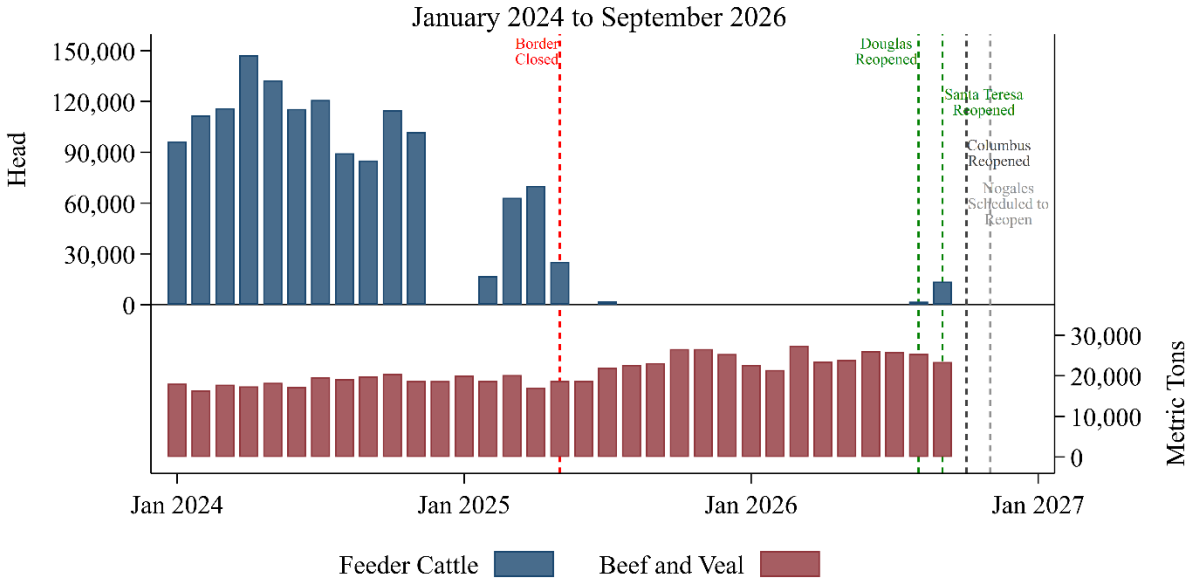
Beef and Cattle Imports from Mexico: September 2026 Update

Brian K. Coffey (bcoffey@ksu.edu) – K-State Department of Agricultural Economics
November 2026

US efforts to prevent the spread of New World Screw Worm (NWS) have included prohibiting the importation of live bovine animals from Mexico. The first border closure was in November 2024 and it lasted until February 2025. Then, on May 11, 2025, USDA announced that the border would be closed again. This closure lasted until a phased reopening began in August 2026 with the opening of the Douglas, AZ port of entry. On September 24, 2026, the major trade hub at Santa Teresa, Mexico opened and Columbus, NM opened on October 26, 2026. The port of entry at Nogales, AZ scheduled to reopen on November 30, 2026.

Mexico is a major US trading partner in several sectors, including cattle and beef. Feeder cattle represent a major portion of the live animals imported. The US imported about 1.2 million head of feeder cattle[1] each year in 2023 and 2024. Feeder cattle imports from Mexico were equivalent of 4% of the US calf crop in each of those years.

Figure 1. Monthly Feeder Cattle and Beef Imports from Mexico



Based on USDA GATS data. Beef is all fresh and frozen beef and veal.
Feeder Cattle are all steers and heifers between 200 and 705 pounds.

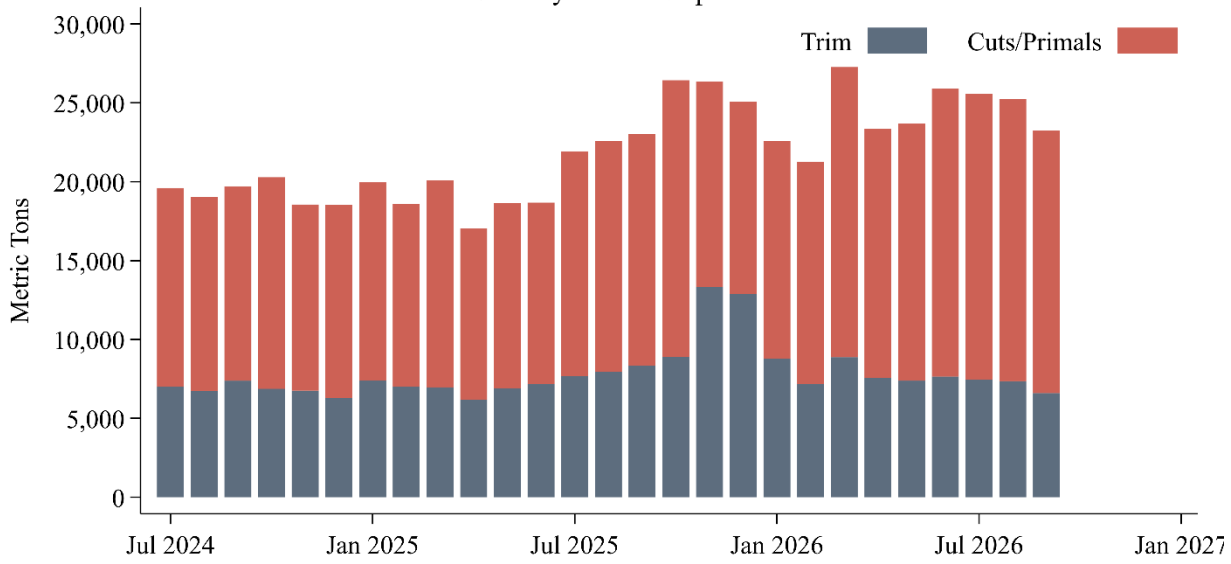
[1] Feeder cattle are defined using the Harmonized Tariff Schedule codes corresponding to steers and heifers between 200 and 705 pounds.

Beef and veal imports from Mexico are also important to the US beef sector. In 2024, total beef and veal imports from Mexico were 489 million pounds, which is the equivalent of 2% of US beef consumption.
Closures of the US-Mexico border have changed the dynamics of cattle and beef trade. Figure 1 shows monthly imports of feeder cattle and beef from Mexico since January 2024 based on the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service Global Agricultural Trade database up to September 2026. Over 13,000 head of feeder cattle came into the US from Mexico in September 2026. For context, that is 16% of the September 2024 volume. Note that the crossing at Santa Teresa opened on September 24th, so almost all of this volume came through only one port of entry.

As fewer Mexican cattle have crossed the border, more Mexican beef has been imported. For example, quantity of all beef and veal imports for September 2026 were 117% of September 2024 levels. Figure 2 shows the import quantities of beef, excluding veal and processed/cooked products. In Figure 2, beef imports are grouped by "Trim" and "Cuts/Primals" based on the Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) codes in the dataset.[2] There has been an increase in the category of Cuts/Primals, relative to the category of Trim, as those products from cattle finished in Mexico have been imported as a substitute for feeder cattle that would have been finished in the US.

Figure 2. Monthly Beef Imports from Mexico

January 2024 to September 2026



Based on USDA GATS data. Beef is categorized by HTS codes. Processed meats and veal are omitted.
Some beef labeled as 'Cuts/Primals' is likely used in ground products.

[2] See the Data Sources and Notes section for an explanation.

Reestablishing the feeder cattle trade between Mexico and the US will take some time but the response to phased reopenings has been swift. Time will also tell whether the shifts toward importing Mexican beef instead of feeder cattle was just a short-term response to border closings or if the practice has become a lasting part of the trade dynamic between the two countries.

Data Sources and Notes

All data were collected from the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service Global Agricultural Trade System (USDA GATS). Data can be extracted here: https://apps.fas.usda.gov/gats/default.aspx. Beef and veal products were aggregated for Figure 2 based solely on Harmonized Tariff Schedule (HTS) codes. Boneless product not specifically named as a cut was deemed "Trim". All bone-in product and product labeled as a specific cut, as a carcass, or as a partial carcass was deemed "Cuts/Primals". This grouping makes no assumptions about what the end use of the products. I will share my USDA GATS query settings and HTS classification scheme upon request.

For more information about this publication and others, visit AgManager.info.
K-State Agricultural Economics | 342 Waters Hall, Manhattan, KS 66506-4011 | 785.532.1504
www.agecononomics.k-state.edu
Copyright 2026: AgManager.info and K-State Department of Agricultural Economics