

BREAKING INTO THE BEEF BUSINESS

Wendy and Jake Bingham of North Powder market their beef locally and across the nation

By LISA BRITTON
Baker City Herald

Wendy and Jake Bingham wanted to expand their contract fencing company when they signed up for a class on how to grow your business.

Then they got to thinking about their commercial cow herd.

"It's always been in my mind that it would be fun to direct sell our meat," Wendy said.

They took that class in 2018.

"In the fall of 2019 we launched our website," she said.

Ag backgrounds

Jake grew up on a cattle ranch outside of North Powder. Wendy grew up in Idaho on a potato farm where cattle and horses were a secondary attribute.

But she loved the animals.

The couple met at Utah State University, and then worked together on a Montana cattle ranch where guests came to work and experience the western lifestyle.

The Bingham family moved to Eastern Oregon in 2002, to the home where Jake was raised.

"We bought a cow herd and moved back," Wendy said.

They had a traditional operation, selling truckloads of cattle on a commercial basis.

Selling beef to local residents was a small part of their business.

"We'd sell quarters or halves to family and friends," Wendy said.

But not everyone has freezer space for that much beef.

Now customers can buy as much or as little as they want —



Tierra Kessler/Contributed photo

Bingham Beef is a family operation. From left: Roper, Brand, Jake, Wendy, Hatlee, Dallee Jo and Range.

a few pounds of ground beef or a box of mixed cuts.

"We want to make it as simple as possible for the consumer," she said.

Today, Bingham Beef ships its products across the United States.

"We've shipped as far as Maine and Florida," Wendy said.

The meat, packed in dry ice, must ship in two days. During the summer, she switches to overnight shipping.

Many of the Bingham family's national customers ordered online after visiting with the couple at their farmers market booth.

"They'll be from somewhere else and take our information," Wendy said. "Then the next month

I'll get an order."

The market, she said, allows customers to talk to the producer and learn more about the meat.

"You're the face of the business — a lot of it is knowing who is raising your meat, and that it's done humanely," she said. "They resonate with our lifestyle, and that we're raising our family in this lifestyle."

Indeed, the Bingham Beef marketing includes family photos, as well as images from the ranch.

She also uses social media to market the products, and often posts photos and videos that offer a glimpse of life on a working cattle ranch.

Wendy had a booth at the La

INFORMATION

Check out Bingham Beef at binghambeef.com, on Facebook and Instagram, or stop by the booth at these farmers markets:

North Powder: Fridays, 9 a.m. to noon

Pendleton: Fridays, 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

La Grande: Saturdays, 9 a.m. to noon

Grande Farmers Market in 2021. This year, she is attending farmers markets in North Powder and Pendleton on Fridays, then in La Grande on Saturdays.

Pandemic response

The Bingham Beef website — binghambeef.com — went live in the fall of 2019.

By spring 2020, everyone was spending much more time at home as the pandemic changed daily routines.

"People were on social media more, so it helped with our reach," she said.

Their orders increased, but the USDA-certified butcher (the certification is required for direct sales) who processes their meat had limited space in the schedule.

Now she's planning ahead for the butcher.

"We're scheduled through 2023," Wendy said.

Taking this direct sales approach means a focus on marketing.

"Processing, packaging and displaying the meat is a different level," she said.

The website features photos to showcase various cuts of beef — for instance, a thick steak sprinkled with coarse salt and decorated with fresh rosemary.

The most popular order varies widely, but tends toward steaks, Wendy said.

"Our ribeyes, filet mignon and New Yorks are the most popular," she said.

She offers something for non-humans, too.

"People love to buy the dog bones," she said with a smile.

As for ground beef, which is made from half of every cow, customers can buy a box full of this cut or will find it added to the variety boxes, too.

Wendy said local purchases make up about 70% of the orders during the summer, thanks to the farmers markets.

"It feels so good to support your locals and supply what they need," she said. "It's been fun to have connections with our customers."

Bingham Beef also supplies meat to The Landing in La Grande, Minam Lodge, and the La Grande School District for school lunches.

Looking ahead

Wendy is always thinking of ways to offer something different, and the newest Bingham Beef offerings are beef breakfast sausage and beef sticks.

Soon, she hopes to launch subscriptions to a Ranch Club monthly meat box.

"It would come at the same time every month," she said.

These subscriptions would be filled first from the inventory, then the rest would be listed on the website.

And, because she offers a wide variety of cuts that might not be familiar — like osso buco — she's happy to share recipes.

The Bingham family knows how to cook beef.

"We have a lot of beef at our house," Wendy said with a laugh. "It's a delicacy to have chicken or fish."