

Call for Papers

Cattle Commodification in Global History: Capitalism, Science and Empire

International Workshop, Ghent University, 3-5 June 2026
Organised by the ERC Starting Grant Project CATTLEFRONTIERS

In recent years, the history of livestock and livestock commodities has attracted increasing attention, partly due to the animal turn, the increasing popularity of environmental history and commodity history, and the intertwined ecological and climate crises that are unfolding. Focusing on cattle (or *bos taurus* and *bos indicus*), perhaps the most emblematic livestock species, this international workshop wants to take stock of recent historiographical developments and push towards a first synthesis that thinks together the various dimensions of cattle commodification from a global history perspective.

The workshop, on the one hand, addresses the broad historical processes such as capitalist and imperial expansion and changing knowledge regimes that, since ca. 1500 CE, transformed cattle production and integrated cattle (commodities) in global, imperial, regional and local economies. Arguably, such processes played out in uneven ways across the globe, giving rise to different trajectories and timelines. On the other, the workshop conceives cattle commodification as a series of partly overlapping processes that transform living animals into profitable commodities. It hence wants to analyse why, how and with what consequences, in varying historical and geographical settings, cattle bodies were 'improved', new forms and techniques of animal husbandry introduced, and living cattle further commodified into beef, hides/leather, milk, tallow, corns or manure. These commodification processes involved a broad range of actors, such as (agro)pastoralists and cattle ranchers, veterinary scientists and state officials, capitalist entrepreneurs and international organizations. Their interactions transformed pre-existing cattle economies, knowledge regimes and local ecologies, but also led to the introduction of cattle in areas where they previously did not thrive.

With this workshop, we aim to explore the different (political, economic, societal, cultural, ecological, scientific, etc.) dimensions of cattle production and commodification in global history. We are interested in contributions from all geographical regions and particularly welcome papers from historians as well as historically-minded anthropologists and veterinary scientists. Individual papers need not be global in scope, but we encourage authors to think about the broader historical context in which developments take place as well as potential (dis)connections with other parts of the world.

Potential paper topics *may* relate, but are not limited to:

- *the politics of cattle production*: colonial control over land and/or indigenous societies, state investments, local/imperial/global food security, the role of international organisations such as FAO, etc.

- *changing modes of cattle raising*: nomadic, semi-nomadic and settled pastoralism, mixed farming, large-scale ranching, industrial animal farming, etc.
- *social conditions and effects of cattle production*: social stratification, gender, race, caste, religious, and ethnic roles, changing labour forms and relations, (legal) regimes of land and cattle ownership, etc.
- *environmental consequences*: deforestation, formation/disappearance of grasslands, soil erosion, (water) pollution, global warming, etc.
- *veterinary, agricultural and environmental knowledge and technologies*: (non-)circulation of knowledge, conflicting knowledge regimes and actors, scientific institutions and practices such as experimental stations, cross-breeding and selective breeding techniques, practices of disease control, etc.
- *processing of cattle commodities*: slaughterhouses, production of hides/leather, dairy infrastructures, techniques for dried, salted, canned, frozen and chilled beef, etc.
- *trading infrastructures and networks*: transport technologies, ports, trade companies, credit mechanisms, etc.
- *cattle labour*: role in agriculture as draft animals, role in transport, etc.
- *local, imperial and global uses of cattle commodities*: as food, clothing, fertilizer, (industrial) grease, medicine, bridewealth, banking, etc.

This three-day workshop is organised by the ERC-funded research project CATTLEFRONTIERS based at the History Department of Ghent University (www.cattlefrontiers.eu). We welcome papers from both early career and senior scholars. Papers will be grouped in thematic panels, pre-circulated to all workshop participants and discussed in extenso during the workshop. We aim to publish an edited volume with a good press afterwards and hence ask participants to submit unpublished papers. The conference will take place in person, meaning that we expect all accepted participants to travel to Ghent. The CATTLEFRONTIERS project will cover travel costs as well as costs of accommodation in Ghent.

If you want to participate, please e-mail your abstract of 200-300 words, accompanied by a short bionote (100-200 words) to cattlefrontiers@ugent.be by **Friday 23 January 2026**. We will notify you about the outcome of our selection process by **15 February 2026** the latest. If your paper is accepted, we will then ask you to submit a draft paper of approx. 5,000-6,000 words (not counting footnotes and bibliography) by **15 May 2026**.