GEOPOLITICS CLUB · WORLD BRIEF

Policy Time vs. Cattle Time

Washington can rewrite trade rules in a day, but cattle take years to produce, so every fix to the beef shortage arrives faster than the beef.

Domestic | Transnational | International

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Information as of Monday, October 12, 2026

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this presentation are my own and do not reflect those of my employer, nor the university I attend.

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ROADMAP

Three stories, three levels

01 · DOMESTIC

Record beef prices, smallest herd in 75 years

Why the U.S. is short of cattle and who is fighting over the fix.

02 · TRANSNATIONAL

Screwworm and the sterile fly race

A parasite that ignores the border, and the factories built to stop it.

03 · INTERNATIONAL

Reopening the border, widening the quota

Mexican cattle and foreign beef as the policy tools of choice.

BEFORE WE START

Screwworm: a fly whose larvae eat the living flesh of animals. **Feeder calf:** a baby cow sent to a feedlot to be fattened. **Tariff-rate quota:** a set number of imports at a low tariff.

Sources — Structure per Geopolitics Club World Brief Standard; screwworm definition: NPR/AP.

Record beef prices, smallest herd in 75 years

86.2M

cattle and calves in January 2026, the smallest herd since 1951

$10.49

per pound, retail Choice beef in July 2026, up from $8.51 in August 2024

9.4%

rise in beef and veal prices vs. a year earlier (BLS)

Players and interests

Ranchers cash in at record prices instead of rebuilding. **Packers** like Tyson pay more for cattle than beef sells for and are closing plants. **The White House** wants lower prices before the midterms.

Theme link

This story shows policy time vs. cattle time because a rancher who keeps a heifer to rebuild the herd waits about two years for any payoff, while record prices pay to sell today.

Sources — Bloomberg via Farm Progress (Feb 2); Fox Business (USDA data); ABC News (Aug 21); Newsweek.

Screwworm and the sterile fly race

The pest

Fly larvae feed on the living tissue of warm-blooded animals, including people.

The border

Panama barrier failed, spread through out N.A, C.A, and into Mexico.

The fix

Females mate once, so a sterile male means eggs that never hatch.

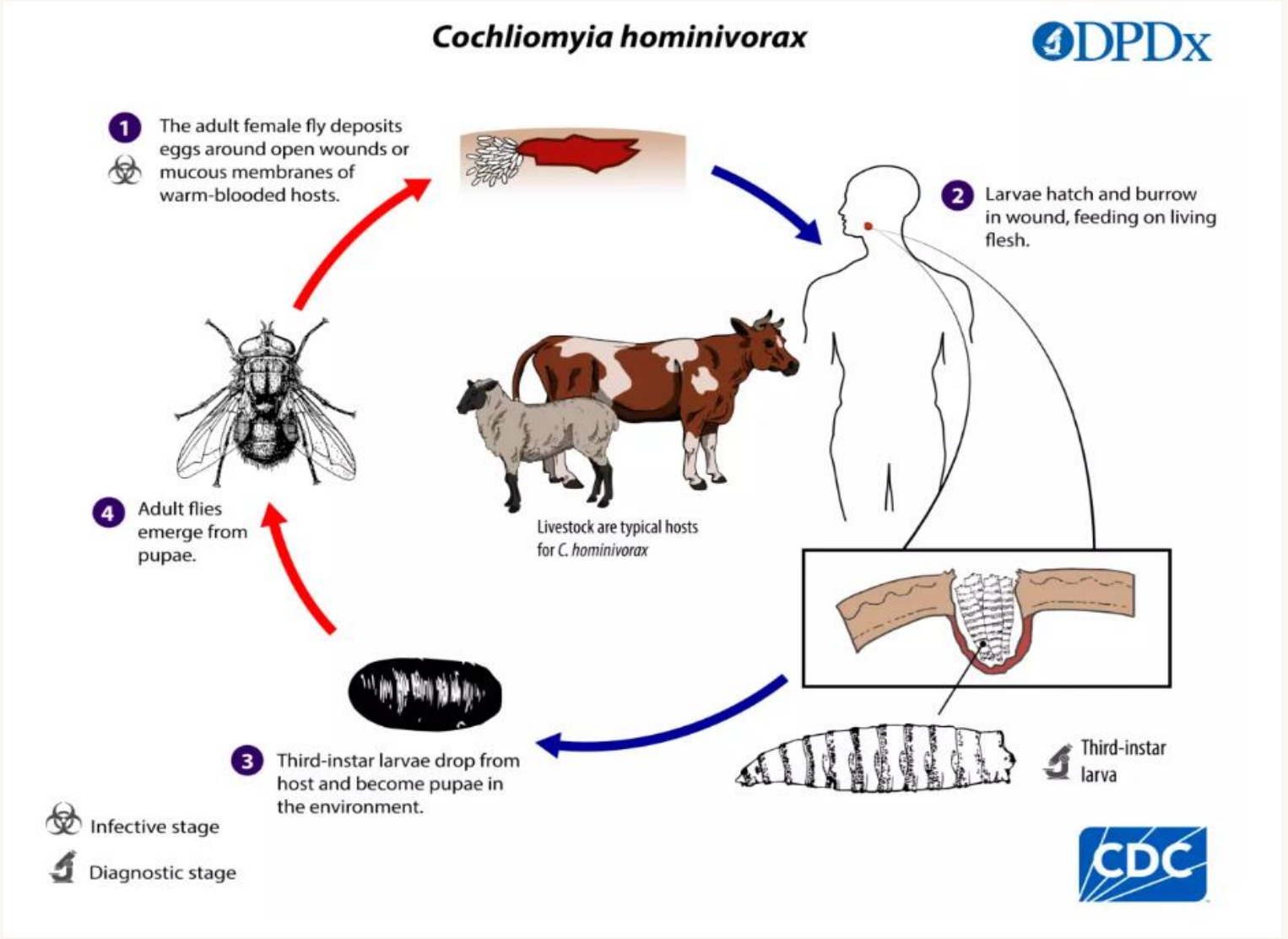
Sterile flies produced per week, in millions



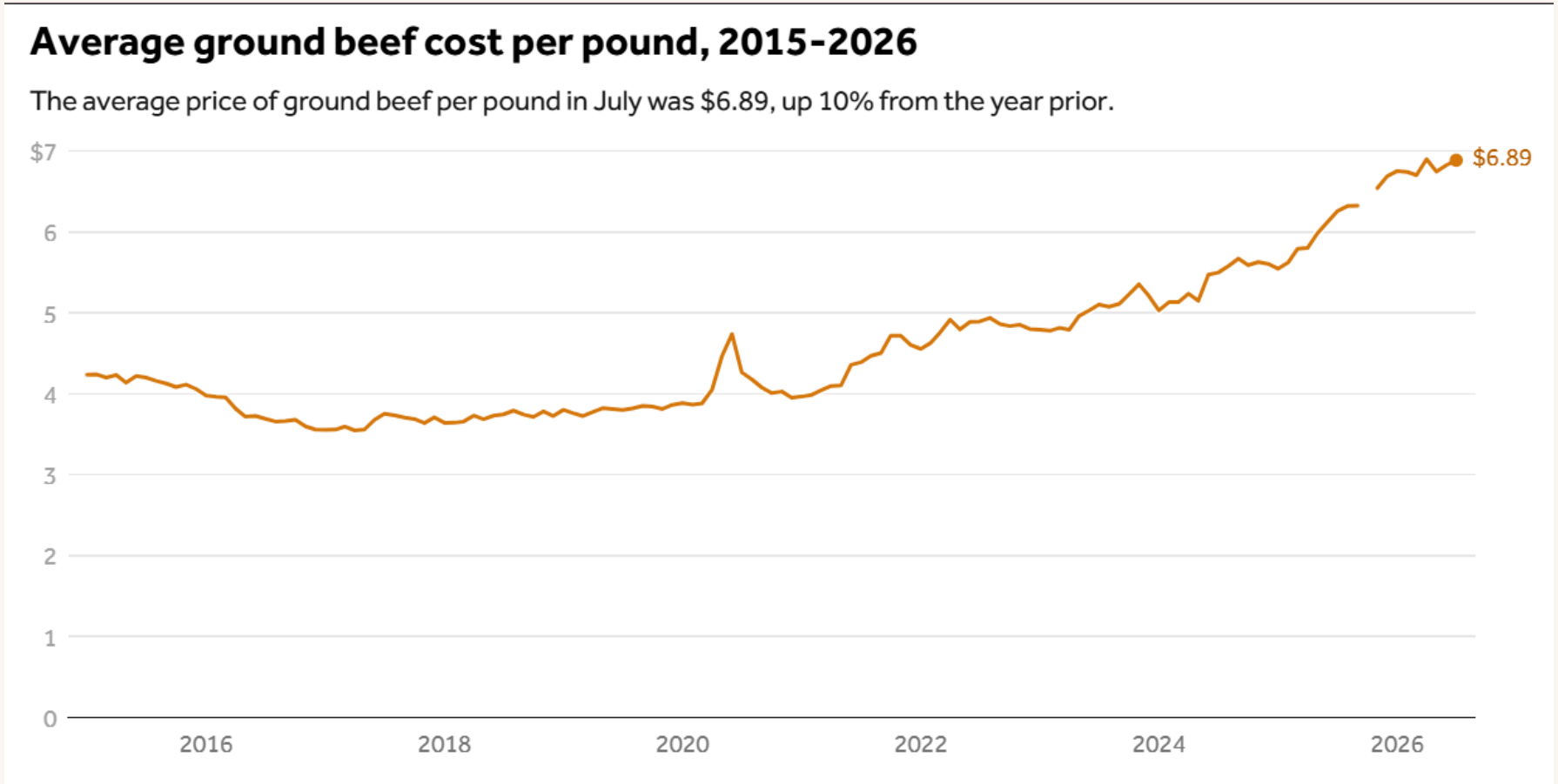
So what: a $750 million Texas plant will not produce until late 2027, so until then the border depends on flies from Panama and Mexico.

Sources — USDA (Apr 17); AP via WTOP (Feb 9); Washington Examiner (Mar 10); Reuters (Sept 24); NPR/AP.

The Screwworm



Sources — https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/news/energy-environment/animals/2026/10/04/556427/texas-new-world-screwworm-tracker/

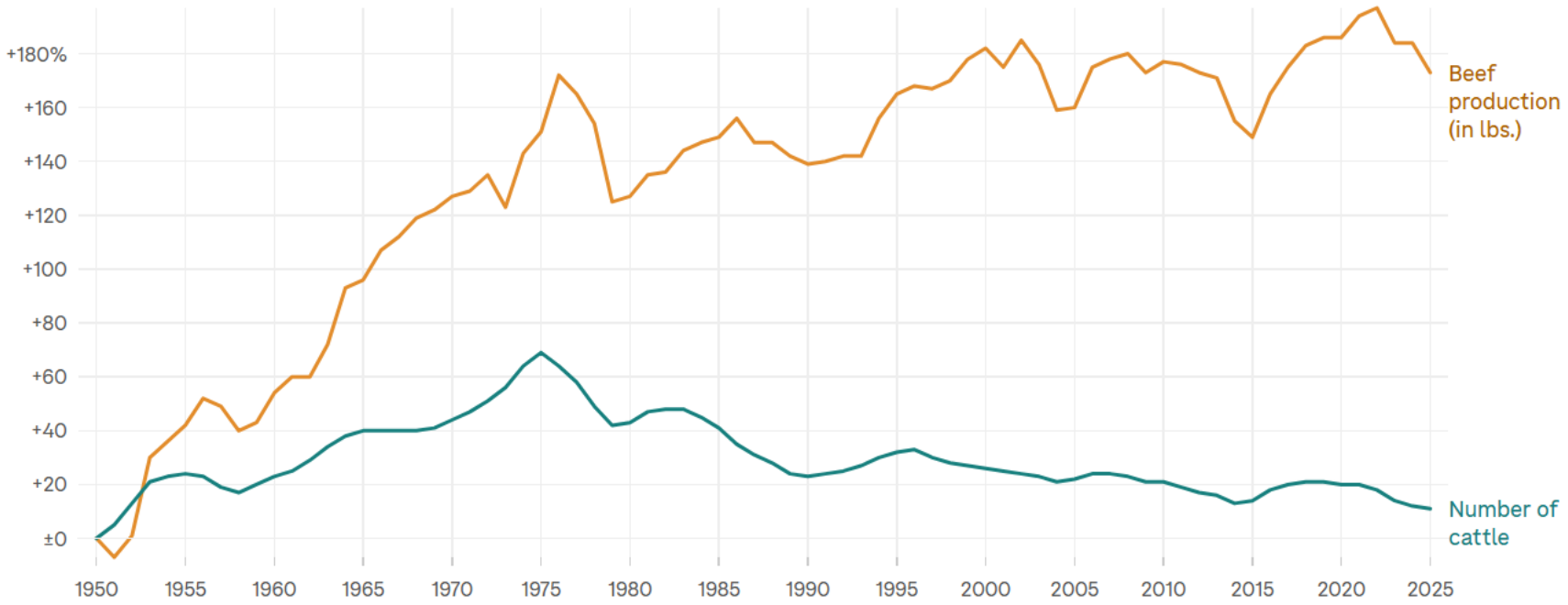


Sources — https://www.wbaltv.com/article/screwworm-cases-confirmed-us-raising-concerns-cattle-industry/71550831.

Fewer cattle, but more beef

The **U.S. cattle herd** in 2025 was the smallest since 1951, but because the average animal is larger, **beef production** has grown — up 173% since 1950.

Percentage change in each metric since 1950



Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture

Credit: Brent Jones/NPR

Sources — https://www.npr.org/2026/05/29/nx-s1-5719511/beef-cattle-herd-food-prices



Sources — https://www.cfsph.iastate.edu/thelivestockproject/stay-alert-and-protect-your-farm-from-new-world-screwworm/

Reopening the border, widening the quota

Mexico: live cattle

Aug 24: Douglas, Arizona reopens, capped at 700 head a day.

Sept 24: the larger Santa Teresa, New Mexico port was set to reopen; about 6,500 head had crossed at Douglas.

Cost to Mexico: ranchers sold at nearly 40% less at home during the ban.

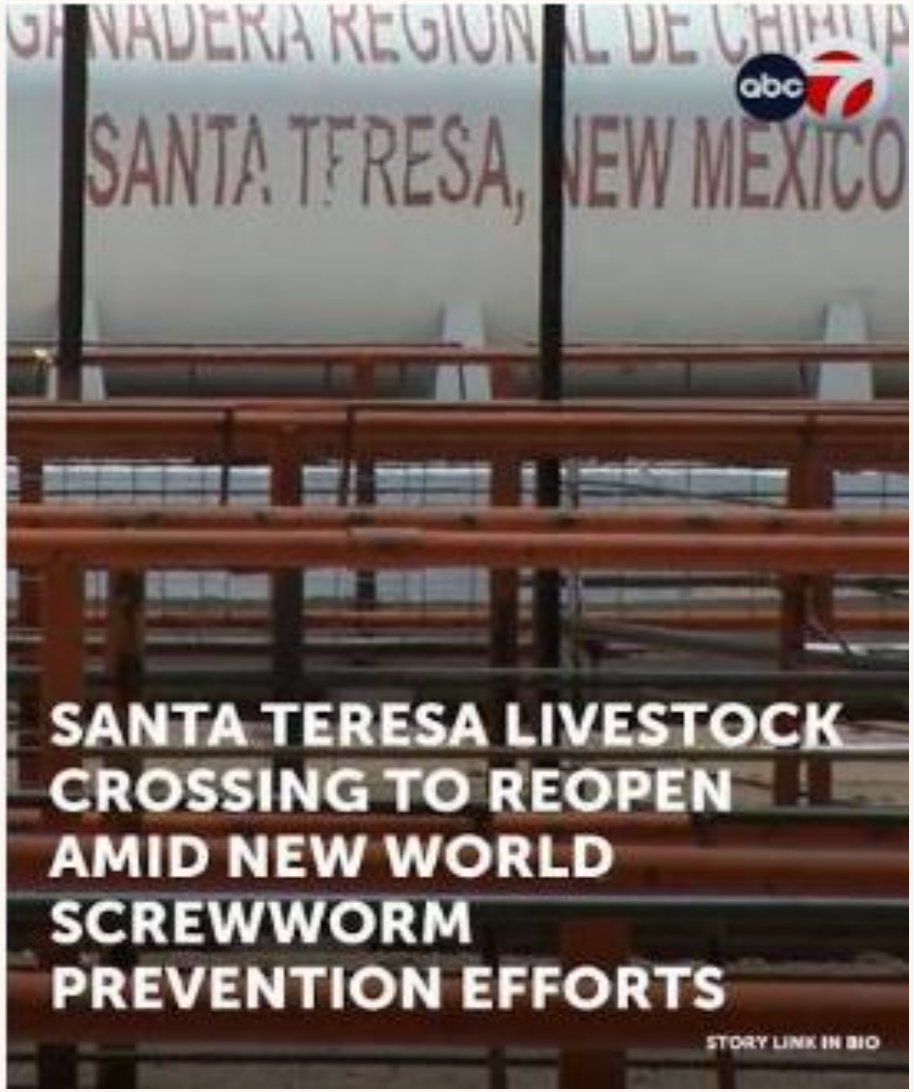
U.S.: imported beef

Aug 26: a proclamation adds 300,000 metric tons of lean beef trimmings to the 2026 quota, nearly 15% of 2025 beef imports.

Backlash: cattle groups opposed it, and the president says he may end it if import prices do not fall.

The lag: it takes about five to eight months to raise an imported calf to slaughter weight, so neither move lowers prices right away.

Sources — Reuters (Sept 24); High Plains Journal; Agronews; White House; DTN; ABC News; AP.



Sources — https://newsin.bio/kviaabc7news?utm_source=ig&utm_medium=social&utm_content=link_in_bio&fbclid

SYNTHESIS

How the three stories connect

TRANSNATIONAL
Screwworm closes the border to Mexican feeder calves

→

DOMESTIC
A herd already at a 75-year low has fewer calves to fatten

→

DOMESTIC
Record prices; packers lose money and close plants

→

INTERNATIONAL
Washington reopens ports and widens the import quota

→

TIME LAG
Five to eight months before imported cattle become beef

Theme link: this brief shows policy time vs. cattle time because every fix, whether a port, a quota or a fly factory, takes months or years to reach the grocery store.

Callback to last month: oil above $100 also raises diesel and fertilizer costs for ranchers (ABC News, Aug 21). Arrows are plausible transmission channels, not proven causation.

Sources — Synthesis of sources on slides 3 to 5; ABC News (Aug 21).

WHAT TO WATCH

Five signposts

What to watch	Why it matters
Santa Teresa and other ports	Do crossings scale up, or stall?
The 300,000-ton beef quota	It can be ended if import prices do not fall
New Texas screwworm cases	A new outbreak could shut the border again
Texas sterile fly plant	First output is targeted for November 2027
USDA January cattle report	First sign the herd is rebuilding; some say relief is 2028 or later

Sources — Reuters (Sept 24); White House; USDA (Apr 17); Fox Business.

SOURCES

Sources and further reading

ABC News. “Trump Announces Temporary Pause of Beef Import Tariffs in Effort to Lower Prices Ahead of Midterms.” *ABC News*, abcnews.com/Politics/trump-announces-temporary-pause-beef-import-tariffs-effort/story?id=135841581. Accessed 10 Oct. 2026.

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