don't own this land, but I've been trusted to be a caretaker for it. So I've tried over the years to gain knowledge in the best practices that work for our soils and climate. Caring for this land is vital for the future generations. I want this ranch to be a model of how to manage resources so the operation can survive plentiful years and drought years," Bendigo says.



## It takes fences to make cattle utilize all the forage.

With land stewardship in mind, Bendigo decided to implement rotational grazing to maximize forage utilization and improve rangeland health. “It takes fences to make cattle utilize all the forage,” he says. “Before cross fencing, the cattle only grazed about two-thirds of a 6,000-acre parcel.”

He began doing research on fencing products to use to break up the 8,000 acres of native rangeland. By asking questions, he learned about the long-term benefits of using high-tensile barbed wire compared to the low-carbon fencing he’d grown up with.

“We had miles and miles of fence to put in, so I wanted to put in the best product because I didn’t want to redo it,” he says of the high-tensile Bekaert Cattleman®Pro 14-gauge barbed wire he installed.

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Tensile strength is the term used to describe the resistance of steel or other materials to break under pressure. Compared to low-carbon barbed wire, high-tensile barbed wire can withstand 25 to 35 percent more pressure before breaking. Because high tensile wire only has 3 percent stretch, compared to low-carbon wire’s 13 percent elongation, high-tensile barbed wire doesn’t sag from snow load or livestock pressure.

During the summer of 2010, Bendigo began dividing the single 8,000-acre pasture into eight smaller pastures. That winter, extreme weather put the fence to the test. “In the river breaks, the fence was completely covered by snow. In the past, that kind of snow load would have flattened the fence. But that spring, I rode the fence line and the high-tensile fence didn’t need any repairs. I was sold on

Bekaert’s high-tensile fencing after that.”

In addition to the strength and maintenance benefits, the cost of high-tensile barbed wire also beat out low-carbon options—by \$3 a roll. “When you’re talking 36 rolls on a pallet, it is quite a savings.” By working with Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Bendigo was able to receive funding for 90 percent of fencing supplies and installation.

As he, Susanne and their children: Seth, 19; Lexie, 16; Joshua, 13; and Riley, 11, make improvements, he is constantly reminded of the investments his parents made which help him today—specifically installing rural water. “When rural water came into the area in the 70s, dad had the foresight to install rural water hookups in two areas of the pasture. He was not able to expand on that, but the water was here for me.”

Water availability plays a significant role in rangeland restoration because it encourages cattle to graze the entire pasture, not just the areas close to water. Again, utilizing NRCS EQIP program funds, Bendigo was able to put in several miles of pipeline, supplying 13 water tanks with fresh water. Even during a drought, available water allows Bendigo to continue rotational grazing.

Nine years after he began putting in cross fencing and water tanks, the land has responded to rotational grazing with an increased diversity of range plants and by healing areas of erosion. As a result, 10 years ago during a five-year review, Bendigo’s carrying capacity was increased by 43 pairs.

Bekaert’s Cattleman Pro 14-gauge barbed wire continues to hold up to its low-maintenance reputation. “Instead of taking a week to fix fence each summer, now we put our time into building more cross fence so we can utilize our pastures better,” Bendigo says.

**To learn more about Bekaert’s high-tensile fencing products, visit <https://fencing.bekaert.com>.**