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

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.

Information as of Monday, October 12, 2026

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.

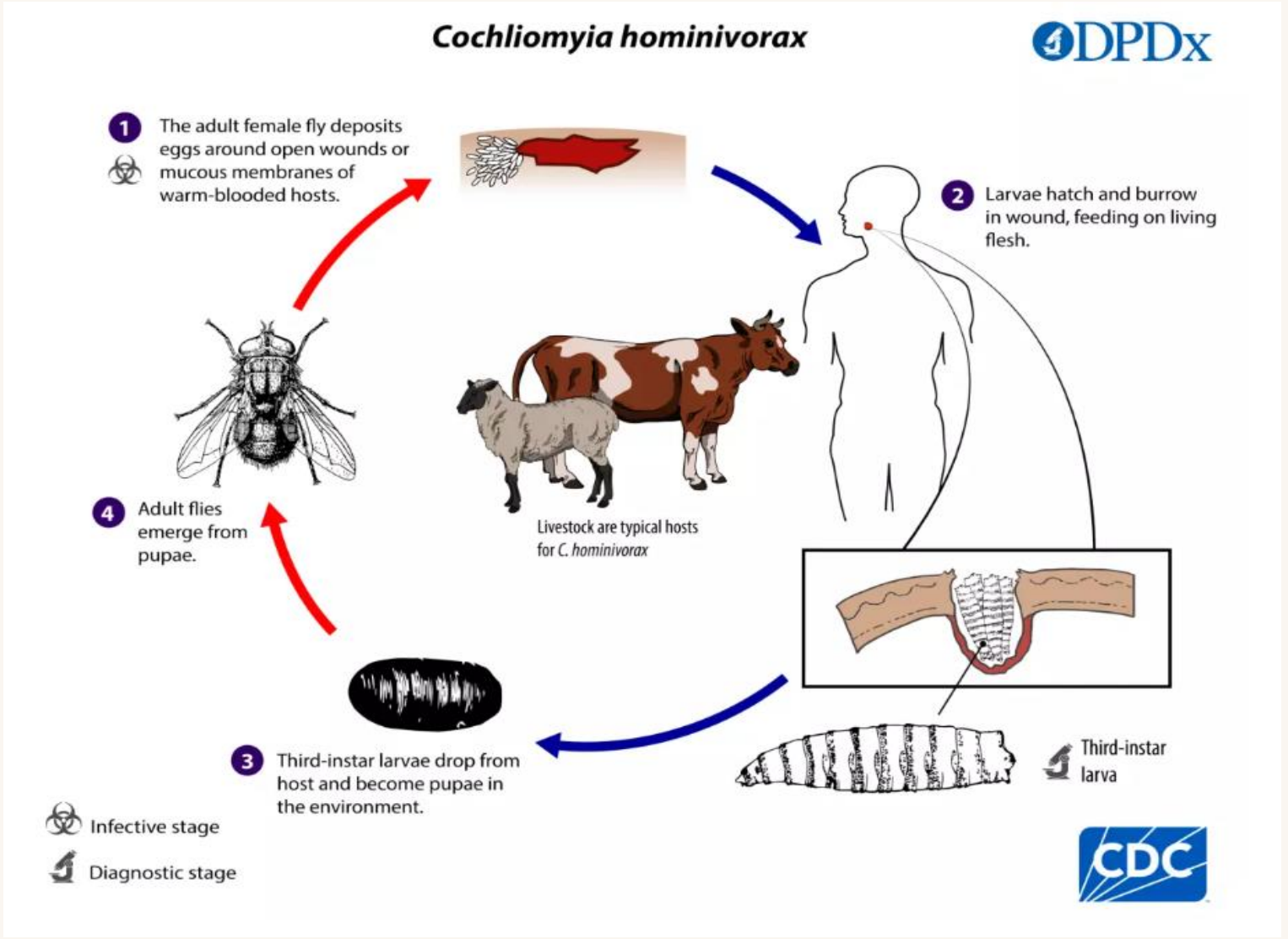
Sterile flies produced per week, in millions



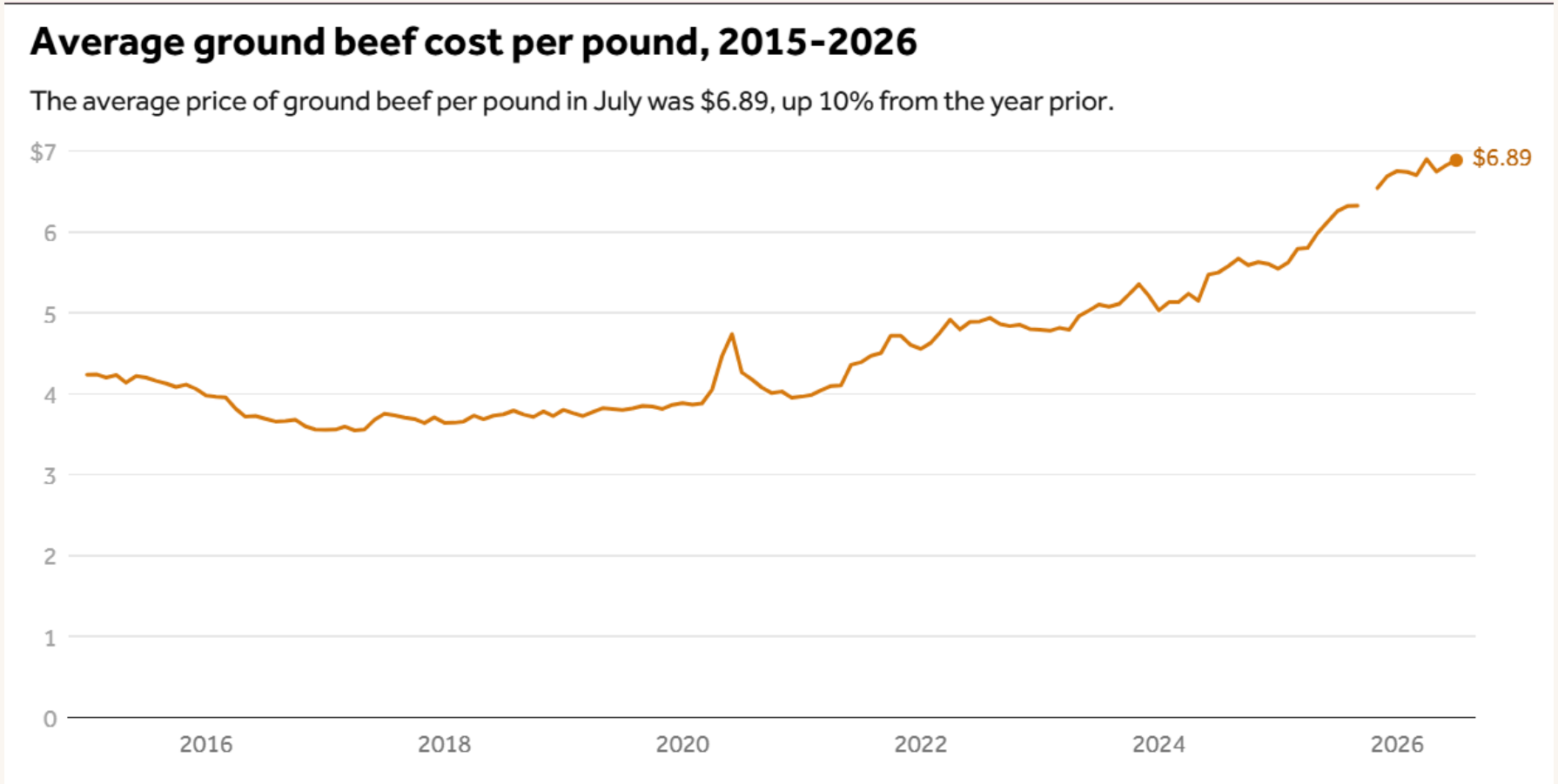
So what: a $750 million Texas plant will not produce until late 2027, so until then the border depends on flies from Panama and Mexico.

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/

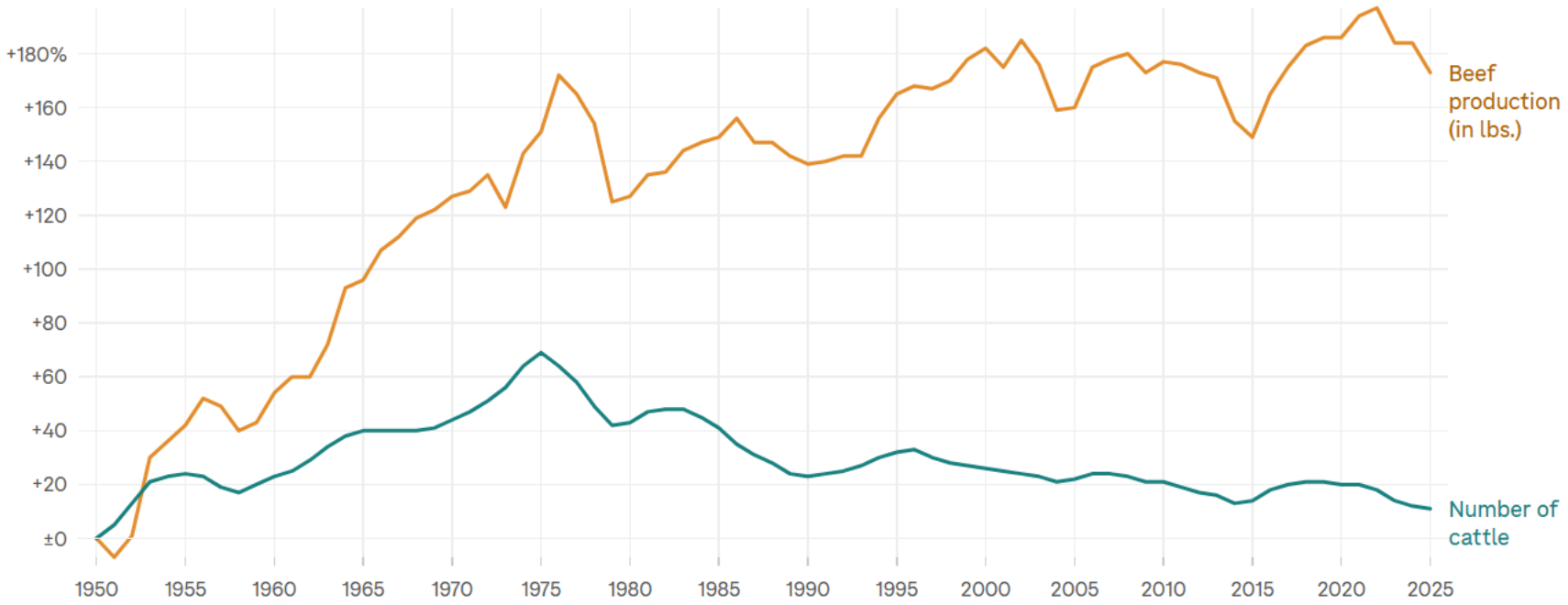


Sources — https://www.wbaltv.com/article/screwworm-cases-confirmed-us-raising-concerns-cattle-industry/71550831.

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.

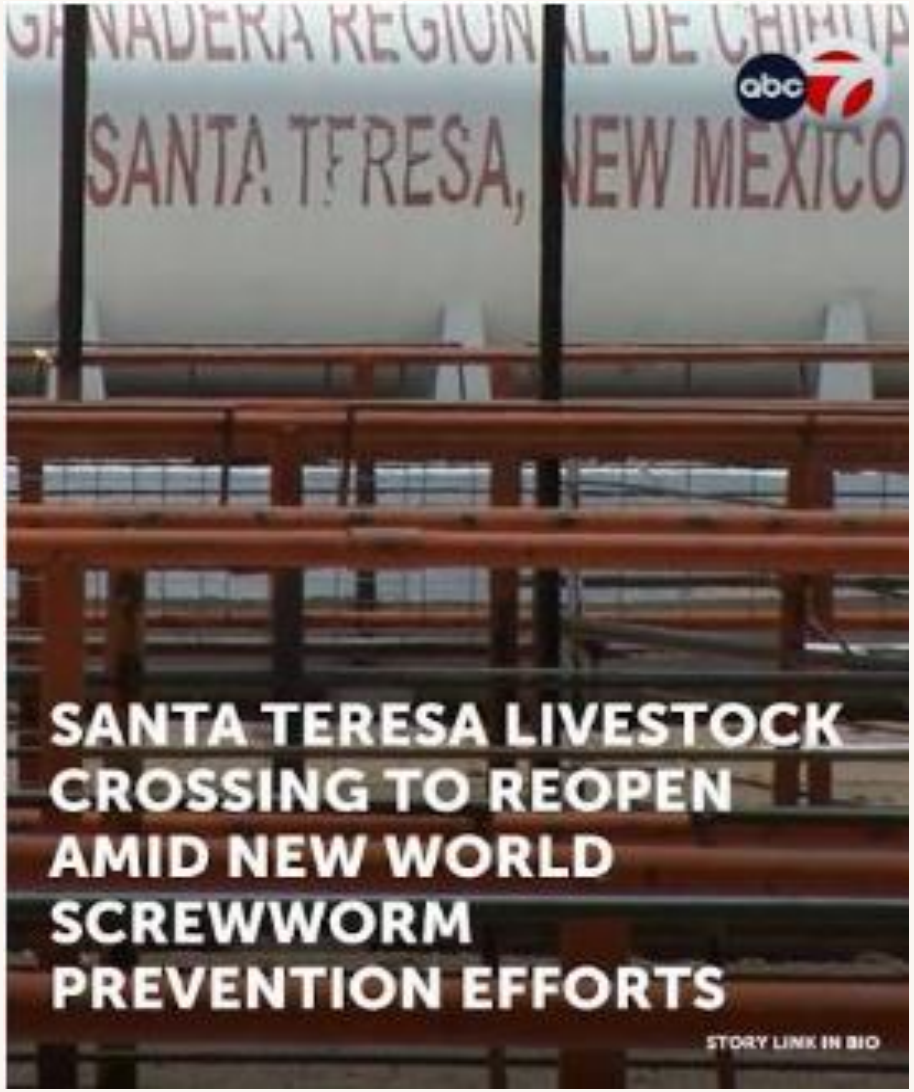
U.S.: imported beef

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

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