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Farming Statistics - Livestock Populations at 1 December 2017, United Kingdom

This release contains livestock numbers on agricultural holdings in the United Kingdom for cattle, pigs and sheep.

Data come from various different sources, full details of which are provided in the methodological notes on pages 8 to 10.

Key points:

Cattle ([Table 1](#))

The total number of cattle and calves in the UK is 9.8 million at 1 December 2017. This is almost unchanged compared to December 2016. There are small changes in the numbers in each of the categories, for example a 0.9% decrease in the beef breeding herd and a 0.3% increase in the dairy breeding herd.

Pigs ([Table 2](#))

The total number of pigs in the UK increased by 3.9% between December 2016 and December 2017 and now stands at 4.7 million. This increase is mainly due to the 4.4% rise in the number of fattening pigs, which rose to 4.2 million animals.

Sheep ([Tables 3 and 4](#))

The total number of sheep and lambs in the UK decreased by 1.5% from 23.7 million animals in December 2016 to an estimated 23.3 million in December 2017. The overall decrease in population was due to other sheep and lambs which decreased by an estimated 4.2% to 8.6 million animals in December 2017. The UK's female breeding flock remained almost unchanged at 14.7 million animals.

Survey methodology ([Pages 8 to 10](#))

For information on the different data sources please see the methodology section on pages 8 to 10.

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Detailed results

Cattle

The total number of cattle and calves in the UK remained almost unchanged between December 2016 and December 2017 at 9.8 million animals. The UK's total breeding herd accounts for just over a third of total cattle and decreased by 0.2% since December 2016 to 3.4 million.

The female breeding herd is made up of dairy and beef cows over two years old with offspring and accounts for 48% of all female cattle in December 2017. Compared to 2016, the UK's dairy breeding herd has increased by 0.3% to just over 1.9 million. The beef breeding herd decreased by 0.9% to 1.5 million.

Figure 1: Female dairy and beef herds at 1 December 2013 to 2017

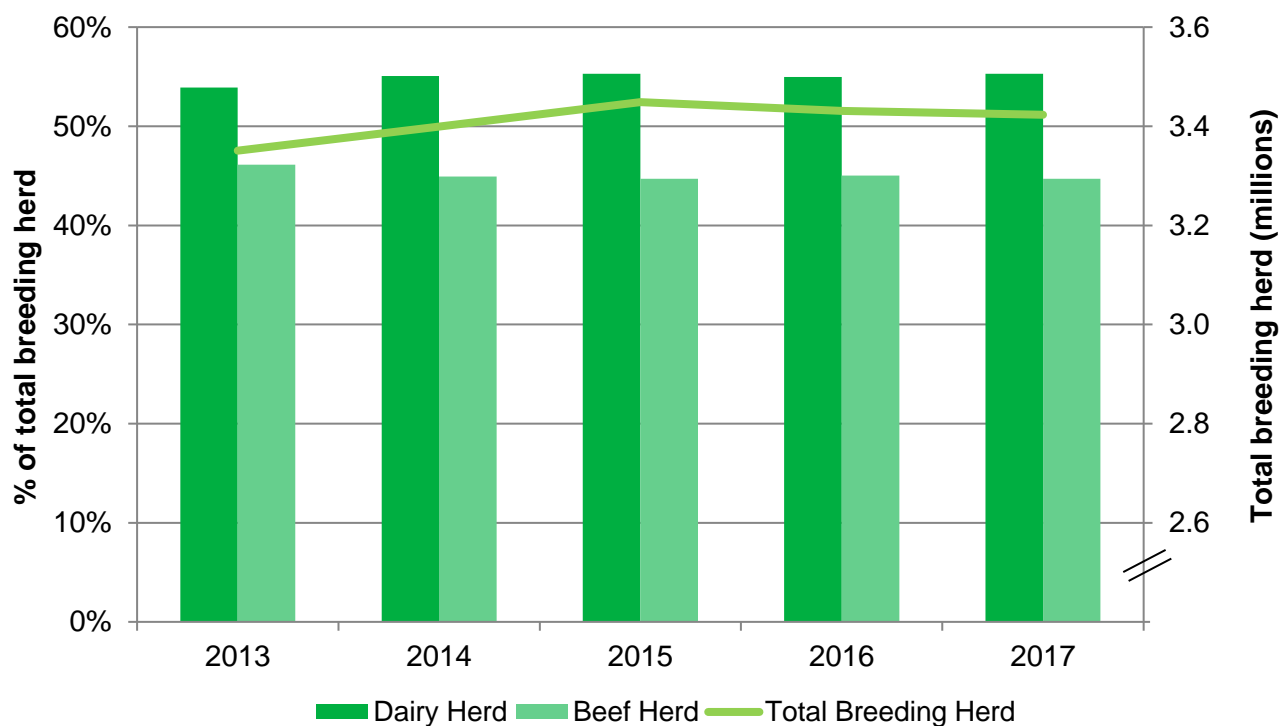


Table 1: Cattle and calves on UK agricultural holdings on 1 December ^(a)

	Thousands					
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% change 2017/2016
Total cattle and calves	9 682	9 693	9 816	9 806	9 787	-0.2
All female cattle	7 013	7 076	7 153	7 149	7 141	-0.1
Aged 2 years or more	4 126	4 176	4 164	4 125	4 119	-0.1
Total breeding herd	3 371	3 419	3 469	3 451	3 443	-0.2
Beef herd	1 554	1 536	1 551	1 554	1 539	-0.9
Dairy herd	1 817	1 883	1 918	1 898	1 904	0.3
Other female cattle	755	757	696	673	676	0.4
Beef	353	348	326	325	326	0.3
Dairy	402	409	370	349	350	0.5
Aged between 1 and 2 years	1 396	1 367	1 403	1 437	1 429	-0.6
Beef	852	824	843	858	885	3.1
Dairy	543	543	560	579	544	-6.1
Less than 1 year	1 491	1 532	1 586	1 587	1 592	0.3
All male cattle	2 669	2 617	2 662	2 658	2 646	-0.4
Aged 2 years or more	342	344	313	294	298	1.2
Aged between 1 and 2 years	1 015	964	969	998	984	-1.4
Less than 1 year	1 312	1 309	1 380	1 365	1 364	-0.1

(a) Figures are sourced from the Cattle Tracing System (CTS) in England, Wales and Scotland and the equivalent APHIS system in Northern Ireland. The data include returns from all holdings with cattle so are not subject to survey error.

Pigs

The total number of pigs in the UK is an estimated 4.7 million at 1 December 2017, an increase of 3.9% from December 2016. The main driver for the overall increase was the number of fattening pigs which rose by 4.4% (177 thousand animals) from December 2016 to 4.2 million pigs in December 2017.

The female pig breeding herd saw a small decrease of 0.4% from 409 thousand pigs in December 2016 to 407 thousand in December 2017. Other breeding pigs decreased by 0.7% since December 2016 to 95 thousand. This was largely due to a decrease in the number of boars which reduced by 2 thousand between December 2016 and December 2017. A similar decrease was also seen between June 2016 and June 2017. Livestock populations for June and December are displayed together in the accompanying dataset which can be found using the link on page 10.

Figure 2: Proportion of pigs in the breeding herd and total number of fattening pigs UK at 1 December 2013 to 2017

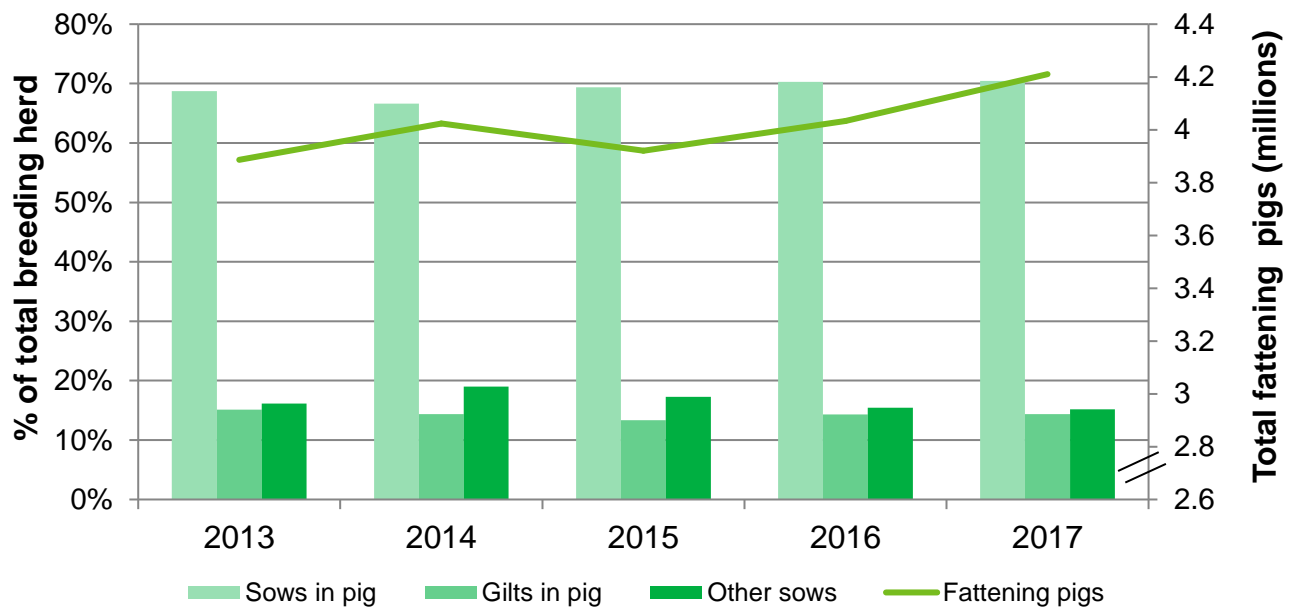


Table 2: Pigs on commercial agricultural holdings on 1 December

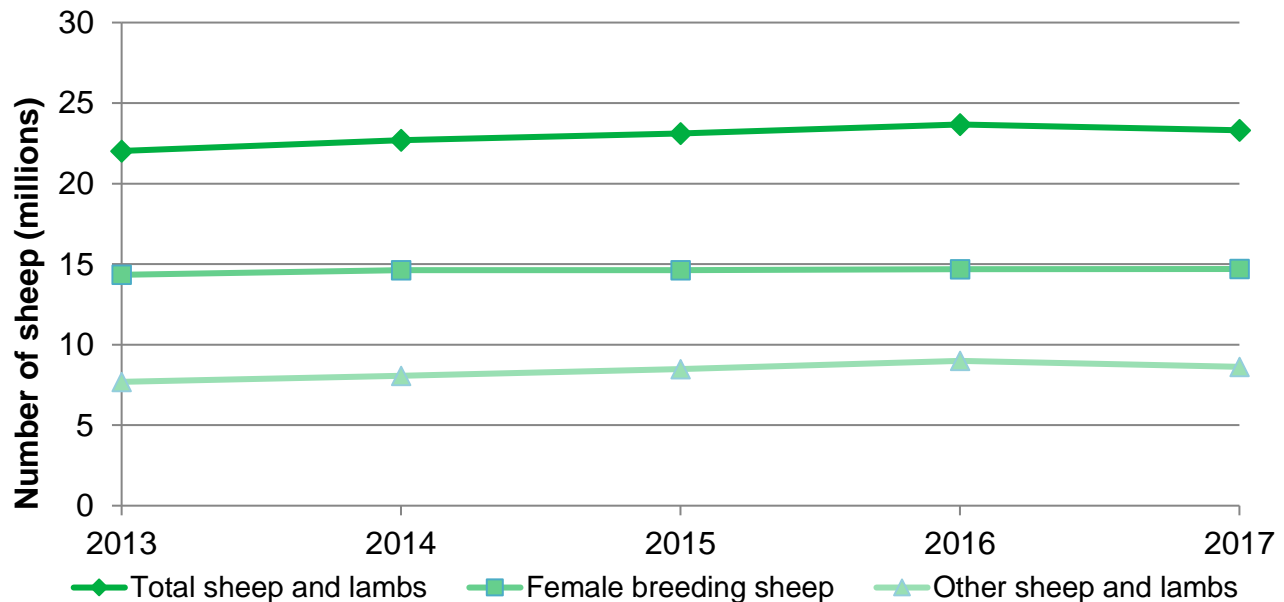
	Thousands					
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% change 2017/2016
Total pigs	4 383	4 510	4 422	4 538	4 713	3.9
Breeding pigs	497	486	501	505	503	-0.4
Female breeding herd	398	390	401	409	407	-0.4
Sows in pig	273	260	278	287	287	-0.1
Gilts in pig	60	56	54	59	59	0.1
Other sows ^(a)	64	74	69	63	62	-2.1
Other breeding pigs	99	96	100	96	95	-0.7
Boars being used for service	15	13	13	14	12	-14.4
Gilts intended for first time breeding	84	83	87	82	83	1.7
Fattening pigs (incl. barren sows)	3 886	4 024	3 921	4 033	4 211	4.4

(a) Either being suckled or dry sows kept for further breeding.

Sheep

The total number of sheep and lambs in the UK decreased by 1.5% between December 2016 and December 2017 and now stands at 23.3 million animals. The UK's female breeding flock remained almost unchanged over the same period at 14.7 million animals. Other sheep and lambs decreased by 4.2% from December 2016 to December 2017 to 8.6 million animals.

Figure 3: Total sheep and lambs UK at December 2013 to 2017



Figures for England for 2016 have been revised to take into account late inventory returns and data cleansing. The figures in table 3 have been updated as a result. Table 4 over the page shows the effect of the revisions.

Table 3: Sheep and lambs on agricultural holdings on 1 December

	2013 ^(a)	2014	2015	2016	2017 ^(b)	Thousands % change 2017/16
Total sheep and lambs	22 027	22 687	23 110	23 671	23 310	-1.5
Female breeding sheep	14 337	14 617	14 630	14 680	14 697	0.1
Other sheep and lambs	7 690	8 069	8 481	8 991	8 614	-4.2

(a) In 2013 Wales started using data from the annual Sheep and Goat Inventory (an annual exercise requiring all sheep and goat keepers to record animals under their keepership). Before this sheep data was collected via the Welsh December survey of agriculture.

(b) 2017 results are provisional.

Table 4: Effect of revisions to Sheep figures for 2016

	2016			Thousands
	Original	Revised	% change	
Total sheep and lambs	23 819	23 671	-0.6	
Female breeding sheep	14 768	14 680	-0.6	
Other sheep and lambs	9 051	8 991	-0.7	

Methodological notes

All percentage changes in this release's tables are based on unrounded figures. Therefore, totals may not necessarily agree with the sum of their components due to rounding.

England

Data for this 2017 December livestock publication comes from a number of different sources.

Cattle

Cattle results are sourced from the Cattle Tracing System (CTS). The data include returns from all holdings with cattle so are not subject to survey error. More information on the use of this administrative data can be found on the "survey notes and guidance" web page via the following link:

www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182225/defra-stats-foodfarm-landuselivestock-june-results-BovineRegisters.pdf.

Pigs

Pig data came from the December survey of Pigs, which is a small sample survey of farms that keep over 750 pigs. It is used to estimate the size of the pig herd in England at 1 December each year.

To improve the coverage of the pig sector, a special data collection exercise was run to collect data from a central point for some of the largest companies. This brought the total sample size to 800 holdings, achieving a response rate of 91%, so the results for pigs are subject to a degree of sampling error.

Pig data relates to commercial holdings only. Commercial holdings are defined as those with significant levels of farming activity, i.e. holdings with more than five hectares of agricultural land, or one hectare of orchards, or 0.5 hectares of vegetables or 0.1 hectares of protected crops, or more than 10 cows, or 50 pigs, or 20 sheep, or 20 goats or 1,000 poultry.

The following document provides further detail on why data is provided for commercial holdings only (see section 3.3 on thresholds):

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182206/defra-stats-foodfarm-landuselivestock-june-junemethodology-20120126.pdf

Sheep

Sheep data came from the Sheep and Goat Inventory (an annual exercise requiring all sheep and goat keepers to record animals under their keepership at 1 December). It is an EU requirement to hold the inventory for livestock tracing and identification purposes. Sheep and goat keepers will receive either a paper form or an email request to complete their inventory in late November. Since 2010 the information collected by the inventory is used to estimate the size of the English sheep flock at 1 December. More information about the use of the sheep and goat inventory for estimating sheep populations is available below:

[Use of the sheep and goat inventory for estimating sheep populations](#) (PDF, 114KB, 6 pages)

Data analysis

The data for pigs and sheep are subject to rigorous validation checks which identify inconsistencies within the data or large year-on-year changes.

Wales

Until 2012 sheep numbers were collected via the Welsh December survey of agriculture. Since 2013 the sheep data has been sourced from the Welsh Sheep and Goats Inventory, which is an annual exercise requiring all sheep and goat keepers to record animals under their keepership as at 1 January. The Inventory figures are adjusted to take account of the number of sheep slaughtered during December in order to produce an equivalent figure. Cattle data are taken from the Cattle Tracing System (an administrative system primarily set up for animal health monitoring purposes).

Further details of agricultural statistics in Wales can be found on the Welsh Government website at:

gov.wales/statistics-and-research/?topic=Environment+and+countryside&lang=en

Scotland

The December agricultural survey is based on a sample of main holdings and covers crops, livestock and machinery. From a population of 26,300 main holdings, 14,700 holdings were sampled and 8,900 responses received, giving a response rate of 60%. Since 2015, data for the sheep and goat inventory has been collected as part of the December Survey and informed the sheep figures in the publication. To this end, a further 10,800 forms were sent requesting sheep and goat data only, with 8,600 forms being returned (a response rate of 79%). Estimates are made for non-responses.

Final results for Scotland were published on 14 March 2018 by the Scottish Government, Rural and Environment Science and Analytical Services, Q Spur, Saughton House, Broomhouse Drive, Edinburgh, EH11 3XD (e-mail agric.stats@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) and are available online at:

www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Agriculture-Fisheries/PubFinalResulsDecCensus

Northern Ireland

The 2017 December Survey conducted in Northern Ireland was a sample survey issued to 5,001 farms, 3,867 forms were returned, a 77% response rate. Estimates are made for non-responses. This survey covered pigs, crops and heifer numbers. All other information relating to cattle was taken from the APHIS (Animal and Public Health Information System) database, while data on sheep was taken from the Annual Sheep and Goat Inventory, each of these being a census of animal numbers. The APHIS database is a central register maintained by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland. It is a live database containing individual cattle records and details for associated herds and keepers.

Final results for Northern Ireland were published on 22 February 2018 by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for Northern Ireland, Dundonald House, Belfast, BT4 3SB (telephone: Belfast (02890) 525450) and are available online at: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/december-agricultural-survey-final-results

Data uses and users

- The UK is required to supply estimates of livestock populations in December each year to the European Commission.
- This data also helps us monitor changes in livestock populations over time for example linking them with revisions to the Common Agricultural Policy.
- The numbers are used to make forecasts of meat and milk production to inform industry of the availability of supply which in turn affects prices.
- Livestock distributions across the UK help when assessing the risks associated with animal disease outbreaks.

Feedback

We welcome feedback on the data from all users including how and why the data is used. This helps us to understand the value of the statistics to external users. Please see our contact details at the bottom of the first page of this notice.

Next publication

March 2019: Farming Statistics Livestock Populations at 1 December 2018, United Kingdom

More detailed results can be found at: www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/structure-of-the-livestock-industry-in-england-at-december

These data series include annual statistics on the number of cattle, sheep and pigs in England and the UK as at 1 December each year from 1992.