



Published 17 March 2016

Farming Statistics - Livestock Populations at 1 December 2015, 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 and 9.

Key points:

Cattle ([Table 1](#))

The total number of cattle and calves in the UK has increased by 1.3% between December 2014 and December 2015 and now stands at 9.8 million. This is mainly due to an increase in the breeding herd rising to 3.5 million.

Pigs ([Table 2](#))

Despite a rise in the breeding herd of 2.6% the total number of pigs in the UK decreased by 2.0% to an estimated 4.4 million compared to December 2014. This fall is mainly due to the 2.6% decrease in fattening pigs to 3.9 million animals.

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

The total number of sheep and lambs in the UK increased by 1.8% during 2015 to an estimated 23.1 million animals. The overall rise in population was from the other sheep and lambs sector which increased by an estimated 5.2% to 8.5 million animals. The UK's female breeding flock remained constant at 14.6 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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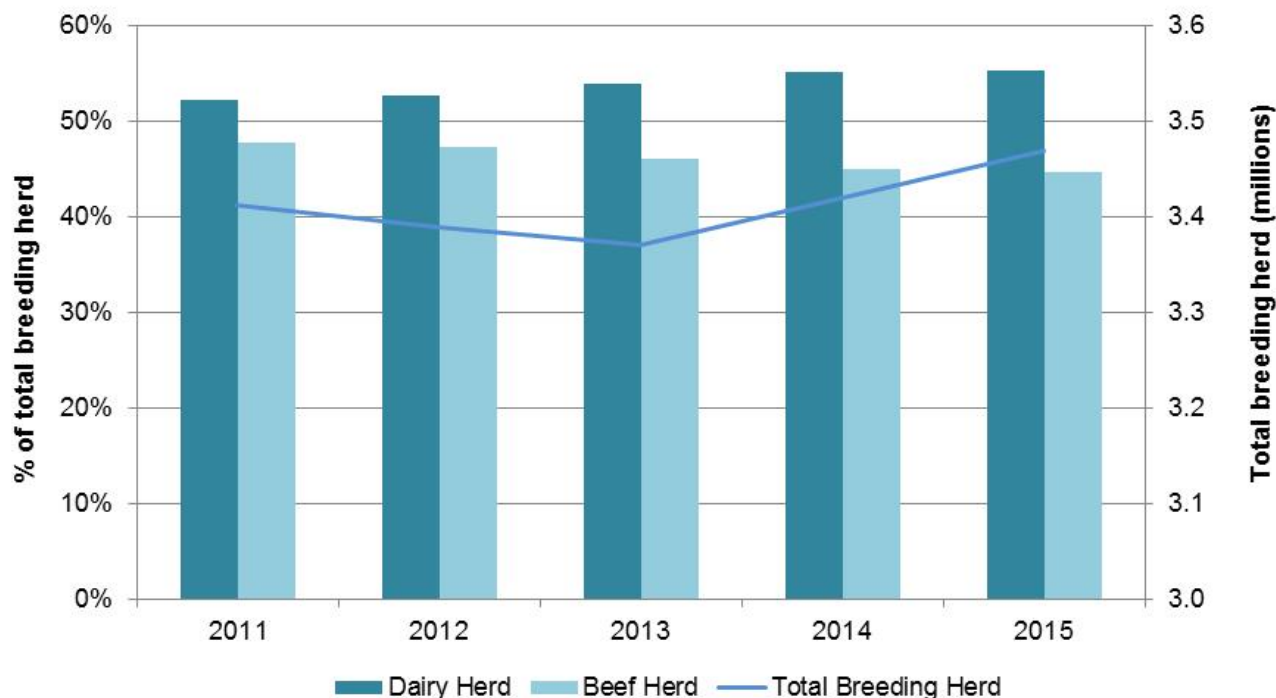
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Detailed results

Cattle

The UK's total breeding herd which accounts for over a third of all cattle has increased by 1.5% to 3.5 million.

Figure 1: Female dairy and beef herds at 1 December 2011 to 2015



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 2015.

The UK's dairy herd has continued to increase by 1.9% to just over 1.9 million and for the first time since 2011 the beef herd has also increased to 1.6 million. Whilst profitability concerns still exist in the beef breeding herd, this ends a period of time when the component parts of the UK herd have been moving in different directions.

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

| | thousands | | | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|
| | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | % change 2015/14 |
| Total cattle and calves | 9 692 | 9 749 | 9 682 | 9 693 | 9 816 | 1.3 |
| All female cattle | 7 054 | 7 062 | 7 013 | 7 076 | 7 153 | 1.1 |
| Aged 2 years or more | 4 164 | 4 128 | 4 126 | 4 176 | 4 164 | -0.3 |
| Total breeding herd | 3 412 | 3 388 | 3 371 | 3 419 | 3 469 | 1.5 |
| Beef herd | 1 630 | 1 603 | 1 554 | 1 536 | 1 551 | 1.0 |
| Dairy herd | 1 783 | 1 786 | 1 817 | 1 883 | 1 918 | 1.9 |
| Other female cattle | 752 | 740 | 755 | 757 | 696 | -8.1 |
| Beef | 335 | 346 | 353 | 348 | 326 | -6.3 |
| Dairy | 417 | 394 | 402 | 409 | 370 | -9.7 |
| Aged between 1 and 2 years | 1 352 | 1 394 | 1 396 | 1 367 | 1 403 | 2.6 |
| Beef | 835 | 861 | 852 | 824 | 843 | 2.2 |
| Dairy | 516 | 532 | 543 | 543 | 560 | 3.2 |
| Less than 1 year | 1 538 | 1 540 | 1 491 | 1 532 | 1 586 | 3.5 |
| All male cattle | 2 638 | 2 687 | 2 669 | 2 617 | 2 662 | 1.7 |
| Aged 2 years or more | 303 | 305 | 342 | 344 | 313 | -9.0 |
| Aged between 1 and 2 years | 985 | 1 001 | 1 015 | 964 | 969 | 0.5 |
| Less than 1 year | 1 350 | 1 381 | 1 312 | 1 309 | 1 380 | 5.4 |

(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 4.4 million at 1 December 2015, a decrease of 2.0% from December 2014. Breeding pigs in the UK increased by 3.1% in December 2015 to 501 thousand animals. Conversely, the total number of fattening pigs decreased in 2015 falling by 2.6% (103 thousand animals) to 3.9 million pigs.

Figure 2: Proportion of pigs in the breeding herd and total number of fattening pigs UK at 1 December 2011 to 2015

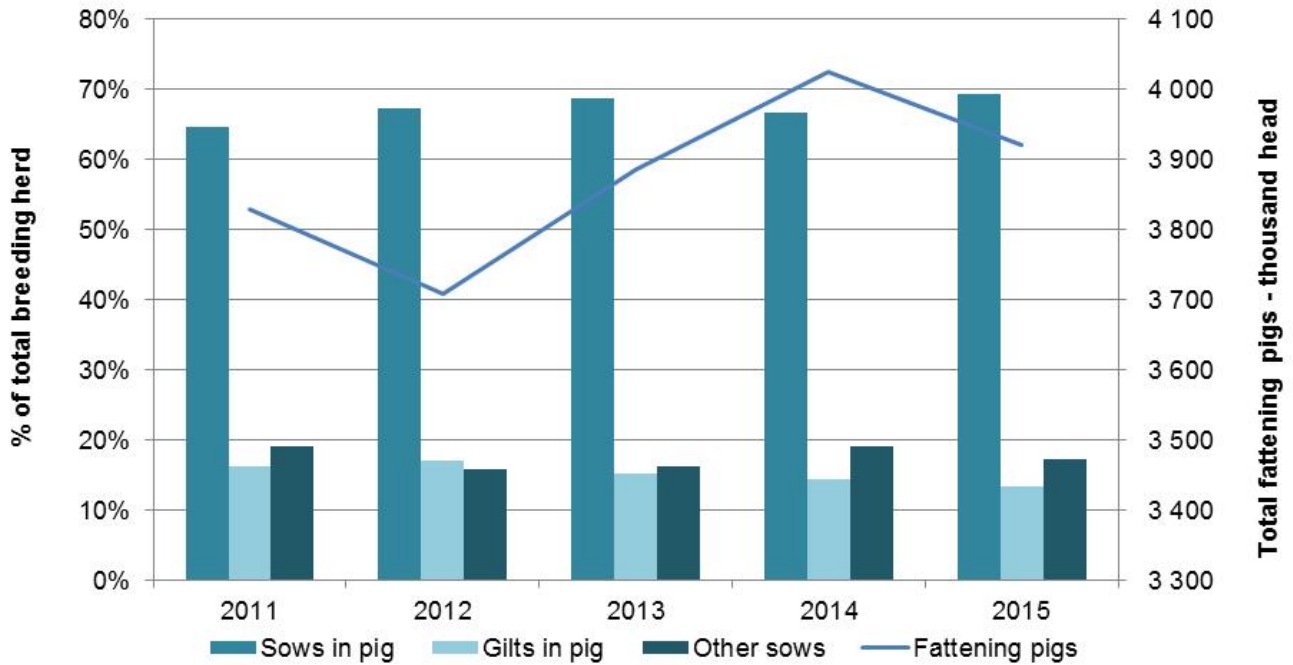


Table 2: Pigs on commercial agricultural holdings on 1 December

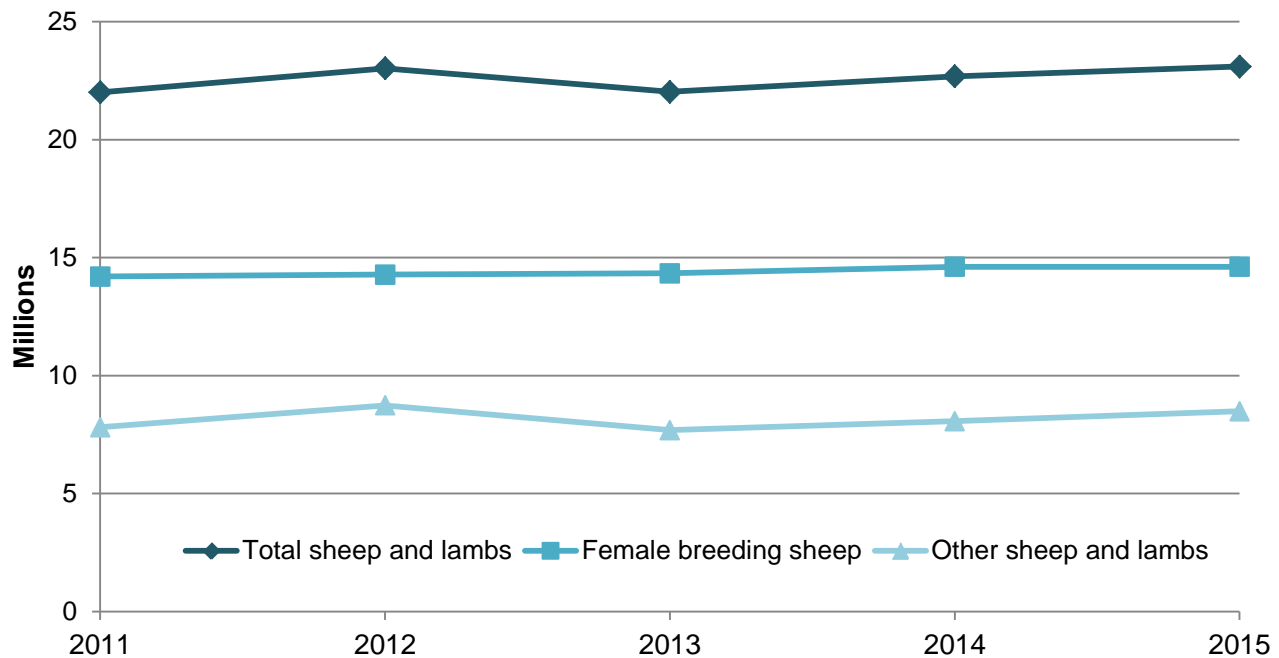
| | thousands | | | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|---------------------|
| | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | % change 2015/14 |
| Total pigs | 4 327 | 4 216 | 4 383 | 4 510 | 4 422 | -2.0 |
| Breeding pigs | 499 | 509 | 497 | 486 | 501 | 3.1 |
| Female breeding herd | 409 | 400 | 398 | 390 | 401 | 2.6 |
| Sows in pig | 265 | 269 | 273 | 260 | 278 | 6.8 |
| Gilts in pig | 66 | 68 | 60 | 56 | 54 | -4.6 |
| Other sows ^(a) | 78 | 63 | 64 | 74 | 69 | -6.6 |
| Other breeding pigs | 90 | 109 | 99 | 96 | 100 | 4.9 |
| Boars being used for service | 15 | 15 | 15 | 13 | 13 | 3.4 |
| Gilts intended for first time breeding | 75 | 93 | 84 | 83 | 87 | 5.2 |
| Fattening pigs (incl. barren sows) | 3 828 | 3 707 | 3 886 | 4 024 | 3 921 | -2.6 |

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

Sheep

The total number of sheep and lambs in the UK increased by 1.8% between December 2014 and December 2015 and now stands at 23.1 million animals. The UK's female breeding flock remained constant over the same period at 14.6 million animals. Other sheep and lambs increased 5.2% in December 2015 to 8.5 million animals.

Figure 3: Total sheep and lambs UK at December 2011 to 2015



Figures for England for 2014 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

| | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 ^(a) | 2014 | 2015 ^(b) | % change 2014/15 |
|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| | thousands | | | | | |
| Total sheep and lambs | 22 007 | 23 028 | 22 027 | 22 687 | 23 103 | 1.8 |
| Female breeding sheep | 14 199 | 14 286 | 14 337 | 14 617 | 14 614 | 0.0 |
| Other sheep and lambs | 7 808 | 8 742 | 7 690 | 8 069 | 8 489 | 5.2 |

(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). Until 2012 sheep data was collected via the Welsh December survey of agriculture.

(b) 2015 results are provisional.

Table 4: Effect of revisions to Sheep figures for 2014

| | thousands | | |
|------------------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------|
| | 2014 | | |
| | Original | Revised | % change |
| Total sheep and lambs | 22,916 | 22 687 | -1.0 |
| Female breeding sheep | 14 764 | 14 617 | -1.0 |
| Other sheep and lambs | 8 152 | 8 069 | -1.0 |

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 2015 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 resulted in an increase to the sample size to 810 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, one hectare of orchards, 0.5 hectares of vegetables or 0.1 hectares of protected crops, or more than 10 cows, 50 pigs, 20 sheep, 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):

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. Sheep and goat keepers in England 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 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).

No individual figures have yet been published for Wales, but it is anticipated that they will be shortly. When available they will 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 around 23,200 main holdings, 14,000 holdings were sampled and 9,700 responses received, giving a response rate of 69 per cent. For 2015, data for the sheep and goat inventory was collected as part of the December Survey for the first time and informed the sheep figures in the publication. To this end, a further 8,000 forms were sent requesting sheep and goat data only, with 7,200 forms being returned (a response rate of 91 per cent). Together with holdings responding to the sheep question in the December Survey form, this means that the overall response rate for the sheep question was approximately 85 per cent. Estimates are made for non-responses.

Final results for Scotland were published on 15 March 2016 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 2015 December Survey conducted in Northern Ireland was a sample survey issued to 4,934 farms, 3,989 forms were returned, a 81% 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 25 February 2016 by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development for Northern Ireland, Dundonald House, Belfast, BT4 3SB (telephone: Belfast (02890) 525450) and are available online

at: www.dardni.gov.uk/articles/december-agricultural-survey-2015-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 2017: Farming Statistics Livestock Populations at 1 December 2016, 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.