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Farming Statistics - Livestock Populations at 1 December 2016, 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 remains broadly constant at December 2016 at 9.8 million. There are changes in the numbers in each categories for example with female cattle aged between one and two years increasing by 2.4% being mostly offset with by a decrease in the number cattle in the dairy herd aged two years or more to 4.1 million animals.

Pigs ([Table 2](#))

The total number of pigs in the UK increased by 2.6% to an estimated 4.5 million compared to December 2015. This increase is mainly due to the 2.9% rise in the number of fattening pigs to just over 4.0 million animals.

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

The total number of sheep and lambs in the UK increased by 3.1% during 2016 to an estimated 23.8 million animals. The overall rise in population was from the other sheep and lambs sector which increased by an estimated 6.7% to 9.1 million animals. The UK's female breeding flock rose by an estimated 0.9% to 14.8 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 UK's total breeding herd, which accounts for just over a third of all cattle, has decreased by 0.5% since December 2015 to 3.45 million. The 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 2016. Compared to 2015 the UK's dairy breeding herd has decreased by 1.1% to 2014 levels at just under 1.9 million. The beef breeding herd remains constant at 1.55 million.

Figure 1: Female dairy and beef herds at 1 December 2012 to 2016

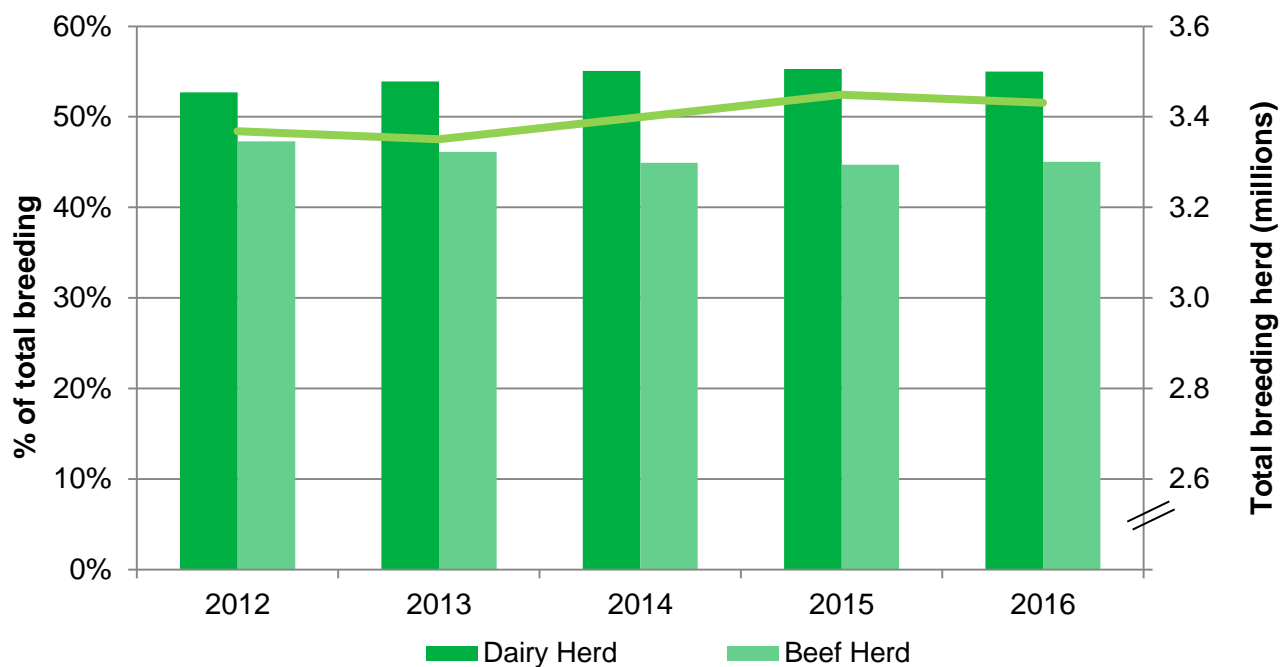


Table 1: Cattle and calves on UK agricultural holdings on 1 December ^(a)

	Thousands					
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	% change 2016/15
Total cattle and calves	9 749	9 682	9 693	9 816	9 806	-0.1
All female cattle	7 062	7 013	7 076	7 153	7 149	-0.1
Aged 2 years or more	4 128	4 126	4 176	4 164	4 125	-1.0
Total breeding herd	3 388	3 371	3 419	3 469	3 451	-0.5
Beef herd	1 603	1 554	1 536	1 551	1 554	0.2
Dairy herd	1 786	1 817	1 883	1 918	1 898	-1.1
Other female cattle	740	755	757	696	673	-3.2
Beef	346	353	348	326	325	-0.4
Dairy	394	402	409	370	349	-5.7
Aged between 1 and 2 years	1 394	1 396	1 367	1 403	1 437	2.4
Beef	861	852	824	843	858	1.8
Dairy	532	543	543	560	579	3.3
Less than 1 year	1 540	1 491	1 532	1 586	1 587	0.0
All male cattle	2 687	2 669	2 617	2 662	2 658	-0.2
Aged 2 years or more	305	342	344	313	294	-5.9
Aged between 1 and 2 years	1 001	1 015	964	969	998	3.0
Less than 1 year	1 381	1 312	1 309	1 380	1 365	-1.1

(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 4.5 million at 1 December 2016, an increase of 2.6% from December 2015. Breeding pigs in the UK saw an increase rising by 0.8% in December 2016 to 505 thousand animals. However, the main driver for the overall increase was the number of fattening pigs which rose by 2.9% in 2016 (113 thousand animals) to just over 4.0 million pigs.

Figure 2: Proportion of pigs in the breeding herd and total number of fattening pigs UK at 1 December 2012 to 2016

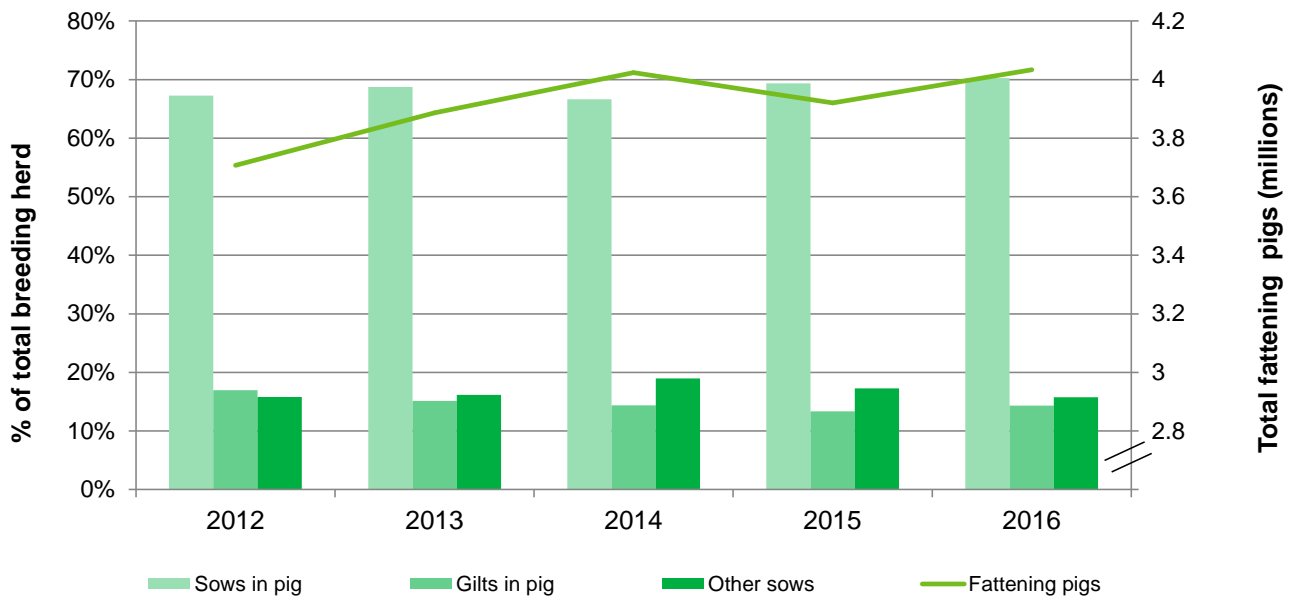


Table 2: Pigs on commercial agricultural holdings on 1 December

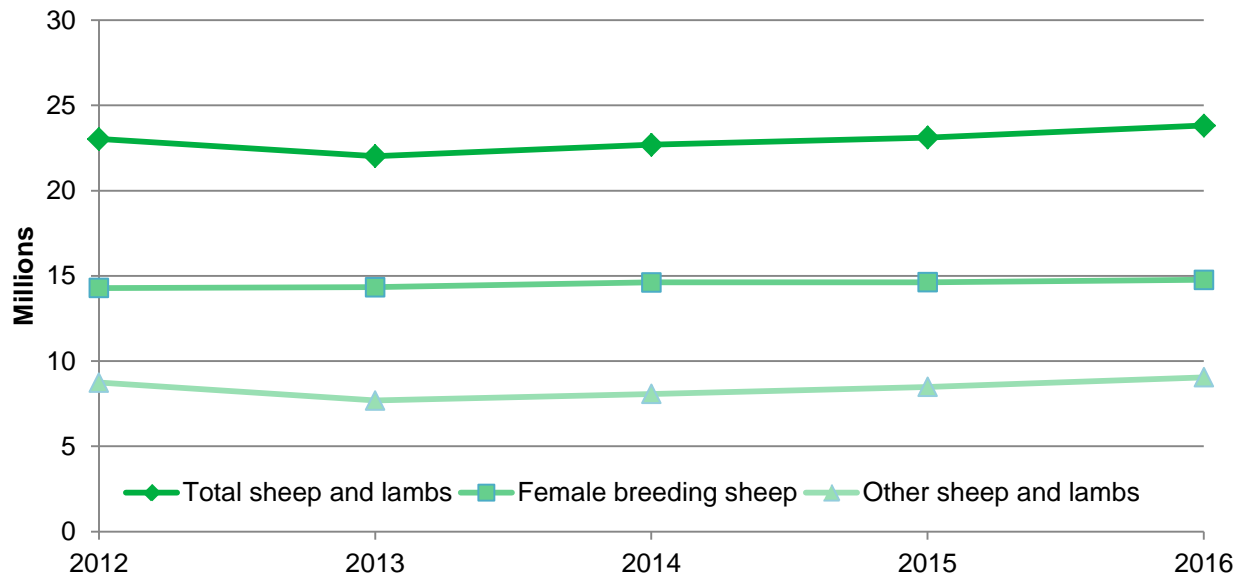
	thousands					
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	% change 2016/15
Total pigs	4 216	4 383	4 510	4 422	4 538	2.6
Breeding pigs	509	497	486	501	505	0.8
Female breeding herd	400	398	390	401	409	2.0
Sows in pig	269	273	260	278	287	3.4
Gilts in pig	68	60	56	54	59	9.3
Other sows ^(a)	63	64	74	69	63	-8.9
Other breeding pigs	109	99	96	100	96	-4.2
Boars being used for service	15	15	13	13	14	8.1
Gilts intended for first time breeding	93	84	83	87	82	-6.1
Fattening pigs (incl. barren sows)	3 707	3 886	4 024	3 921	4 033	2.9

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

Sheep

The total number of sheep and lambs in the UK increased by 3.1% between December 2015 and December 2016 and now stands at 23.8 million animals. The UK's female breeding flock increased over the same period to 14.8 million animals. Other sheep and lambs increased 6.7% in December 2016 to 9 million animals.

Figure 3: Total sheep and lambs UK at December 2012 to 2016



Figures for England for 2015 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

	thousands					% change
	2012	2013(a)	2014	2015	2016(b)	2015/16
Total sheep and lambs	23 028	22 027	22 687	23 110	23 819	3.1
Female breeding sheep	14 286	14 337	14 617	14 630	14 768	0.9
Other sheep and lambs	8 742	7 690	8 069	8 481	9 051	6.7

(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) 2016 results are provisional.

Table 4: Effect of revisions to Sheep figures for 2015

	thousands		
	2015		
	Original	Revised	% change
Total sheep and lambs	23,103	23,110	0.0%
Female breeding sheep	14,614	14,630	0.1%
Other sheep and lambs	8,489	8,481	-0.1%

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 2016 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 798 holdings, achieving a response rate of 94%, 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).

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 23,200 main holdings, 14,700 holdings were sampled and 10,100 responses received, giving a response rate of 69%. 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 9,800 forms were sent requesting sheep and goat data only, with 7,700 forms being returned (a response rate of 78%). 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 77%. Estimates are made for non-responses.

Final results for Scotland were published on 16 March 2017 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/PubFinalResultsDecCensus

Northern Ireland

The 2016 December Survey conducted in Northern Ireland was a sample survey issued to 4,988 farms, 4,139 forms were returned, an 83% 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 23 February 2017 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/publications/december-agricultural-survey-2016

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 2018: Farming Statistics Livestock Populations at 1 December 2017, 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.