

The Almost Monthly Epic-Cure® Newsletter

June 2026

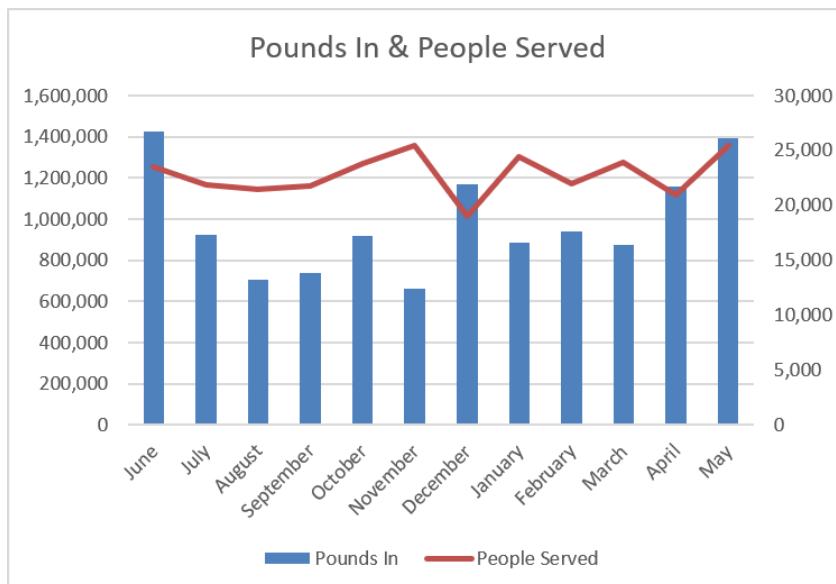
The Report Card

The Epic-Cure *Report Card* as of May 31, 2026

Life to Date (since May 24, 2019)

Pounds In/Out	46,575,469	
Wholesale Value of Food Distributed	\$95,200,919	
Pounds of Food per Family:	90.50	Average pounds per family per visit
Equivalent Meals Served:	38,812,891	Assumes 1.2 pounds per meal
Families Served		
Number of Families Served this month:	8,834	in Month of May 2026
Number of Distributions this month:	75	in Month of May 2026
Pounds of Food/Household Goods		
Total Pounds In / Out:	1,394,637	in Month of May 2026
Total Pounds In / Out:	992,130	Average of 3 prior months
Operating Efficiency		
Wholesale value of food distributed for each \$1.00 spent on Operations since inception:		\$47.88
Wholesale value of food distributed for each \$1.00 spent on Operations in May:		\$71.14

Here is our PIPS (Pounds In & People Served) Graph



Notes on the graph: To say that May was busy is putting it mildly. We were pushing potatoes, pineapples, and cabbage up to GA, NC and SC and down to Vero Beach to manage the volume effectively.

Type	Pounds
Potatoes	134,855
Pineapple	120,201
Cabbage	81,990
Oranges	45,364
Watermelon	40,591
Turnip Greens	16,568
Carrots	10,952
Corn	10,817



Register Today for the Shine a Light 5K Presented by Epic-Cure!



Lace up your running shoes and join us for the 5th Annual Shine a Light 5K on Saturday, October 17, 2026, in beautiful St. Augustine! Whether you are a competitive runner, casual walker, or simply want to support a great cause, this event is a fun way to make a real difference in our community. The scenic 5K course winds through Anastasia State Park and surrounding shaded neighborhoods before finishing at Anastasia Church.

Participants receive a race shirt, finisher medal, goody bag, and a memorable morning spent helping neighbors in need. Virtual participation options are also available for those who want to join from anywhere.

Ready to run, walk, or support the cause? Register today:

[Shine a Light 5K Registration Page](#)

Together, we can shine a light on food insecurity-one step at a time.

Become a sponsor of the Shine a Light 5K and help fight food insecurity one step at a time. Please text (248) 701-8469 or email jcaudill44@gmail.com to get your logo on the back of the race shirt!

Palatka Distribution Center Insulation Project Complete!

The spray foam insulation project was completed on June 4, and the difference has been remarkable. Before the project, it was hotter inside the warehouse than it was outside. Now, stepping inside brings immediate relief from the heat.

Thank you to everyone who donated and helped make this project possible. Your support is creating a safer, more comfortable environment for the people who work every day to ensure food reaches families in need.

We Need Front-Wheeled Walkers!

Our Epic-Med team has received an overwhelming number of requests for front-wheeled walkers, and our inventory is currently empty.

It is funny how things change-at one point they were coming out of our ears, and now we cannot keep them in stock!

If you have a gently used front-wheeled walker that is no longer needed, please consider donating it. These mobility aids make a tremendous difference for individuals recovering from illness, injury, or surgery and help people maintain their independence and safety.

Donations can be dropped off at either Epic-Cure distribution centers during regular business hours.



The Almost Monthly Epic-Cure® Newsletter

June 2026

Operations

Through hailstorms, thunder, soaked clothes, and laughter, this distribution team keeps showing up for families.

What makes that significant is not just that volunteers were willing to work in those conditions-it is that they understood that hunger does not pause for bad weather. While many people were seeking shelter from the storm, this team was unloading food, directing traffic, setting up the distribution, and serving their community with smiles on their faces.

Just as remarkable, 105 families arrived during those same conditions to receive food. Their presence is a reminder that food insecurity does not take a day off when the weather turns bad. For many families, the need for food outweighs the inconvenience and discomfort of standing in the rain.

This distribution became a powerful example of a community showing up for one another. Volunteers showed up despite the weather because families needed food. Families showed up despite the weather because they needed support. In the middle of hail, thunder, and rain, both groups demonstrated resilience, determination, and a shared commitment to making sure no one went without.

Moments like these remind us that food distributions are about more than food. They are about neighbors helping neighbors, communities standing together, and people refusing to let difficult circumstances prevent them from caring for one another.

[Gamble Rogers Stormy Day Distribution](#)

What happens at a distribution is the visible part of the mission. What is not always visible is the planning, logistics, transportation, food recovery, warehousing, inventory management, and coordination that make those moments possible.

For every \$1 invested in Epic-Cure's operations during May, \$71.14 worth of food was placed into communities rather than going to waste.

This metric demonstrates the power of our food recovery and distribution model. Through strong partnerships, volunteer support, efficient logistics, and careful inventory management, we are able to convert every operational dollar into a substantial amount of food for families facing food insecurity.

The significance of this number extends beyond financial efficiency. It represents thousands of pounds of nutritious food being rescued from waste, redirected into communities, and placed directly into the hands of families who need it most. It reflects our commitment to maximizing every donation, whether that donation comes in the form of funding, food, transportation, volunteer time, or community partnerships.

A return of \$71.14 in food value for every operational dollar spent demonstrates that even modest investments in Epic-Cure's operations create an outsized impact. Operational support makes it possible to coordinate food pickups, manage warehouses, organize distributions, maintain compliance, and ensure that donated food moves quickly and efficiently through our network rather than being discarded.

This level of efficiency is possible because of the collective efforts of our donors, volunteers, and nonprofit partners, all working together toward a common goal: increasing access to nutritious food while reducing food waste. Every dollar invested in our operations helps transform available resources into meaningful support for families throughout our service area.



The Almost Monthly Epic-Cure® Newsletter

June 2026

On that note, if you would like to be part of the solution to both food waste and food insecurity, we invite you to support Epic-Cure's mission.

Together, we can rescue more food, serve more families, and create a stronger, healthier community.

Donate here: [Link to Donate](#)

Fundraisers and Food Drives



Holiday food drives are incredibly helpful, but hunger does not end when the holidays do.

That is why we are especially grateful to Colonial Church for hosting food drives not only during the holiday season, but also in February and June. Year-round food drives help provide pantry staples like canned goods, pasta, rice, and peanut butter-items that are often difficult to obtain through food rescue programs but are essential for families. Thank you to everyone who donated and helped make these drives a success.



If your church, business, school, civic group, or neighborhood organization is looking for a meaningful way to make an impact, consider hosting a food drive at any time of the year.

Two other wonderful partnerships are helping us make an even greater impact. Check out the flyer below for the ongoing Jersey Mike's Subs fundraiser.

Winn-Dixie on The Island has launched a new donation initiative that is already making a significant impact. Customers can purchase \$5, \$10, or \$15 bags of dry goods to donate toward hunger relief, and the store has been generating hundreds of dollars in donations each day. In the last 2 months they have donated over 7,100 pounds of food to Epic-Cure. Bravo!



The Almost Monthly Epic-Cure® Newsletter

June 2026

Winn Dixie customer food donations:



Vicar's Landing Award:



We extend our sincere thanks to Vicar's Landing for once again selecting Epic-Cure as one of the benefiting organizations of their charity golf event for the second consecutive year.

Your continued partnership and generosity make a meaningful impact on our mission. Support like yours helps ensure rescued food reaches individuals and families facing food insecurity across our community—turning what might have gone to waste into hope and nourishment.

We are truly grateful for your ongoing commitment and for standing with us in this work year after year.



Scaling Solutions to Food Waste: Takeaways from ReFED 2026

The 2026 ReFED Food Waste Solutions Summit (May 19-21 in Charlotte, NC) was the main event matching this description-often referred to in connection with ReFED's work on food waste. It brought together over 650 leaders from foodservice, retail, nonprofits, government, and tech to focus on scalable solutions, with strong emphasis on AI/data technologies, operational innovations, policy, education, and methane-reducing infrastructure.

AI emerged as a central theme, with the release of ReFED's report "The Food Operating System: How AI is Being Deployed Across the Food System to Reduce Waste". It draws from 40+ interviews, case studies, and data showing where AI delivers results (e.g., in foodservice and grocery) and where barriers remain (e.g., broader household adoption). Key applications highlighted:

- Waste tracking and analytics: AI-powered cameras and tools (e.g., similar to Winnow or Leanpath integrations) identify waste hotspots in real-time, helping kitchens cut waste by 20–53% in commercial settings by making "invisible" waste visible and recommending prevention actions.
- Demand planning and predictive ordering: Tools analyze sales, inventory, weather, and trends to reduce over-ordering (e.g., pilots with retailers using solutions like Shelf Engine or Afresh showed ~15% waste reduction).
- Operational decision-making: Companies like Compass Group (via SVP Gurbir Perhar) and Thermo King demonstrated AI for real-time prevention, supply chain optimization, and data visibility.
- Broader uses: Predictive maintenance, automated inspections, smarter ripening (e.g., Strella for bananas), and supply chain visibility.

The consensus was that AI excels in measurable, incentive-aligned environments (foodservice/retail) but needs better data infrastructure and incentives for wider impact.

Other Highlighted Solutions and Innovations:

- Operational and infrastructure optimization: Tours of Compass Group sites showcased waste tracking at scale, food donation programs, composting, and circular economy practices in real foodservice settings.
- Consumer engagement and education: WWF's "Ending Wasted Food Within a Generation" campaign (Ad Council + grants); culinary demos (e.g., Andrew Zimmern using "waste" ingredients like fish heads) to normalize upcycling and shift culture.
- Packaging/depackaging, policy, and low-waste models: Sessions on reporting, state/local successes, and redesigning systems around external factors.
- Robotics and labor solutions: Earlier ReFED funding (contextual) for tools like Fieldwork Robotics to address harvesting/labor shortages at the source, reducing on-farm loss.

Overall, the summit emphasized no single silver bullet but a "million silver buckshots"-combining AI/tech for prevention, infrastructure for diversion (especially composting/upcycling to cut methane), education/culture change, and cross-sector collaboration. Data, measurement, and incentives were recurring keys to scaling impact.



Food Waste Solutions Need Packaging Solutions

At the 2026 ReFED Food Waste Solutions Summit, one breakout session cut straight to a persistent pain point in the industry: “Depackaging at a Crossroads: Promise, Risk, and the Path Forward.” As someone on the front lines of foodservice waste diversion, this topic resonated deeply. About a year and a half ago, our operation faced an overwhelming surge of dairy products-half-and-half, Silk milk, iced coffee drinks, and more. These were not straightforward milk cases that distributors or charities could easily accept. The volume was staggering, and the packaging made redistribution nearly impossible.

We explored every option. Anaerobic digestion (AD) and composting seemed promising for turning this high-organic waste into energy or soil amendments. But there was a catch: facilities required the product to be depackaged first. That meant sourcing barrels, manually or mechanically separating liquids from containers, transporting the material, and paying processing fees. The logistics proved too burdensome. For the first time, we had no choice but to landfill approximately 43,000 pounds in May of 2025. It was a heartbreaking decision, but the alternatives simply were not practicle or affordable at that flood volume.

We adapted quickly, capping intake at four pallets per week from sources and urging manufacturers to rethink packaging for better distributability. The flow eventually slowed, but the experience highlighted a systemic issue.

The Real-World Cost of Inconvenient Packaging

Consider another common culprit: those convenient squeeze pouches for toddlers and on-the-go kids. We tried diverting pallets of them to local farmers. The result? One pallet yielded less than a five-gallon bucket of actual food after hours of labor from multiple workers. The mountain of cardboard and plastic packaging filled an entire dumpster. Farmers walked away-it simply was not worth their time.

This is where depackaging technology and the push toward cleaner monostreams become game-changers. Depackaging machines mechanically separate organics from packaging at scale-handling everything from dairy cartons to pouches-producing a pumpable slurry suitable for anaerobic digesters or composters. Advances highlighted at the summit include higher-recovery systems (often >95% organic capture) that are gentler on materials, reducing shredding and contamination risks like microplastics.

Role of Monostreams

Monostreams (or mono-streams) refer to clean, single-type or highly pure organic waste streams (e.g., mostly food scraps without mixed packaging or contaminants). Depackaging is key to creating these from mixed collections.

- Why they matter: Cleaner monostreams improve processing efficiency and output quality in composting and AD. They reduce contamination risks, yield higher-value products (better compost/digestate), and make systems more economically viable. Mixed streams are harder/cheaper to collect but require robust depackaging; monostreams (e.g., source-separated from specific generators like supermarkets) need less processing.
- Effectiveness improvements: Advances in depackaging help “upgrade” mixed waste into monostream-like quality. This supports scalability of diversion infrastructure, aligns with policy mandates for organics recycling, and minimizes environmental drawbacks like microplastics. Sessions and field trips (e.g., to facilities using high-recovery depackaging + AD) showcased real-world circular impacts.



The Almost Monthly Epic-Cure® Newsletter

June 2026

Overall, the summit framed depackaging as a critical but maturing tool-not a complete solution on its own. It works best alongside prevention, better packaging design (e.g., compostable options), policy support, and data-driven standards. Integration with AI for waste tracking and operational optimization was also noted as complementary.

[Why This Matters for Solution Providers and Consumers](#)

As a solution provider, we must evaluate the full landscape: prevention, redistribution, upcycling, and infrastructure like depackaging + AD. No single tool suffices. The summit reinforced that while AI helps track and prevent waste upstream, downstream technologies like improved depackagers are essential for what slips through-especially in foodservice where packaged goods dominate.

For consumers, it is a stark reminder of the convenience-vs.-environment tradeoff. Those easy pouches and single-serve creams save time but create disproportionate waste headaches. Better packaging design (compostable where appropriate, or easier-to-open/recyclable) combined with scalable depackaging infrastructure could shift the balance.

Progress is happening. Facilities partnering with operators like Denali or RE:CIRCLE are demonstrating real impact, turning would-be landfill material into renewable energy and resources. But challenges remain: contamination standards, microplastics concerns, and the need for policy support to scale.

The lesson from our dairy flood and those stubborn pouches? Innovation in depackaging is not glamorous, but it is critical. It bridges the gap between good intentions and practical diversion. As we continue collaborating post-summit through efforts like the U.S. Food Waste Pact, investing in these technologies-and demanding smarter packaging upstream-will help us move from reactive landfilling to proactive, circular solutions.

[ReFED Summit Session Recordings](#)



Volunteer Spotlight



Nanci Smith

You probably know Nanci. She is the one, along with Paul, who keeps the Palatka warehouse running smoothly and efficiently all through the week.

She is a team leader, but, like a leader you can love, does everything that everyone else does. She operates the forklift, the power jacks, loads and unloads the delivery trucks. She is the administrator of the volunteer site and is in charge of ordering from NEFlorida. Whatever needs to be done, she will do it.

Four years ago she first came to Epic-Cure as a patron. But soon she was recruited to help one day a week. She was concerned about being away from home as she was raising two grandchildren, but she figured that out. And before long one day turned into two, then three and four days. Even five days! She has cut back to only four now. She just loves working here, finds it so rewarding.

She is originally from Illinois where she worked as a unit secretary at a hospital. One day she received a call that two of her grandkids

needed immediate help. If she did not pick them up before midnight, they would go into “the system”, and she might have a difficult time getting them out. That was the start of caring for and ultimately adopting Addisyn, who was three at the time, and Devlyn, who was just 9 months old.

Deciding to leave the Midwest, she used her 401K to buy a house sight unseen on the internet. She loaded up a 26’ U-Haul truck and set out for Florida. She had never driven a truck like that, so going through big cities like Nashville and then Atlanta in the rain was harrowing!

Arriving at their new home she found it in deplorable condition, and had to spend precious funds making repairs. Then in 2023 along came Hurricane Ian which blew the roof off! Fortunately Rebuild Florida came along. She filled out the forms and waited. Finally she got the phone call...they would not be replacing the roof. Instead she would be receiving a brand new four bedroom mobile home! Happiness!! Fearing hurricanes, when the next one came along the little family opted to sleep on air mattresses at the old warehouse on SR17.

Coming from a family of twelve kids, she has a huge family. She has four adult children, a total of ten grandchildren. A sister who lives in East Palatka volunteers on Mondays. Her grandchildren have come in to help at Epic-Cure too.

Granddaughter Addisyn is 18, a homeschooled honors student, a senior who will graduate in June. She plans to have a career in teaching. Grandson Devlyn, 15, is also an honors student. He is in JROTC, and sees being a pilot in his future. He is a real “people person”. Great kids!

One thing Nanci urges is for more people to volunteer. She is 71 and comments “age is not an issue in volunteering”. It is very rewarding!

A quote from Sunny: “Nanci is the kind of person who quietly holds everything together for the people around her, and our organization is better because of her”.

Thank you for all you do, Nanci! You are one in a million.



Volunteer Spotlight



David Hurt

Epic-Cure is developing a medical supply area in the St. Augustine warehouse called Epic-Med. The goal is similar to the goal of the food bank. Save good medical equipment and supplies from being wasted and give them to people, clinics, or anyone who has a need.

I met David Hurt as he was working in the loft area of the warehouse which is the base for this project. He is the Epic-Med “Attic Organizer”. I asked him how he got involved. He said he met Wendy Caudill, a Nurse Practitioner, while working at UF Health Flagler Hospital and also at Anastasia Baptist Church. Wendy is Sunny’s sister. She and her husband, Dr. Jeremy Caudill, have been actively engaged in traveling to many parts of the world helping rescue missions in underdeveloped and war torn countries. With their experience and connections this new area of Epic-Med was born.

One instance David mentioned was regarding a clinic in a remote area of Costa Rica called The Nest. The application for the clinic was given government approval but that door was seemingly slammed shut when the accompanying funding approval was denied. Then God and Wendy did the thing they do and the next thing he knew things were flying off the shelves, and heading where they needed to go. Epic-Med was able to supply their needs. That made David very happy!

Their outreach has not been to just international countries but also locally, such as helping the Wildflower Clinic and individuals who may be uninsured.

David works the night shift at UF Flagler. Frequently he will also work at Epic-Med in the middle of the night or the wee hours of the morning. Supplies will have accumulated, ready to be checked, inventoried and organized. He has been a nurse for 15 years earning his ASN at St. Johns College, and his BSN at St. Petersburg College. Raised in central Florida, he has been in St. Augustine 18 years. He and his daughter Ellie, 15, enjoy hiking, Legos, and Escape Rooms.

Fortunately David has other volunteers to help him as this project grows. Here are just a few of the medical equipment/supplies he mentioned: wheelchairs, walkers, bedside commodes, infusion supplies, IV tubing and poles, gloves, gowns, masks, wound care supplies, colostomy needs, tube feeding, respiratory equipment and the list goes on. All this comes from a variety of sources such as to individuals, doctors offices, clinics. The goal is to continue to collect what they can and get it to whomever is in need.

This new area is destined to grow. Fortunately David has other volunteers who will help him keep the warehouse organized, efficient, and ready to serve those in need.

Thank you, David, for this excellent service. You are greatly appreciated.



The Geopolitics of Food: Oil, Wheat, and Two Wars

Supply and demand set prices in global commodity markets like oil and grain: price adjusts until the quantity producers want to sell matches what buyers want to buy. The mechanism is simple. What makes mid-2026 different is that two wars, Russia's in Ukraine and the new Iran war that began in March, are pressing on these markets at the same time, through energy, shipping, and fertilizer all at once. Let us drill deeper.

The Basics: How a Market Clears

What? How a market clears? What does that even mean? Well, it is simple, really. A market "clears" when the quantity that buyers want to buy exactly equals the quantity which sellers want to sell, at a given price. There is no leftover supply and no unmet demand. Everything offered gets bought, and everyone willing to pay the going price gets what he or she wants.

The price that makes this happen is called the "market-clearing price." That is what traders call it. Academics and economists call it the "equilibrium price." If the price is too high, sellers are stuck with unsold goods (excess supply or "surplus"). If it is too low, buyers cannot get what they want (shortage). The market clears when the price settles at the level where the two sides match.

OK, fair enough, but how does that work? Let us take the supply side first.

- When supply rises (more oil is pumped, a bigger harvest is reaped) and demand holds steady, sellers compete to move the surplus and prices fall.
- When supply falls (a refinery outage, a poor harvest), buyers bid against each other, and prices rise until some demand backs off or new supply arrives.

Demand works in the inverse way.

- Stronger growth lifts prices and rations scarce barrels or bushels to those who value them most.
- A slowdown does the reverse. Higher prices eventually call forth more production (new wells, more planted acres).

Here is a critical point. Those responses take months or seasons. That lag is why commodity prices are volatile: shocks hit inelastic¹ markets that cannot adjust quantity quickly, so price does most of the work, and since these markets have evolved into large, deep, liquid markets with many, many buyers and sellers, the prices may change more rapidly than even professional traders anticipate.

Demand Pulls Supply: Oil versus Wheat

Oil. Strong demand pulls barrels forward out of storage, from distant producers by tanker, and from new drilling. Grade and location matter: light sweet crude commands a premium over heavier sour grades², and benchmarks like WTI³ (U.S.) and Brent⁴ (international) move together but not identically. Crucially, production is geographically concentrated, so a disruption at a single chokepoint can move the entire market.

- WTI crude oil first went negative on April 20, 2020, hitting an intraday low of about negative \$40.32 per barrel and closing the day at negative \$37.62 per barrel. Prices stayed below zero into part of the following trading day, when the May futures⁵ contract expired, so the episode lasted roughly a day.



The Almost Monthly Epic-Cure® Newsletter

June 2026

- It happened because COVID-19 lockdowns destroyed oil demand while supply kept flowing, filling up storage. The key trigger was that the expiring May futures contract required holders to take physical delivery of crude at Cushing, OK⁶, but storage there was nearly full. Traders who did not want barrels they had nowhere to put were forced to pay others to take the contracts off their hands, pushing the price below zero.

Wheat. Demand pulls grain across seasons and hemispheres. Northern Hemisphere harvests (U.S., Europe, Russia, Canada) arrive in summer and fall; the Southern Hemisphere harvests (Australia, Argentina, Brazil) occur in its opposite season. That stagger smooths global supply, so bad weather in one place is often offset by a harvest elsewhere, a built in buffer that oil does not enjoy.

The two hemispheres have opposite growing seasons, so harvests land at different times of year, creating a natural rotation in who has fresh supply.

- **Surplus in one, shortage in the other.** This balanced state is the normal, healthy state. One hemisphere just harvested (surplus, low prices locally), the other is between harvests or had a bad crop (shortage). Grain flows from the surplus side to the shortage side, and prices stay relatively moderate because the two halves offset each other. Trade does the balancing, and prices are more stable.
- **Surplus in both.** Global glut. Prices fall hard everywhere because there is nowhere short to ship to. Storage fills up, and the lowest-cost producers keep selling while higher-cost farmers lose money or cut back planting. (This is roughly the WTI-style problem described above, but for grain.)
- **Shortage in both.** Global crisis. Prices spike sharply because there is no surplus hemisphere to draw from. Importing countries bid against each other, and the poorest buyers get priced out. This is the dangerous scenario for food security.

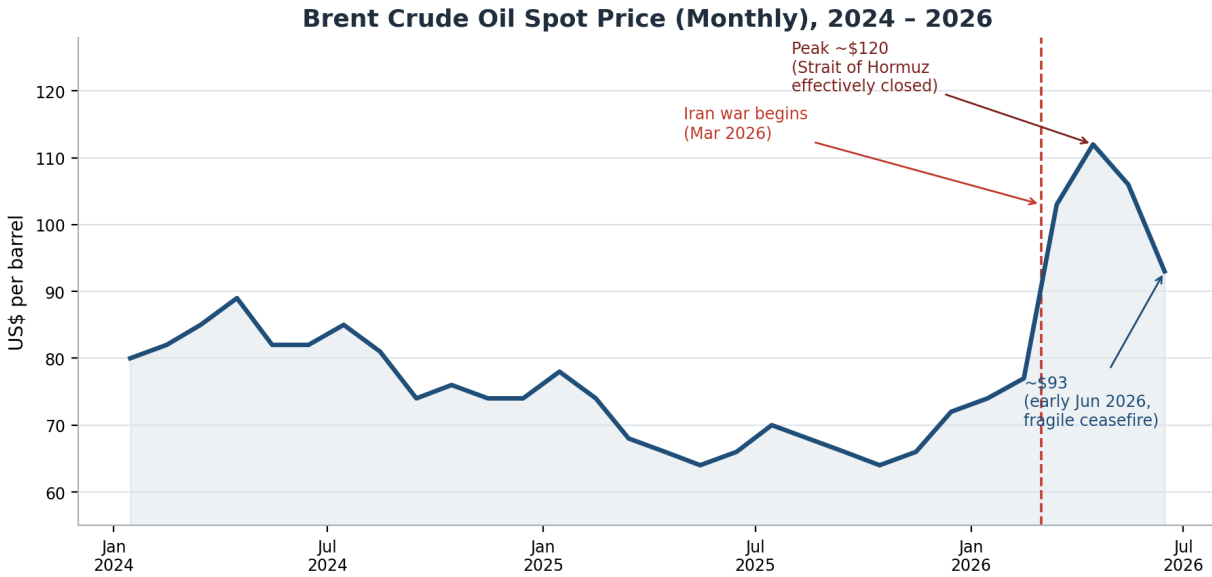
This Moment: The Iran War and the Price of Oil

The war that began in early March 2026 turned a calm oil market upside down. Brent jumped roughly 10 to 13 percent in the first days, then climbed toward \$120 a barrel as the Strait of Hormuz, the chokepoint for about one-fifth of the world's seaborne oil, fell to a small fraction of normal traffic. The International Energy Agency has described it as the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market. By early June, a fragile ceasefire had pulled Brent back to about \$93, still some 40 percent above a year earlier and swinging on every headline.

Note that the level is not the whole story; the volatility is. When a chokepoint can open or close on a rumor, the risk premium (that is, the extra price required to compensate for the added risk of owning or taking delivery of the oil) itself becomes a greater part of the price. That premium can appear or vanish faster than any barrel can be pumped.



June 2026

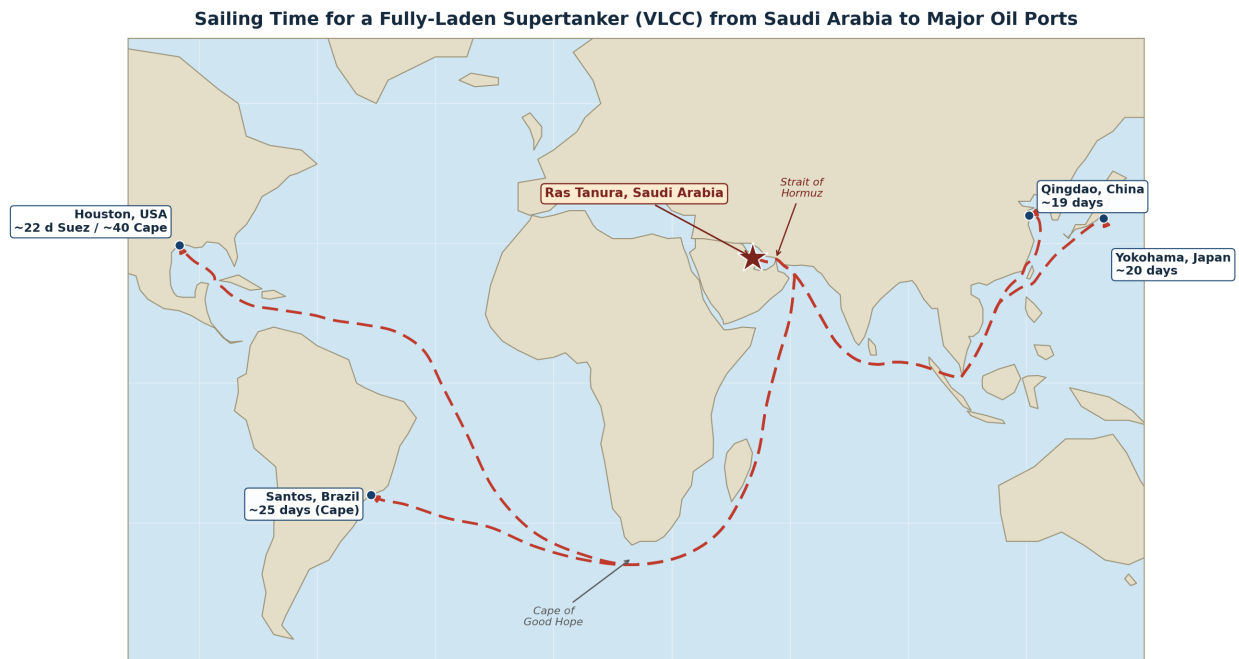


Source: U.S. EIA / FRED, Brent (DCOILBRETEU), monthly averages; 2026 values reflect reported spot and front-month futures during the Iran war and are subject to revision.

Brent crude, 2024 to 2026: a long, soft stretch ends in a war-driven spike toward \$120, then a partial, uneasy retracement.

Distance Is a Cost: How Long Oil Takes to Ship

Oil is rarely consumed where it is produced; it sails. From Ras Tanura⁷ in Saudi Arabia, a laden supertanker (a VLCC⁸) needs roughly 19 to 20 days to reach China or Japan and about 22 days to the U.S. Gulf via the Suez Canal, and considerably longer when the Red Sea or Hormuz is unsafe and ships divert around the Cape of Good Hope⁹, which adds 10 to 15 days and stretches a voyage bound for the United States or Brazil to a month or more.



Routes follow practical sea lanes: Asia-bound cargoes exit via the Strait of Hormuz and pass through the Malacca Strait and South China Sea; US- and Brazil-bound cargoes round the Cape of Good Hope (the route used when the Suez Canal / Red Sea are unsafe). Times are for a laden VLCC at ~13 knots plus 1-3 days in port. Map outlines are simplified. Sources: MOL; S&P Global / Platts; Tankers International; sea-distances.org.



Every cargo from the Gulf must first clear the Strait of Hormuz; rerouting around Africa lengthens the longest voyages by weeks.

Those weeks at sea are floating inventory¹⁰. When the strait tightens, cargoes already on the water gain value, buyers scramble for prompt barrels, and the gap between the price of oil "now" and oil "later" widens. Longer routes also tie up more ships per barrel delivered, raising freight costs and thinning the margin for error across the whole system.

When the Strait Closes: A Slow-Motion Whipsaw

A chokepoint does not have to be physically blocked to stop working. War can close the Strait of Hormuz outright, but so can the insurance market: when underwriters judge the war risk too high, premiums on hull, cargo, and especially war-risk cover spike until a voyage is simply uneconomic, and shipowners refuse to sail. Whether by shells or by premiums, the effect is the same; barrels stop moving even though the wells keep pumping. That single fact sets off a distortion that plays out in four stages.

First, production outruns shipping. Oil cannot be turned off on a dime; wells keep flowing while the cargoes that would carry the crude away sit idle. Supply at the source piles up faster than it can leave.

Second, storage fills and prices at the source can collapse. The surplus backs up, first into tank farms at the loading terminals, then into any tanker that can be chartered as floating storage. Once the tanks are full, a barrel that cannot be stored or moved becomes a liability rather than an asset, and its price can fall through the floor. This is not hypothetical: in April 2020, when COVID-19 demand evaporated and storage filled, the U.S. WTI benchmark briefly traded below zero, and sellers paid buyers to take oil off their hands. A closed Hormuz can manufacture the same glut at the source even while the rest of the world is short of oil.

Third, demand at the destinations keeps draining their tanks. Nothing pauses at the far end of the voyage. Refineries in China, Japan, the United States, and Brazil keep running and consumers keep buying, so destination inventories draw down day after day. The world thus splits into two opposite problems at once: a surplus trapped at the source and a deepening deficit at the destinations, with the ocean and the closed strait in between. That is how prices can spike at the pump in importing countries at the very moment crude is going begging in the Gulf.

Fourth, reopening brings no instant relief. When the lanes finally reopen, the depleted destinations are not refilled overnight. The first replenishment barrels still have to make the full voyage (roughly 19 to 20 days to Asia, and a month or more to the U.S. Gulf or Brazil if ships are still routing around the Cape) before they reach an empty tank. Worse, if the glut at the source forced producers to cap or shut wells to relieve the storage crunch, those wells do not simply switch back on; restarting shut-in¹¹ production can take weeks to months, and some older wells never fully recover their former output. The time to refill destination storage is therefore the shipping time plus the well-restart time, stacked one after the other. A war that "ends" can leave importers tight for months afterward, which is exactly why the risk premium in the price lingers long after the shooting stops.

From Gas to Grain: The Fertilizer Connection

The oil shock does not stop at the gas pump. Natural gas is the feedstock for nitrogen fertilizer (the Haber-Bosch process¹² turns gas and air into ammonia, which becomes urea¹³), and gas accounts for 80 to 90 percent of ammonia's production cost. The Gulf is also a major fertilizer exporter, and much of that product moves through the same contested waters as the oil. The World Bank expects urea prices to rise about 60 percent in 2026.



The Almost Monthly Epic-Cure® Newsletter

June 2026

That lands hardest on Brazil, which imports roughly 95 percent of the nitrogen its farmers use and is buying fertilizer right now for the 2026/27 soybean crop. The United States is better insulated. It has substantial domestic production, but it is not immune. Fertilizer is a global market, and higher input costs eventually surface in the price of corn, soybeans, and the meat raised on them.

The key energy-derived inputs for fertilizers are:

- **Natural gas** is the feedstock for ammonia, which becomes urea (the main nitrogen fertilizer). This is the big one.
- **Sulfur** (a byproduct of oil and gas processing) is needed for phosphate fertilizers (DAP and MAP¹⁴).

With the 2026 Iran war, the conflict has driven a sharp spike in natural gas prices, a key input for urea production, and restricted flows through the Strait of Hormuz, which handles about a third of global fertilizer shipments. The energy input gets pricier and the finished fertilizer cannot physically ship out. Urea has jumped from the \$400 to \$490 range to around \$700 per metric ton.

How does the mechanism allocate resources? Resources are allocated (the wheat goes where it goes) through price. When supply is choked off, the price rises until demand falls enough to match what is available. That higher price acts as a rationing signal: whoever values the fertilizer most (or can afford it most) keeps buying, and everyone else uses less or goes without.

The catch is that this is a global market. Even though the United States makes its own nitrogen, rising ammonia prices will still hit American farmers, because like oil, fertilizer is bought and sold on a globally integrated market. So Brazil suffers more from the physical shortage (it needs the imports), but United States farmers still pay the higher world price. Price does not care about borders; it allocates the scarce fertilizer to the highest bidders worldwide, which is efficient but tends to squeeze out poorer, import-dependent buyers first.

The Other War: Ukraine and Wheat

At the same time, Russia's war in Ukraine continues to weigh on grain. Ukraine's exports remain roughly a third below their pre-invasion peak, yet the country is still among the world's top wheat and corn exporters and the largest supplier of sunflower oil. The hemispheric buffer means wheat is less explosive than oil (when one breadbasket falters, another is harvesting), but two large shocks at once erode that cushion. Energy feeds fertilizer; fertilizer feeds yields; and a second war keeps a major exporter operating below capacity. The result is a grain market that is tighter and more sensitive than headlines about any single harvest would suggest.

The Geopolitics of Food: Two Scenarios

The honest answer to "what happens next" is that it hinges on the war. Consider two bracketing cases.

Scenario 1: the war ends within 90 days. If Hormuz reopens and the peace holds, the risk premium unwinds quickly. Brent could retrace toward the \$70s as delayed cargoes arrive and tankers return to normal routes. Fertilizer prices ease into the 2026/27 season, though with a lag, and the inflation impulse fades. This is the benign path: a sharp scare and a real but temporary cost, followed by a return toward the pre-war range. It is plausible, but not assured, since the ceasefires in this conflict have already proven fragile.

Scenario 2: the war continues a year or more. A prolonged conflict makes the Cape route and a standing risk premium the new normal. Oil settles into a higher, choppy range (think \$100 to \$120 and above on flare-ups), freight stays elevated, fertilizer stays expensive, and Brazil's input costs feed into the 2026/27



The Almost Monthly Epic-Cure® Newsletter

June 2026

and 2027/28 crops. Layered on top of Ukraine, this is how a price shock hardens into structural inflation, not a one-time spike but a persistently higher cost base across energy, food, and everything that moves by ship. The burden falls unevenly: wealthy importers simply pay more, while import-dependent low-income countries face genuine food emergencies, with the historical risk that hunger turns into unrest or even a change of government.

Where the United States Stands: Oil, Wheat, Hunger, Cohesion

For the United States, the picture is serious but not dire.

Oil. America is now a major producer and a net petroleum exporter, so it faces no physical shortage. But prices are global, so U.S. drivers and businesses still pay the world price, and gasoline follows crude with a lag.

Wheat. The U.S. is a large producer and exporter; domestic bread is not at risk, but grocery prices ride the same global market that the wars are tightening.

Hunger. The realistic danger here is not famine but price. Food-at-home inflation strains household budgets and food-assistance programs, and food insecurity, already a real problem, would widen, especially for lower-income families. That is a definite possibility worth planning for.

Social cohesion. Sustained inflation is corrosive and politically destabilizing, but U.S. institutions are deep and the country's food and energy base is broad. The revolutions and state failures that prolonged shocks can trigger in fragile, import-dependent nations are not a realistic prospect here.

The Bottom Line

Oil, wheat, and fertilizer are one system, and in 2026 two wars are pressing on it at once. The basics still govern: scarce goods are rationed by price, and price does most of the adjusting when demand is inelastic. What is different now is that the shocks are stacking, the adjustment lags are long, and the chokepoints are political rather than geological. The difference between a passing scare and an era of structural inflation will be measured less in barrels and bushels than in how long the shooting lasts.

Selected Sources

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Endnotes

1. Inelastic: Describes supply or demand that changes very little when the price changes. People still need oil and food even when prices rise, so the quantity adjusts slowly and the price does most of the moving.
2. Light sweet crude and heavier sour grades: Terms for crude oil quality. Light oil flows easily and yields more gasoline and diesel; sweet oil is low in sulfur. Heavy and sour oils are thicker and higher in sulfur, cost more to refine, and sell at a lower price.



The Almost Monthly Epic-Cure® Newsletter

June 2026

3. WTI: West Texas Intermediate, the main benchmark price for United States crude oil. It is priced for delivery at Cushing, Oklahoma.
4. Brent: The main benchmark price for international crude oil, based on oil produced in the North Sea. Brent and WTI prices usually move together but are not identical.
5. May futures: A futures contract is an agreement to buy or sell a set amount of a commodity at a set price on a future date. The May contract settles in May. When it expires, whoever still holds it must take physical delivery of the oil.
6. Cushing, Oklahoma: The inland United States town that serves as the official delivery and storage hub for WTI crude oil. When its storage tanks fill up, sellers struggle to find anywhere to put their oil.
7. Ras Tanura: A large oil shipping terminal on the Persian Gulf coast of Saudi Arabia, one of the main points where crude oil is loaded onto tankers for export.
8. VLCC: Very Large Crude Carrier, a class of supertanker that can carry roughly two million barrels of oil in a single voyage.
9. Cape of Good Hope: The southern tip of Africa. When the Suez Canal or the Strait of Hormuz is unsafe, tankers sail the long way around this cape, adding one to two weeks to the trip.
10. Floating inventory: Oil sitting in tankers at sea rather than in tanks on land. The weeks a cargo spends sailing act as a moving stockpile, and idle tankers are sometimes used as temporary storage.
11. Shut-in production: Oil wells that have been closed off temporarily, usually because there is nowhere to store or sell the oil. Restarting them can take weeks or months, and some older wells never return to their former output.
12. Haber-Bosch process: The industrial method that combines natural gas and nitrogen from the air to make ammonia, the building block of most nitrogen fertilizer.
13. Ammonia and urea: Ammonia is the basic nitrogen compound made from natural gas. It is processed into urea, the solid form that is the most widely used nitrogen fertilizer.
14. DAP and MAP: Diammonium phosphate and monoammonium phosphate, the two most common phosphate fertilizers, which supply phosphorus to crops.



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Transparency:

Anyone who wishes to see *Epic-Cure's financial statements* need only ask.

Our CPA-Audited financial statements and tax returns for fiscal years 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024 have been released and are available upon request.

- Also available on our website.
- Click here to view: [Epic-Cure's Financial Statements](#)

Please email your requests to our Ken Mulford: ken.mulford@epic-cure.org

