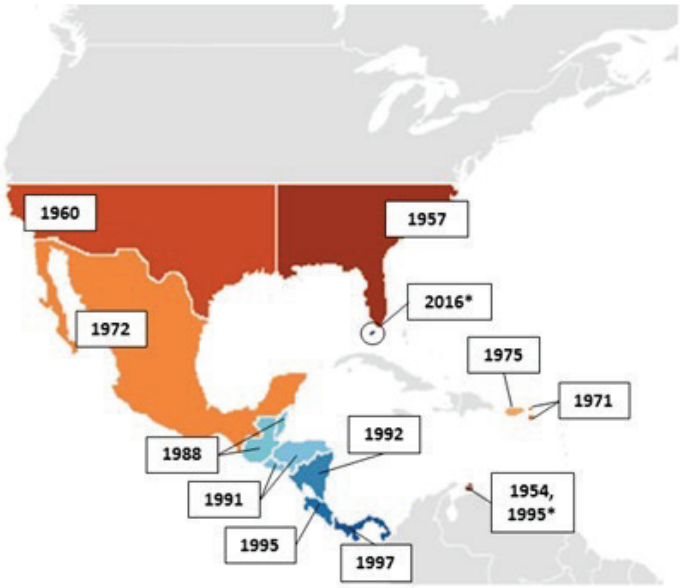
Ag INSIDER
FARM BUREAU ARKANSAS
June 2026

New World Screwworm: What Arkansas Producers Need to Know

The USDA confirmed the first New World screwworm case in the U.S. since 1966 on June 3, 2026. Since then, the containment efforts have increased, with targeted sterile fly releases and increased surveillance. However, the case numbers and affected species continue to increase. This Ag Insider reviews the history of New World screwworm in the U.S. This map shows the historic start dates of eradication programs.*



New World screwworm was eradicated completely in the continental U.S. by 1966, primarily via the sterile insect technique with help from the weather. Like horn flies, New World screwworm activity tends to decline in the colder months as the threshold for survival is 20 degrees Fahrenheit. However, for Mexico, and many southern states, temperatures don't often drop to that level. The sterile insect technique is the only proven method to control fly populations. New World screwworm females only mate once in a lifetime, so when lab-raised, sterile males are released into the population and mate, a generation of flies doesn't hatch, and we see a population reduction.

There is one sterile insect production facility in Panama, which is operated by the Panama-United States Commission for the Eradication and Prevention of Screwworm Infestation in Livestock, with two more in construction; one in Mexico and one in Texas. There are three dispersal facilities, two in Mexico and one in Texas. The aerial and ground release of flies occur in targeted locations, where there is a population of New World screwworm.

During the last outbreak, it took six years for the continental U.S. to fully eradicate the parasite. Knowing what we know now, how do we prepare? Ranchers should work with a veterinarian to create a fly management plan, which may include FDA-approved preventative products.

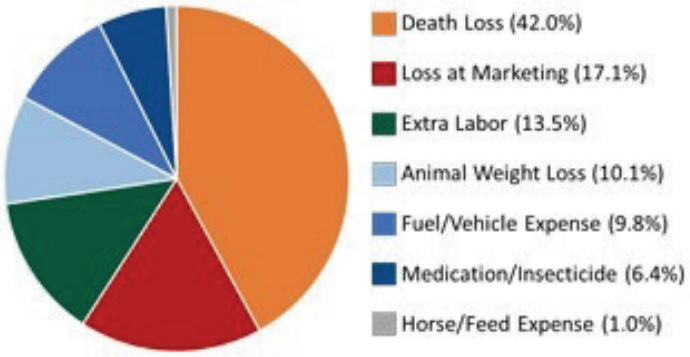
A wound as small as a tick bite can become infested, which makes monitoring animals essential. Livestock management practices such as castration, dehorning and branding put livestock at risk. Anyone calving in the upcoming months should check the navels of newborn animals. Keep an eye out for wounds and certain behaviors such as animals that appear sick, animals that isolate themselves, animals that become lethargic or stop eating, and animals shaking their heads or excessively scratching. It's important to note that, while we typically think of New World screwworm affecting cattle, U.S. cases have included goats, sheep and a dog. If you own livestock and farm dogs or barn cats, check all animals. Report suspected cases to a veterinarian or the Arkansas Department of Agriculture for

testing.

In 2016, New World screwworms were re-introduced to the Florida Keys. This outbreak affected companion animals but also had a major impact on the deer population. Livestock producers have little if any control over the movement of wildlife across their land, so it's important to monitor wildlife the best you can. Wild hogs can be affected, so be mindful if trapping or otherwise controlling the population and inspect those animals before disposing. The National Wildlife Heath Center has worked closely with USDA in developing a plan to deal with New World screwworm in wildlife.

In the previous U.S. outbreak, the economic impact on farmers and ranchers was significant. In a report from USDA APHIS Veterinary Services, the leading impact was death loss, followed by loss at marketing.

Prevention and early detection avoid some animal loss, as the impacts of the parasite are treatable. As for loss at marketing, the fed beef cattle futures market reacted immediately to news of the parasite in the U.S. It's early yet to tell the effect this infestation will have on the cash market but, as of now, prices remain high. Potential disruptions to the market could result from movement restrictions. The Arkansas Department of Agriculture has added entry requirements to all warm-blooded animals traveling from an infested state. Animals must be accompanied by an Interstate Certificate of Veterinary Inspection dated within seven days of entry into the state and documentation must include the following statement: All animals in shipment were inspected and found free of evidence of New World screwworm infestation.



Movement of animals into Arkansas from identified New World screwworm infested zones will be restricted according to federal response guidance. Louisiana has also placed restrictions on the movement of cattle coming from or through an infested zone. Canada, despite its cooler climate and distance from Texas, has declared they will temporarily deny entry of cattle originating from or that were present in Texas within 21 days of attempted entry to Canada. The Texas border remains closed to incoming cattle from Mexico, and any thoughts towards reopening have been postponed. Rodeos and livestock shows have increased biosecurity practices, with many having veterinarians on-site to check incoming animals.

Lastly, I want to commend Arkansas producers for staying vigilant and up to date on New World screwworm news. I encourage everyone to reassure the public that it is still safe to eat beef. The parasite cannot be transmitted to humans through eating beef and consumers should have no concerns over purchasing meat at the grocery store. Beef shines during the summer grilling season and we want to continue promoting our product.

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