



Farming Statistics - Livestock Populations at 1 December 2018, England

This release shows livestock numbers on agricultural holdings in England. Results are from the December Pigs Survey, along with data from the administrative sources of the Cattle Tracing System and the Annual Sheep and Goat Inventory. Full details of these sources are provided in the methodological notes on page 7. Key findings are below.

In England on 1 December 2018 there were:

Cattle ([Table 1](#))



5.3 million
total cattle
and calves,
a decrease of 1.6% since
December 2017



1.8 million
cattle in the
breeding herd,
a decrease of 1.7% since
December 2017

Pigs ([Table 2](#))



3.7 million
total pigs,
a decrease of 0.8% since
December 2017



3.3 million
fattening pigs,
a decrease of 0.8% since
December 2017

Sheep ([Table 3](#))



10.9 million
total sheep
and lambs,
a decrease of 3.1% since
December 2017



6.4 million
breeding ewes,
a decrease of 4.4% since
December 2017

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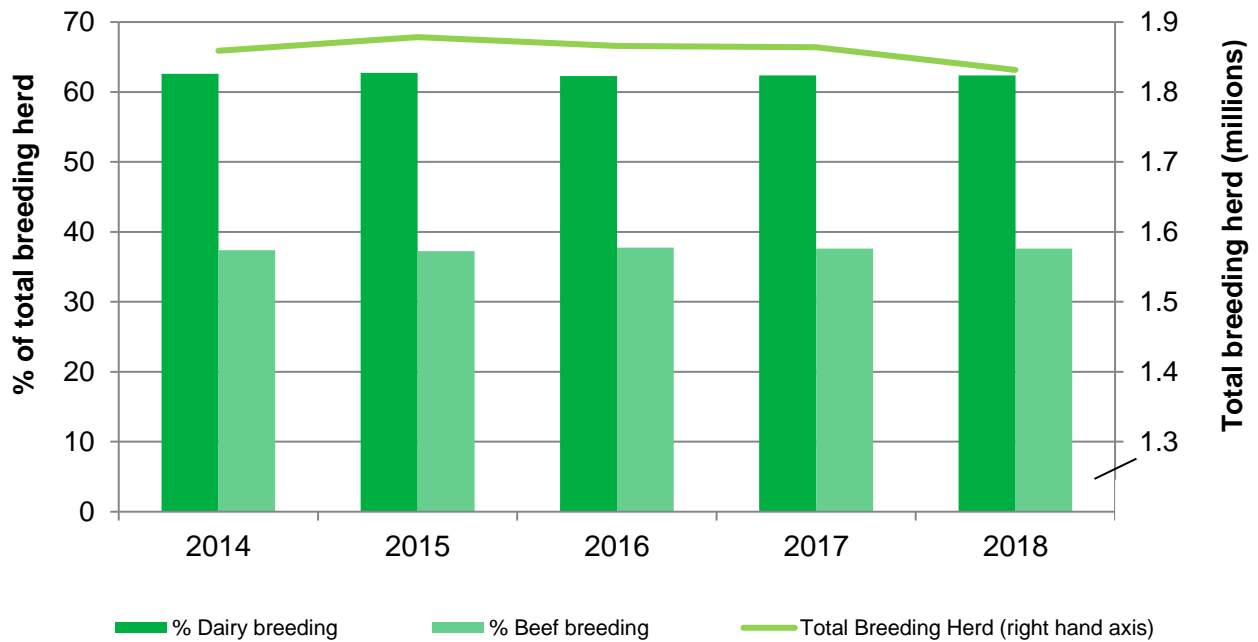
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Detailed results

Cattle

In December 2018 the total number of cattle and calves in England sits at just under 5.3 million. This equates to a decrease of 1.6% from December 2017.

Figure 1: Female dairy and beef breeding herds at 1 December 2014 to 2018



The female breeding herd is made up of dairy and beef cows over two years old with offspring and accounts for almost half (48%) of all female cattle in December 2018.

The breeding herd has remained relatively stable for the last four years between 1.8 and 1.9 million animals. The dairy herd accounts for the majority (62%) of the breeding herd and decreased by 1.8% in December 2018 to 1.1 million animals. The beef herd decreased by 1.7% from 701 thousand in December 2017 to 689 thousand in December 2018.

The total number of male cattle in England is 1.4 million in December 2018, a decrease of 2.1% compared to December 2017.

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

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Thousands % change 2018/2017
Total cattle and calves	5 308	5 358	5 355	5 347	5 261	-1.6
All female cattle	3 868	3 900	3 895	3 891	3 837	-1.4
Aged 2 years or more	2 288	2 273	2 247	2 240	2 194	-2.1
Total breeding herd	1 838	1 878	1 866	1 864	1 832	-1.7
Beef herd	695	700	704	701	689	-1.7
Dairy herd	1 164	1 178	1 162	1 163	1 143	-1.8
Other female cattle	429	394	381	376	362	-3.8
Beef	185	173	173	171	176	3.1
Dairy	243	221	208	206	186	-9.6
Aged between 1 and 2 years	749	769	789	784	787	0.4
Beef	422	431	441	458	473	3.3
Dairy	327	338	348	326	314	-3.5
Less than 1 year	831	858	859	867	855	-1.3
Beef	482	498	520	540	536	-0.8
Dairy	349	360	339	326	320	-2.0
All male cattle	1 440	1 457	1 460	1 456	1 425	-2.1
Aged 2 years or more	200	182	170	169	166	-1.9
Aged between 1 and 2 years	532	530	551	546	548	0.5
Less than 1 year	708	746	739	741	711	-4.1

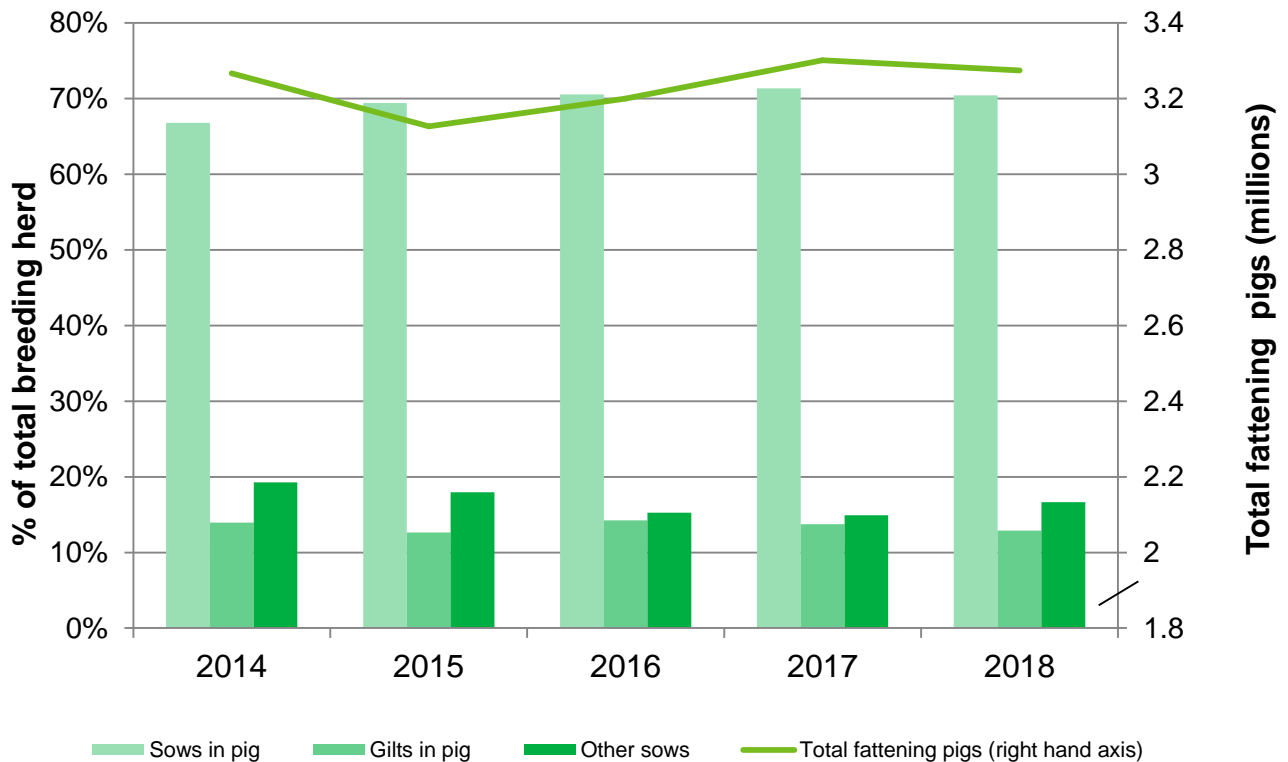
(a) These figures have been sourced from the Cattle Tracing System (CTS). The data include returns from all holdings with cattle so are not subject to survey error.

Pigs

The total number of pigs in England has decreased by 0.8% since December 2017 to just under 3.7 million. Fattening pigs, which accounts for 89% of the total pig population, also saw a decrease of 0.8%, falling to just below 3.3 million.

The female pig breeding herd saw a decrease of 0.9% from 325 thousand pigs in December 2017 to 322 thousand in December 2018. This decrease was driven by the fall in the number of sows and gilts in pig which more than offset the rise in other sows (either being suckled or dry sows kept for further breeding).

Figure 2: Proportional make-up of the female breeding herd and the total number of fattening pigs at 1 December 2014 to 2018



Data for pigs are provided for only those holdings considered to have a commercial level of agricultural activity. This allows data to be directly comparable to data from the June Survey of Agriculture and Horticulture. Commercial holdings are defined in the methodology section on pages 7 and 8.

Table 2: Pigs on commercial agricultural holdings on 1 December

	Thousands					
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	% change 2018/2017
Total pigs	3 662	3 530	3 608	3 709	3 679	-0.8
Breeding pigs	396	403	408	408	405	-0.7
Female breeding herd	313	317	324	325	322	-0.9
Sows in pig	209	220	229	232	227	-2.1
Gilts in pig	44	40	46	45	42	-7.0
Other sows ^(a)	60	57	49	49	54	10.7
Other breeding pigs	82	86	84	82	82	-0.1
Boars being used for service	11	12	13	11	10	-3.7
Gilts intended for first time breeding	71	75	72	72	72	0.4
Fattening pigs (incl. barren sows)	3 267	3 127	3 200	3 301	3 274	-0.8

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

Sheep

The estimated total number of sheep and lambs in England fell by 3.1% from 11.2 million in December 2017 to 10.9 million in December 2018. England's female breeding flock decreased by 4.4% to 6.4 million animals over the same period. The other sheep and lambs category saw a small decrease in the year to December 2018 of 1.1% and remains around 4.5 million.

Figure 3: Total sheep and lambs at 1 December 2014 to 2018

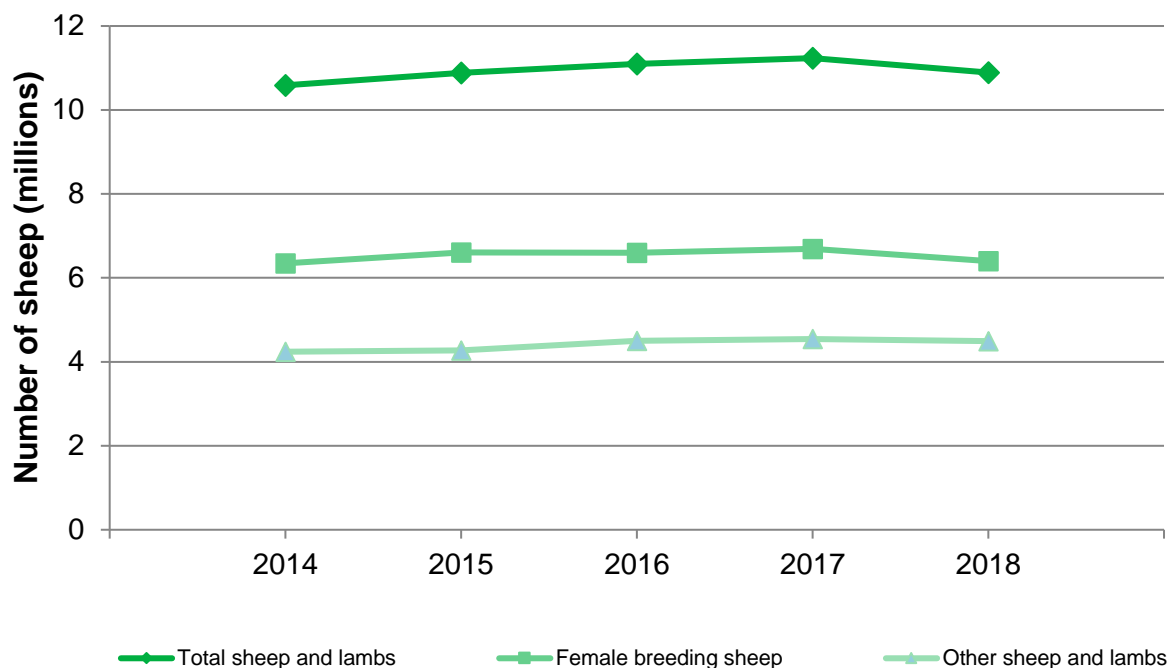


Table 3: Sheep and lambs on agricultural holdings on 1 December (a)

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Thousands % change 2018/2017
Total sheep and lambs	10 587	10 881	11 101	11 235	10 890	-3.1
Female breeding sheep	6 346	6 609	6 597	6 691	6 399	-4.4
Other sheep and lambs	4 241	4 272	4 504	4 543	4 492	-1.1

(a) 2018 results are provisional.

Figures for 2017 have been revised to take into account late inventory returns and additional data cleansing. The table below shows the minimal effect of the revisions:

Table 4: Effect of revisions to Sheep figures for 2017

	Thousands		
	2017		
	Original	Revised	% change
Total sheep and lambs	11 306	11 235	-0.6%
Female breeding sheep	6 730	6 691	-0.6%
Other sheep and lambs	4 576	4 543	-0.7%

Survey methodology

Data for this 2018 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:

https://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 798 holdings, achieving a response rate of 89%, 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 annual 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 an annual inventory of sheep and goat keepers for livestock tracing and identification purposes. In England the inventory is held on 1 December each year.

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.

Data notes

- All percentage changes are based on unrounded figures.
- Totals may not necessarily agree with the sum of their components due to rounding.

Data uses and users

- The UK is required to supply estimates to Eurostat of livestock populations in December each year.
- This data also helps us monitor changes in livestock populations over time.
- The numbers are used to make forecasts of meat and milk production to inform industry of the availability of supply which affects prices.
- Livestock distributions across the UK also help assess the risk of animal diseases and to control outbreaks.

Other survey results and publications

Results from all the Defra farming surveys can be viewed on the Defra website via the following link: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs/about/statistics> . This also contains details of future publication dates.

The next publication due for December livestock populations relates to the UK and is shown below.

UK Publications

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

More detailed results can be found at: <https://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.

National Statistics Status

National Statistics status means that our statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value, and it is our responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

The continued designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed in 2014 following a [full assessment](#) by the UK Statistics Authority against the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#).

Since the last review of these statistics in 2014, we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made improvements including:

- Improved data visualisations throughout the statistical release, particularly the key points on the front page.

- Adding Table 4: Effect of revisions to Sheep figures for the previous year to the release.
- Improved coverage of the pig sector by running a special data collection exercise each year to collect data from a central point for some of the largest companies.
- Improved quality of sheep data by working closely with the data owners, APHA, to improve the form and population list.