



**38-years-old**

**Rancher, Bell Bar Ranch**

**South Dakota State University with a degree in Ag Systems Technology, Minors in Ag Business, Ag Markets and Business**

**Background:** Geigle and his family have joined his parents, Norman and Diane, in the family ranching operation that his great-grandfather homesteaded in 1907. While managing cattle and crops takes up a lot of his time, he also manages to take time fulfilling his role in telling others the truth about production agriculture.

**Family:** Wife, Shasta of 11 years, and children, Owyn, 8, Moriah, 6, and Sully, 4

**Industry Involvement:** Pennington/Jackson County Farm Bureau President, graduate of the AFBF Partners in Agricultural Leadership program, recipient of the J. McCloy Fellowship through the American Council on Germany, American Farm Bureau GO Team, Ash Township Supervisor, board member of Wall Rodeo Booster Club and volunteer firefighter

**Hobbies:** Hunting in the fall, and his kids' activities, which include football, baseball and rodeo play days.

**Why Advocate?** "We have to tell our own story of agriculture. If we don't, someone else will and it won't be accurate or effectively promote agriculture in a positive way," says Geigle.

# RANCHER'S VOICE

By Codi Vallery-Mills

How do we stop "preaching to the choir" and reach more non-ag people about farm and ranching? Josh Geigle has a few ideas, as he has spent the last several years trying to better his conversations with people not like himself.

Geigle was at a convention in 2014 when his eyes were opened to the need for people of the agricultural community to speak up about production ag. He sat in on a session called "Omnivores Dilemma" – the panel that day had representatives from the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, Meatless Monday campaign and a carbon footprint, anti-ag speaker.

"I didn't agree with a lot of what was being said by two of them, and when it was time for questions I stood up and instead of asking a question I took the opportunity to tell them about my family's ranch and what we do to take care of our land and livestock," Geigle says.

He was rewarded with numerous people wanting to learn more from him afterward. He came home from that event pretty invigorated about telling his ag story. "Just ask my family, I was annoying," Geigle recalls.

Another ag advocacy win for him was when he had the chance to give his side on the estate tax issue to a fellow South Dakotan now living and working in Washington, D.C. "At the end of it all, he said he had never thought about it the way I explained it. I don't know if I changed his mind, but I was able to present the other side, and I felt good about it."

Several years have rolled on since then, but Geigle still sees the need to have a seat at the table and a voice on ag issues. Through the American Farm Bureau Federation, he has received media training and been able to conduct interviews, give presentations and be a spokesperson for agriculture.

"I have learned you have to get out of your comfort zone and go to where the consumers are," Geigle says of his advocating efforts. He also advises people to just "Be yourself. Be polite. Be truthful and tell people if you don't have the right answer, but you know the right people that do and you will get them in touch."

With a ranch to help run, his main method of promoting agriculture has been through

social media. The Bell Bar Ranch's Facebook page is updated with happenings on the ranch whether it is wheat harvest or spring cattle branding. He includes his family in many of the posts because he wants the public to realize there is a real family behind the cattle and crops being produced. There is a real family behind the stewardship efforts being implemented.

"The main message I want to convey to people is that farmers and ranchers are everyday people doing the right thing for our own families as well as the public," Geigle says.

As fourth generation on his family's 110-year-old ranch, he's also hoping to communicate the sustainability that must come into play to be in operation for multiple generations.

"I mean these operations must be doing something right to stay in practice that long," Geigle comments on century-old ranches like his own.

Geigle and his wife, Shasta, ranch with his parents, Norman and Diane. The family has gone through different phases of production practices to get them where they are today – a no-till farming operation that utilizes crop rotations to establish root structure and microbes in the soil. The cattle component of the operation is also built around the sustainability practice of rotational grazing and the "Take Half, Leave Half" theory.

The Geigles practice sustainability in three different areas: social, environment and economic.

Geigle explains the social component is about developing relationships that better their lives but also allows them to expand the message of agriculture. The environment element is taken care of through their production practices. "And it all has to work financially or it doesn't work at all," Geigle explains about the third area of economics.

He is proud to think of the things the generations before him have accomplished and even prouder to imagine what his grandparents would think of the two generations operating today. "I look up to the perseverance that my great-grandparents must have had. I'm sure they couldn't have imagined the things my family has been able to do with the ranch," Geigle says.