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In today's Beef Buzz, senior farm and ranch broadcaster Ron Hays features comments made by one of the speakers at the recent King Ranch Institute for Ranch Management Symposium, Dr Jason Sawyer, Chief Science Officer of the East Foundation discussed the urgent threat posed by the potential return of the New World screwworm across the Rio Grande. The East Foundation oversees 217,000 acres across six ranches in South Texas, an area that would be "literally on the front lines" if the pest crosses into the U.S. Sawyer emphasized that government collaboration is vital in this battle, saying, "The long-term answer here is more sterile flies."

Dr. Sawyer detailed ongoing efforts to control the spread of the screwworm through sterile fly production. "The 100 million flies being produced in Panama couldn't quite hold the line," he explained, noting that new facilities in Mexico and the U.S. are critical. A facility under development in Mexico will "produce an additional 150 to 300 million" sterile flies weekly, while a larger U.S. facility, backed by a \$750 million USDA commitment, could yield "around 500 to 600 million flies per week for distribution and eradication." According to Sawyer, this level of production mirrors historical efforts that required "the weekly dispersal of between 500 and 700 million flies for 20 years" to eliminate the pest in earlier decades.

Sawyer warned that complacency could have severe consequences. "It would be really easy for some of us to say, hey, these things are way down there in southern Mexico... forget about it," he cautioned. "If we don't construct these new facilities and fulfill that total eradication plan, they will be in Texas." His message was clear — preparation and continued investment are the only ways to prevent a devastating outbreak that could impact livestock and wildlife across South Texas.

To prepare, Sawyer said the East Foundation is actively developing a monitoring and response framework. "What we've tried to do is build ourselves a framework for thinking about the problem, and therefore a way to identify strategies and solutions to help us mitigate the problem, should it emerge," he explained. This framework is rooted in basic risk assessment principles — identifying hazards, assessing exposure, evaluating attack rates, and understanding consequences.

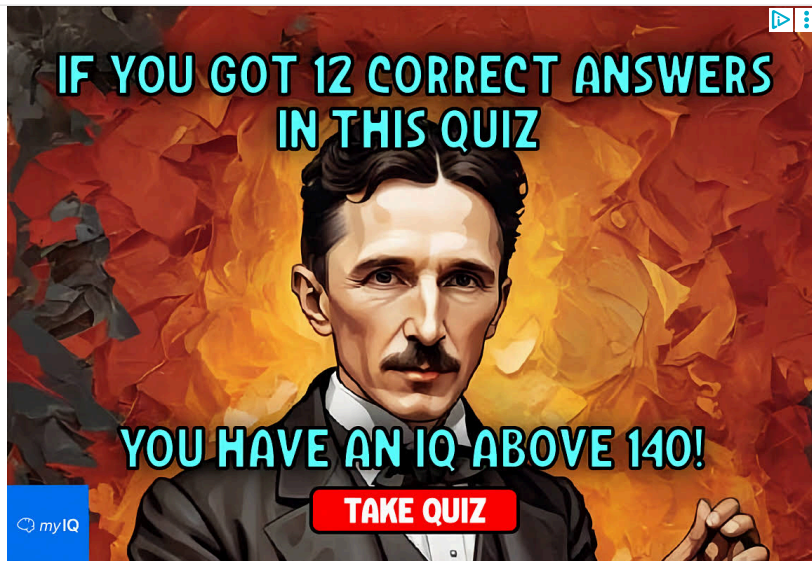
Ultimately, Dr. Sawyer underscored that while much of the exposure risk depends on external efforts in Mexico and beyond, ranch managers still have a role to play. "I can't do anything about exposure risk — that depends on Mexico and how flies fly, whether the government drops sterile insects," he said. "All I can do is advocate attack rate and the

consequential outcome rate... those are the only two things that we actively as managers probably could do much about." With the risk currently "low" but "not zero," Sawyer stressed vigilance, planning, and scientific coordination as the best defenses against a pest that could reemerge with devastating effect.

The Beef Buzz is a regular feature heard on radio stations around the region on the Radio Oklahoma Ag Network and is a regular audio feature found on this website as well. Click on the LISTEN BAR for today's show and check out our archives (<https://www.oklahomafarmreport.com/okfr/beef-buzz/>) for older Beef Buzz shows covering the gamut of the beef cattle industry today.

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