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Farming Statistics - Livestock Populations at 1 December 2017, England

This release shows livestock numbers on agricultural holdings in England. These results are from the December Pigs Survey as at 1 December 2017, along with data from the administrative sources of the Cattle Tracing System (CTS) and the Annual Sheep and Goat (SAG) Inventory. Full details of these sources are provided in the methodological notes on page 7.

Key points:

Cattle ([Table 1](#))

In December 2017 the total number of cattle and calves in England is 5.3 million. This equates to a small decrease of 0.2% from almost 5.4 million in December 2016.

Pigs ([Table 2](#))

The total number of pigs in England has increased by 2.8% since December 2016 to 3.7 million. Fattening pigs saw the largest increase, rising from 3.2 million to 3.3 million.

Sheep ([Table 3](#))

The total number of sheep and lambs in England rose by 1.8% between December 2016 and December 2017 to an estimated 11.3 million. The female breeding flock accounts for 60% of the population and increased by 132 thousand animals to 6.7 million in December 2017.

Survey methodology ([Pages 7 and 8](#))

For information on the different data sources please see the methodology section on pages 7 and 8.

Other surveys and next publications ([Page 8](#))

Further information on the next publications due can be found on page 8.

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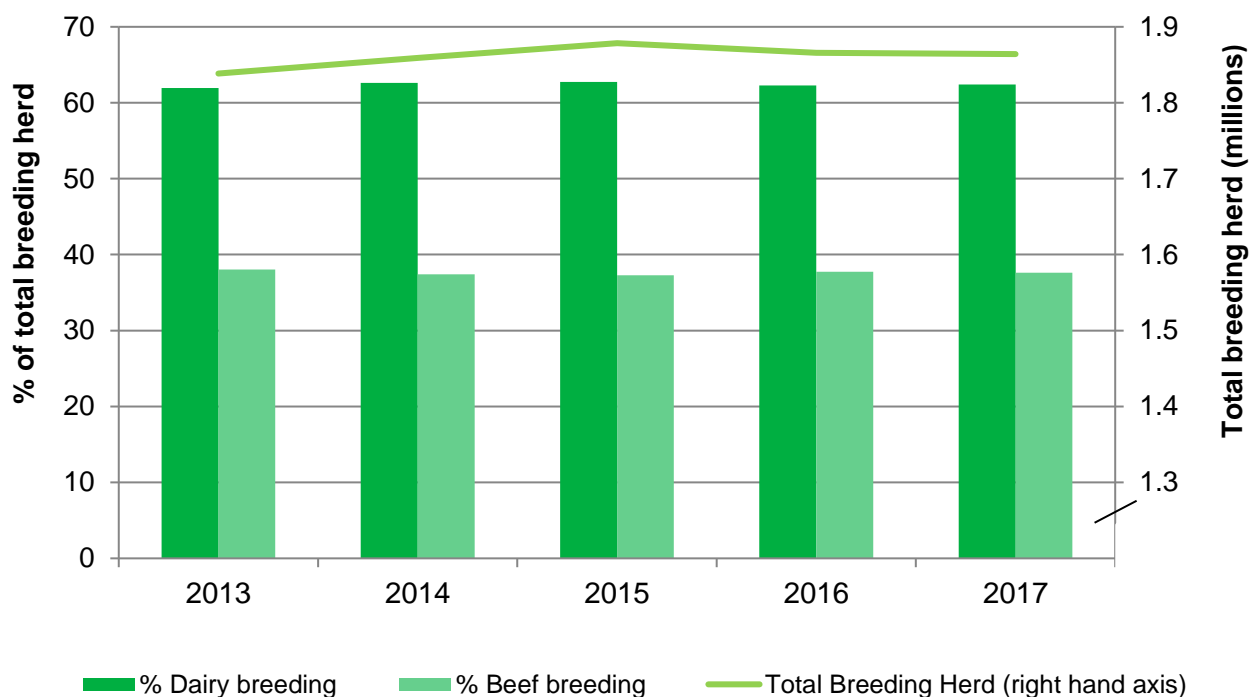
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Detailed results

Cattle

The total number of cattle and calves in England is 5.3 million in December 2017. This equates to a small decrease of 0.2% from almost 5.4 million in December 2016.

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



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 2017.

The breeding herd has remained relatively stable for the last four years at almost 1.9 million animals. The dairy herd accounts for the majority (62%) of the breeding herd and remained almost unchanged in December 2017 at 1.2 million animals. The beef herd decreased by 0.4% from 704 in December 2016 to 701 thousand in December 2017.

The total number of male cattle in England is 1.46 million in December 2017. This has remained largely unchanged since December 2016.

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

	Thousands					
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% change 2017/2016
Total cattle and calves	5 323	5 308	5 358	5 355	5 347	-0.2
All female cattle	3 843	3 868	3 900	3 895	3 891	-0.1
Aged 2 years or more	2 269	2 288	2 273	2 247	2 240	-0.3
Total breeding herd	1 838	1 859	1 878	1 866	1 864	-0.1
Beef herd	699	695	700	704	701	-0.4
Dairy herd	1 139	1 164	1 178	1 162	1 163	0.1
Other female cattle	430	429	394	381	376	-1.2
Beef	188	185	173	173	171	-1.6
Dairy	242	243	221	208	206	-1.0
Aged between 1 and 2 years	764	749	769	789	784	-0.7
Beef	436	422	431	441	458	3.8
Dairy	328	327	338	348	326	-6.4
Less than 1 year	810	831	858	859	867	0.9
Beef	472	482	498	520	540	3.9
Dairy	338	349	360	339	326	-3.7
All male cattle	1 480	1 440	1 457	1 460	1 456	-0.3
Aged 2 years or more	202	200	182	170	169	-0.7
Aged between 1 and 2 years	562	532	530	551	546	-1.0
Less than 1 year	717	708	746	739	741	0.3

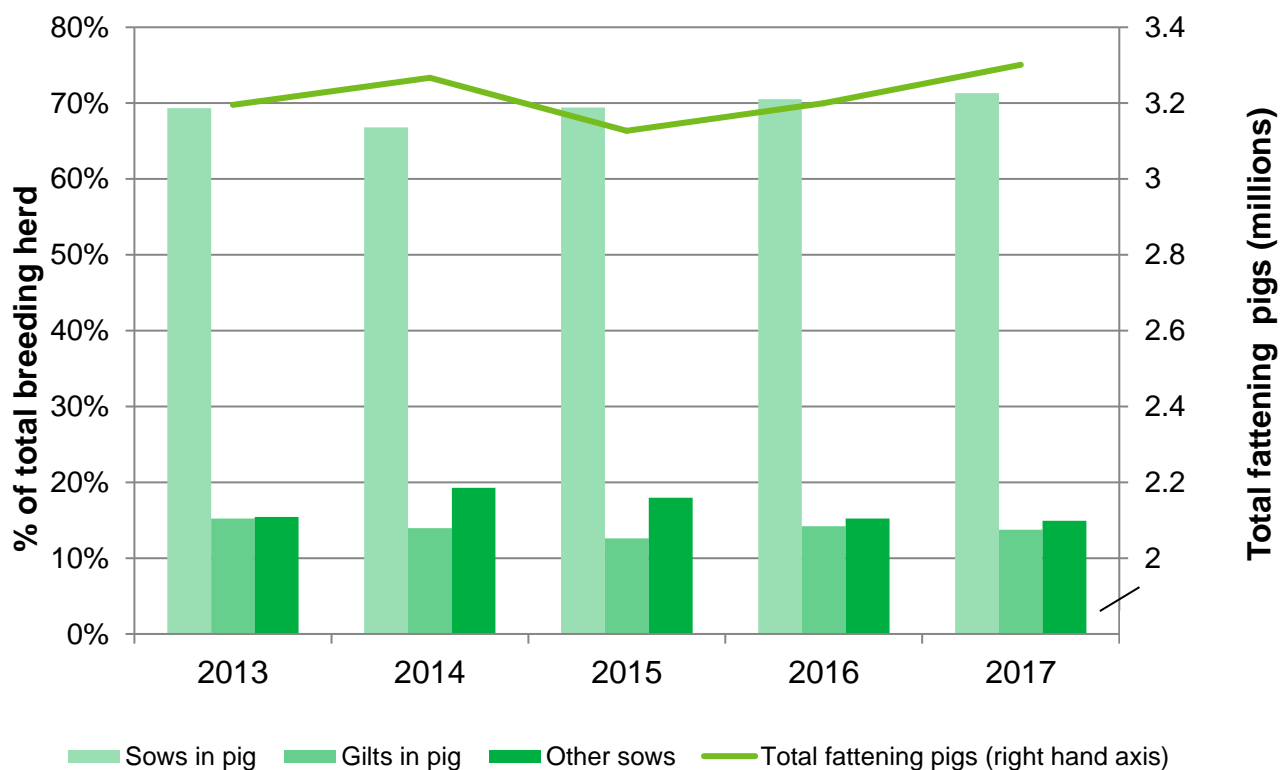
(a) These figures have been sourced from the Cattle Tracing System (CTS). The data include returns from all holdings with cattle so are not subject to survey error.

Pigs

The total number of pigs in England has increased by 2.8% since December 2016 to 3.7 million. The main driver for this overall increase was fattening pigs which rose by 3.2% to 3.3 million and accounts for 89% of the total pig population.

The female pig breeding herd saw a small increase of 0.4% from 324 thousand pigs in December 2016 to 325 thousand in December 2017. Other breeding pigs decreased by 2.4% since December 2016 to 82 thousand. This is similar to estimates seen in June 2017 and was largely due to a decrease in the number of boars which reduced by 2 thousand between December 2016 and December 2017. This decrease was also seen in June 2017. See the detailed results spreadsheet for June and December data side by side (link on page 8).

Figure 2: Proportional make-up of the female breeding herd and the total number of fattening pigs at 1 December 2013 to 2017



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					
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	% change 2017/2016
Total pigs	3 607	3 662	3 530	3 608	3 709	2.8
Breeding pigs	411	396	403	408	408	-0.2
Female breeding herd	326	313	317	324	325	0.4
Sows in pig	226	209	220	229	232	1.5
Gilts in pig	50	44	40	46	45	-3.0
Other sows ^(a)	50	60	57	49	49	-1.7
Other breeding pigs	86	82	86	84	82	-2.4
Boars being used for service	13	11	12	13	11	-16.9
Gilts intended for first time breeding	73	71	75	72	72	0.2
Fattening pigs (incl. barren sows)	3 195	3 267	3 127	3 200	3 301	3.2

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

Sheep

The estimated total number of sheep and lambs in England increased by 1.8% from 11.1 million in December 2016 to 11.3 million in December 2017. England's female breeding flock increased by 2.0% to 6.7 million animals over the same period. The other sheep and lambs category saw an increase in the year to December 2017, of 1.6% rising from 4.5 to 4.6 million.

Figure 3: Total sheep and lambs at 1 December 2013 to 2017

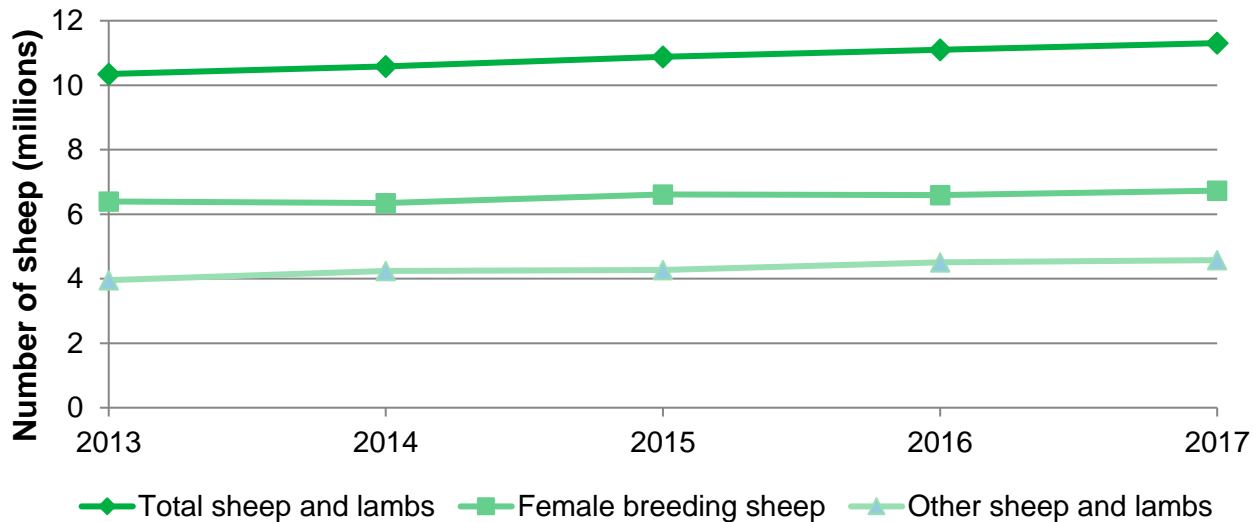


Table 3: Sheep and lambs on agricultural holdings on 1 December (a)

	Thousands					% change
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2017/2016
Total sheep and lambs	10 348	10 587	10 881	11 101	11 306	1.8
Female breeding sheep	6 393	6 346	6 609	6 597	6 730	2.0
Other sheep and lambs	3 955	4 241	4 272	4 504	4 576	1.6

(a) 2017 results are provisional.

Figures for 2016 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 2016

	Thousands		
	2016		% change
	Original	Revised	
Total sheep and lambs	11248	11101	-1.3%
Female breeding sheep	6685	6597	-1.3%
Other sheep and lambs	4563	4504	-1.3%

Survey methodology

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:

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 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 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

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