Uses and Users of the June Survey of Agriculture & Horticulture for England

This survey is run annually by Defra to collect detailed information on arable and horticultural cropping activities, land usage, livestock populations and labour force figures. It is a large survey which samples between 20,000 and 50,000 holdings in England each year (dependent on EU requirements) across all farm sizes and farm types. A lot of the information is required by EU legislation, but it is also heavily used by a broad range of people and organisations within the UK. The information is collected in such a way as to make is comparable with information collected by Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and also by other EU member states. This helps show how UK agriculture contributes to the wider EU and international markets.

The survey data is used heavily within Defra and the agricultural industry to make estimates of crop/livestock production and to provide information for management of the EU commodity markets. It is used to evaluate existing policies and to assess the potential of new EU and UK government policies, particularly when reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is being discussed. For example it has been used to assess how particular types of farms, sizes of farm or farms in less favoured areas may be affected by particular aspects of the CAP reform proposals. The land use and livestock numbers contribute to a number of government indicators of agricultural and environmental performance, such as indicators of greenhouse gas and ammonia emissions from agriculture.

The survey data is also used to link across to other government statistics. For example, the Office of National Statistics (ONS) Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES) use our farm labour estimates alongside their estimates of labour from all other sectors. This data is heavily used by Local Authorities when they apply for European funding to help the people and places that need it most. The farm labour statistics are a vital component for these bids, particularly for the rural authorities.

The survey also forms the basis of other surveys run by Defra that collect information on more specific topics such as cereal production, farm business incomes, current farm management practices, which further contribute to building a picture of how the agricultural sector is performing. The agricultural labour information collected on the survey contributes to the work done by the Office for National Statistics to assess the UK labour force. It is also used in Defra and by organisations such as the National Farmers Union, ADAS and agricultural consultants to help assess farm incomes and performance.

As it is such a large survey, the data can be used to provide low level statistics i.e. at county level, which makes it a powerful tool for researchers and anyone interested in local features. For example local authorities, wildlife trusts, the Environment Agency and Natural England have used the information to look at the types of farming in certain areas, the potential environmental impacts, and implications for their use of resources. This local level information is also used to help assess the impacts of snow, rain (and associated flooding) on farmers and food production.

Researchers and the media use the information for a wide variety of purposes such as running research projects, informing discussions and educating the general public about farming. For example the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA), the BBC’s Countryfile and Farming Today programmes, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) all regularly use information from the survey.
Animal movement and health divisions use the information to monitor livestock distributions throughout England. This is particularly important in the case of emergencies. For example, details on livestock were supplied to experts to help predict the spread of the foot-and-mouth outbreak in 2001 and the poultry data was supplied to help with the investigations into Avian Flu.

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