Top 2026 Beef Industry Hot Topics

Historic Cattle Markets & Tight Supplies: Following years of drought, the national herd has reached a 73-year low, keeping prices for calves, feeders, and fed cattle at record highs. While supply is lower, ranchers are facing high costs and questioning how long high prices will last.

Import Surge and Trade Issues: Beef imports are at record highs, rising 18% in 2025 and 61% since 2022, leading to debates over international competition. Trade with Mexico has been hampered by the closure of the border to live cattle due to New World Screwworm threats in the Southwest, urging officials to find solutions.

Consumer Demand & Inflation: Despite high prices at the retail counter, consumer demand for beef remains high. Consumers are shifting, however, towards less expensive cuts and increasing home consumption rather than dining out.

Industry Consolidation Concerns: The Livestock Consolidation Research Act is a major legislative focus, with lawmakers studying the impact of concentration among large packing companies on the industry.

Sustainability and Production Research: Research is focused on improving production efficiency to improve profitability on smaller land footprints, along with studies on the healthfulness of grass-fed versus grain-fed beef.

Production & Environmental Factors: In addition to the ARS Research Labs Studying Beef studying efficiency, researchers are investigating the mitigation of liver abscesses in dairy-influenced cattle and the use of beef manure to improve soil health.

Industry Operations & Constraints: Rising labor shortages and aging producer populations are making succession planning a critical issue. Furthermore, Feedlot Magazine is tracking how supply chain, management and trade are impacting the industry.