

Muskegon Chronicle



SPARTAN PRIDE

THE MICHIGAN STATE FOOTBALL TEAM IS EXPECTED TO RELY ON ITS DEPTH AT DEFENSE THIS FALL, WHICH INCLUDES ESSEXVILLE GARBER'S ALEX VANSUMERN. **B1**



If prices remain this high, shoppers will likely start to buy more hamburger meat and fewer steaks, but that doesn't appear to be happening broadly yet. And Americans also don't seem to be buying chicken or pork instead. Associated Press file

And, experts say, consumers shouldn't expect much relief anytime soon.

Josh Funk Associated Press

Anyone firing up the grill this summer already knows hamburger patties and steaks are expensive, but the latest numbers show prices have climbed to record highs.

And experts say consumers shouldn't expect much relief soon, either.

The average price of a pound of ground beef rose to \$6.12 in June, up nearly 12% from a year ago, according to U.S. government data. The average price of all uncooked beef steaks rose 8% to \$11.49 per pound.

But this is not a recent phenomenon. Beef prices have been steadily rising over the past 20 years because the supply of cattle remains tight while beef remains popular.

In fact, the U.S. cattle herd has been steadily shrinking for decades. As of Jan. 1, the U.S. had 86.7 million cattle and calves, down 8% from the most recent peak in 2019. That is the lowest number of cattle since 1951, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Many factors, including drought and cattle prices, have contributed to that decline. And now the emergence of a pesky parasite in Mexico and the prospect of widespread tariffs may further reduce supply and raise prices:

SMALLER HERDS

The American beef industry has gotten better at breeding larger animals, so ranchers can provide the same amount of beef with fewer cattle, said David Anderson, a

RECORD HIGHS

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livestock economist at Texas A&M.

Then in 2020, a three-year drought began that dried out pastures and raised the cost of feed for cattle, according to the American Farm Bureau. Drought has continued to be a problem across the West since then, and the price of feed has put more pressure on ranchers who already operate on slim profit margins.

In response, many farmers slaughtered more female cattle than usual, which helped beef supplies in the short term but lowered the size of future herds. Lower cattle supplies has raised prices.

In recent years cattle prices have soared, so animals are selling for thousands of dollars apiece. Recent prices show cattle selling for more than \$230 per hundredweight, or hundred pounds.

Those higher prices give ranchers more incentive to sell cows now to capture profits instead of hanging onto them for breed-

ing given prices in the years ahead may decrease, Anderson said.

"For them, the balance is, 'Do I sell that animal now and take this record high check?' Or 'Do I keep her to realize her returns over her productive life when she's having calves?'" Anderson said. "And so it's this balancing act and so far the side that's been winning is to sell her and get the check."

DISEASE DILEMMA

The emergence of a flesh-eating pest in cattle herds in Mexico has put extra pressure on supply because officials cut off all imports of cattle from south of the border last year. Some 4% of the cattle the U.S. feeds to slaughter for beef comes from Mexico.

The pest is the New World screwworm fly, and female flies lay eggs in wounds on warm-blooded animals. The larvae that hatch are unusual among flies for feeding on live flesh and fluids instead of dead material. American officials worry if the fly reaches Texas, its flesh-eating maggots could cause large economic losses as they did decades ago before the U.S. eradicated the pest.

Agricultural economist Bernt Nelson with the Farm Bureau said the loss of that many cattle is putting additional pressure on supply that is helping drive prices higher.

TARIFF TROUBLE

President Donald Trump's tariffs have yet to have a major impact on beef prices but they could be another factor that drives prices higher because the U.S. imports more than 4 million pounds of beef every year.

SEE FOOD COST, A3

MICHIGAN ROADS

'Band-Aid' fix planned for interchange in need of rebuild

The I-75/I-69 interchange highlights Michigan's infrastructure funding crisis.

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FLINT — Michigan is planning to put a \$5.5 million "Band-Aid" on a busy highway interchange in the Flint area as officials stress the need for more road funding.

The spot where I-75 and I-69 meet in Genesee County is a busy one, used by more than 30,000 vehicles per day, according to the Michigan Department of Transportation. It's a key driver for commercial, commuter and tourism traffic.

However, it's also in need of a complete rebuild due to its declining road and bridge conditions, as well as a redesign to accommodate today's traffic speeds and flow.

That'll cost an estimated \$1.3 billion.

MDOT has recently begun highlighting a handful of key trunkline bridges in declining condition to draw attention to the need for more annual transportation funding.

Without increased funding, MDOT says it's possible more than 100 highway bridges will close to traffic by 2035, affecting about 1.8 million drivers daily.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has said increased funding is a priority, as have leaders from the state House and Senate. Whitmer announced her proposal in February, and the Republican-led House passed their proposal in March.

As of mid-August, the Senate hasn't touched the House-passed bill package, nor introduced one of its own. Lawmakers say they're willing to negotiate, but the issue remains at a standstill.

A redesign of I-75/I-69 would likely affect 33 bridges in the area. Of those, eight are in poor or serious condition.

One such bridge — the northbound I-75 flyover ramp to westbound I-69 — is in serious condition.

SEE MICHIGAN ROADS, A3



A screenshot from an overhead video shows traffic at the interchange of I-75 and I-69 in Genesee County. Michigan Department of Transportation photo

Dems propose law to fight National Guard deployments

House Republicans say the bill won't see the light of day.

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LANSING — Democrats in the Michigan House have introduced a bill that would allow the state to sue President Donald Trump's administration in state court for allegedly unlawful National Guard deployments.

The bill introduced Thursday would forbid any armed military force from entering the state to perform a military duty without the permission of the Michigan governor.

However, the president would still be able to send troops to Michigan without the governor's consent if the troops

were acting under an authority "validly invoked" by the commander-in-chief.

While the bill wouldn't expand or limit Trump's ability to deploy troops to Michigan, it provides an additional legal avenue to challenge the Trump administration in the event of a deployment in the state.

"It merely reiterates federal law into state law, giving our state and our courts one more avenue to push back on the president's unlawful and arguably unconstitutional actions, should he attempt to deploy troops into Michigan," said state Rep. Laurie Pohutsky, D-Livonia, a bill sponsor.

Pohutsky's bill is in response to Trump deploying National Guard and other military troops in Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., and threatening to send them elsewhere as part of his crack-down on crime and calls for law and order.

California sued the Trump administration for deploying National Guard troops to accompany immigration agents on raids in the state.

According to the Associated Press, California argues the troops violated a federal law that generally prohibits military enforcement of domestic laws.

SEE LEGISLATION, A3