Farming Statistics - Livestock Populations at 1 December 2019, England

This release shows livestock numbers on agricultural holdings in England on 1 December. 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 2019 there were:

Cattle (Table 1)

5.1 million total cattle and calves,
a decrease of 2.2% since December 2018

1.8 million cattle in the breeding herd,
a decrease of 1.6% since December 2018

Pigs (Table 2)

3.8 million total pigs,
an increase of 2.7% since December 2018

3.4 million fattening pigs,
an increase of 3.0% since December 2018

Sheep (Table 3)

10.5 million total sheep and lambs,
a decrease of 1.7% since December 2018

6.2 million breeding ewes,
an increase of 0.2% since December 2018

Detailed results

Cattle

In December 2019 the total number of cattle and calves in England sat at just over 5.1 million. This equates to a decrease of 2.2% from December 2018.

Figure 1: Female dairy and beef breeding herds at 1 December 2015 to 2019
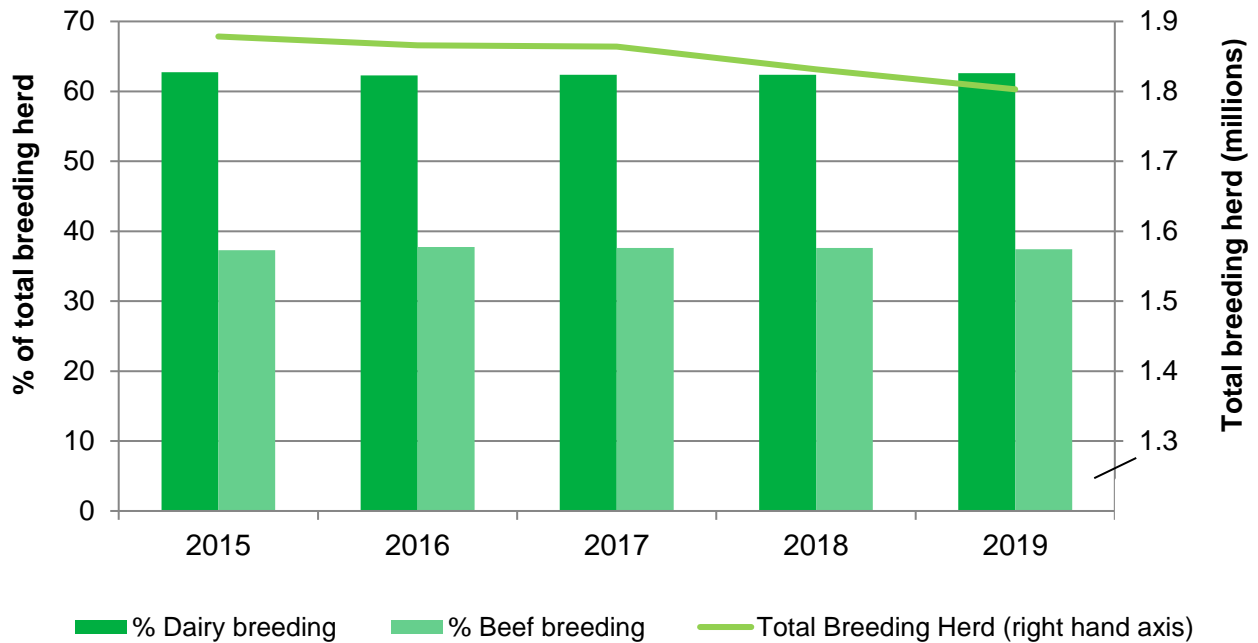
The female breeding herd is made up of dairy and beef cows over two years old with offspring and accounts for almost half (48%) of all female cattle in December 2019.

The breeding herd has remained relatively stable for the last five years between 1.8 and 1.9 million animals. The dairy herd accounts for the majority (63%) of the breeding herd and decreased by 1.2% in December 2019 to 1.1 million animals. The beef herd decreased by 2.1% from 689 thousand in December 2018 to 675 thousand in December 2019.

The total number of male cattle in England is just under 1.4 million in December 2019, a decrease of 3.8% compared to December 2018.

Table 1: Cattle and calves on agricultural holdings on 1 December [a]

Thousands

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	% change 2019/2018
Total cattle and calves	**5 358**	**5 355**	**5 347**	**5 261**	**5 146**	**-2.2**
All female cattle	**3 900**	**3 895**	**3 891**	**3 837**	**3 775**	**-1.6**
Aged 2 years or more	**2 273**	**2 247**	**2 240**	**2 194**	**2 149**	**-2.0**
Total breeding herd	1 878	1 866	1 864	1 832	1 803	-1.6
Beef herd	700	704	701	689	675	-2.1
Dairy herd	1 178	1 162	1 163	1 143	1 128	-1.2
Other female cattle	394	381	376	362	346	-4.4
Beef	173	173	171	176	177	0.5
Dairy	221	208	206	186	169	-8.9
Aged between 1 and 2 years	**769**	**789**	**784**	**787**	**774**	**-1.8**
Beef	431	441	458	473	467	-1.2
Dairy	338	348	326	314	306	-2.6
Less than 1 year	**858**	**859**	**867**	**855**	**852**	**-0.4**
Beef	498	520	540	536	535	-0.1
Dairy	360	339	326	320	317	-0.8
All male cattle	**1 457**	**1 460**	**1 456**	**1 425**	**1 371**	**-3.8**
Aged 2 years or more	182	170	169	166	164	-1.3
Aged between 1 and 2 years	530	551	546	548	520	-5.2
Less than 1 year	746	739	741	711	688	-3.2

(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 2.7% since December 2018 to just under 3.8 million. Fattening pigs, which accounts for 89% of the total pig population, has increased by 3.0%, to just under 3.4 million.

The female pig breeding herd saw a small decrease of 0.7% from 322 thousand in December 2018 to 320 thousand in December 2019. This decrease was driven by an 11.5% fall in the number of other sows (either being suckled or dry sows kept for further breeding), which more than offset the rise in sows and gilts in pig.

Figure 2: Proportional make-up of the female breeding herd and the total number of fattening pigs at 1 December 2015 to 2019
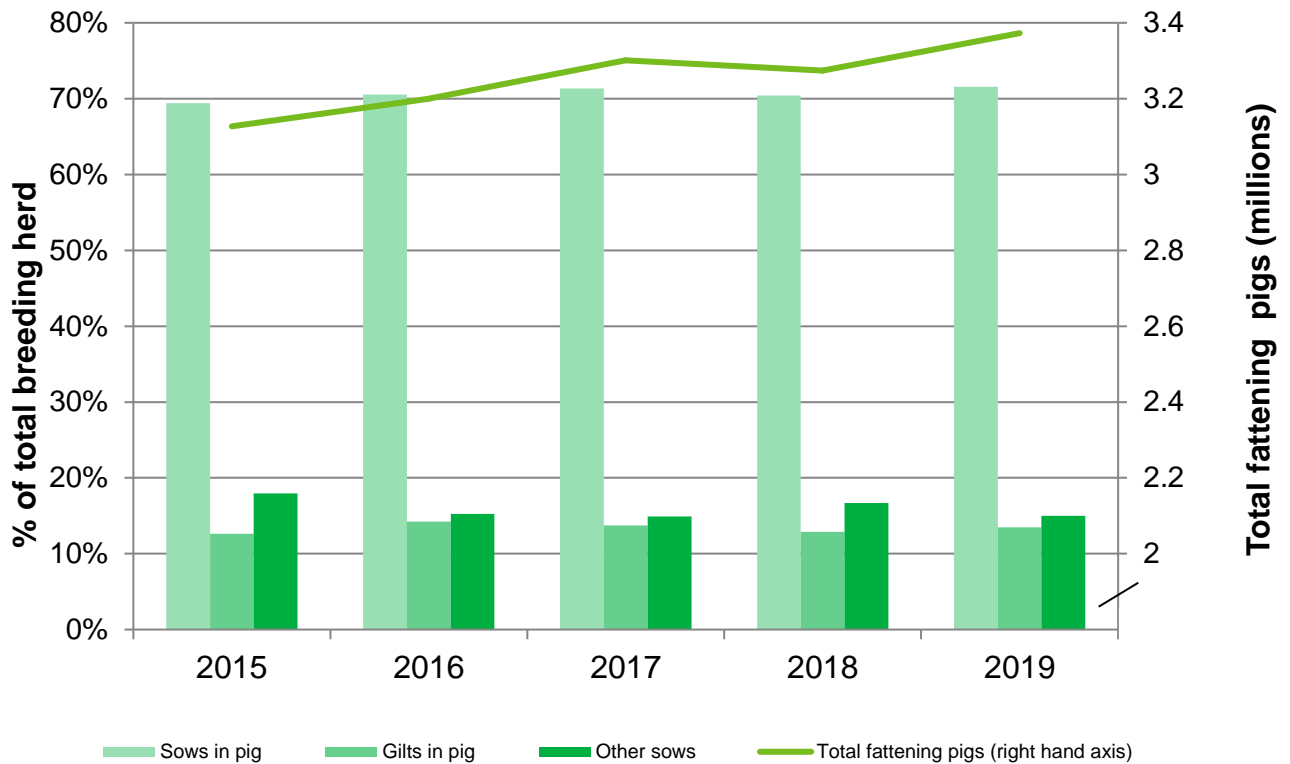
Table 2: Pigs on commercial agricultural holdings on 1 December

<div align="right">Thousands</div>

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	% change 2019/2018
Total pigs	**3 530**	**3 608**	**3 709**	**3 679**	**3 776**	**2.7**
Breeding pigs	**403**	**408**	**408**	**405**	**404**	**-0.2**
Female breeding herd	**317**	**324**	**325**	**322**	**320**	**-0.7**
Sows in pig	220	229	232	227	230	1.2
Gilts in pig	40	46	45	42	43	2.9
Other sows[a]	57	49	49	54	48	-11.5
Other breeding pigs	**86**	**84**	**82**	**82**	**84**	**1.5**
Boars being used for service	12	13	11	10	10	2.2
Gilts intended for first time breeding	75	72	72	72	73	1.4
Fattening pigs (incl. barren sows)	**3 127**	**3 200**	**3 301**	**3 274**	**3 373**	**3.0**

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

Sheep

The estimated total number of sheep and lambs in England fell by 1.7% from 10.7 million in December 2018 to 10.5 million in December 2019. This was driven by the decrease in the other sheep and lambs category which saw a drop of 4.4% from 4.5 million to 4.3 million animals. England's female breeding flock saw a small increase in the same period of 0.2% and remains steady at 6.2 million animals.

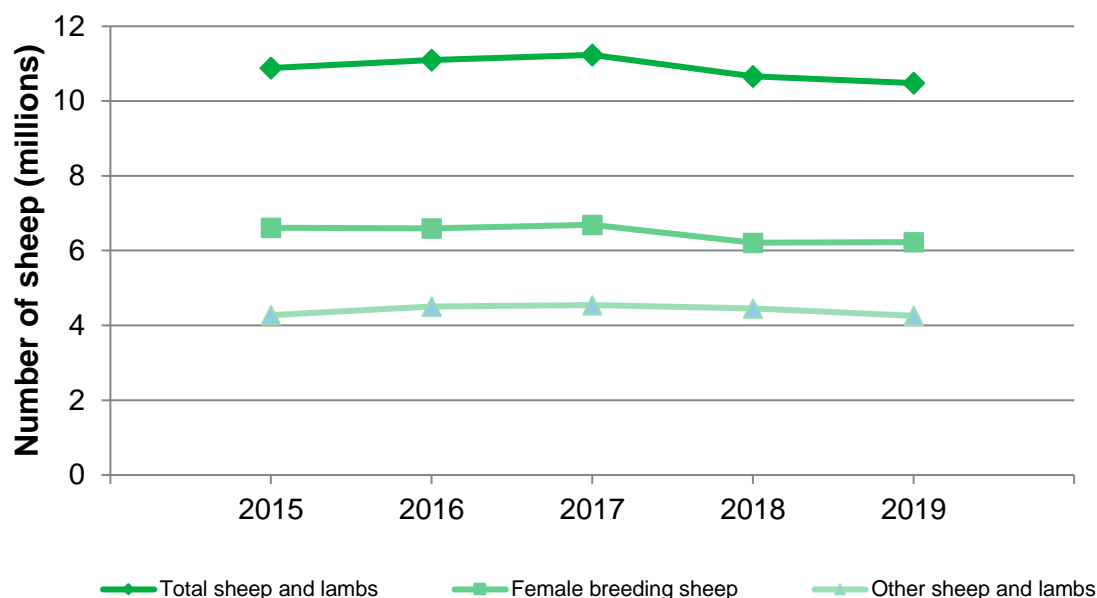**Figure 3: Total sheep and lambs at 1 December, 2015 to 2019**

Table 3: Sheep and lambs on agricultural holdings on 1 December [a]

						Thousands
	2015	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**% change 2019/2018**
Total sheep and lambs	**10 881**	**11 101**	**11 235**	**10 666**	**10 481**	**-1.7**
Female breeding sheep	6 609	6 597	6 691	6 213	6 225	0.2
Other sheep and lambs	4 272	4 504	4 543	4 454	4 257	-4.4

(a) 2019 results are provisional.

Figures for 2018 have been revised to take into account late inventory returns and additional data cleansing. The table below shows the effect of the revisions:

Table 4: Effect of revisions to Sheep figures for 2018

			Thousands
	2018		
	Original	**Revised**	**% change**
Total sheep and lambs	**10 890**	**10 666**	**-2.1%**
Female breeding sheep	6 399	6 213	-2.9%
Other sheep and lambs	4 492	4 454	-0.8%

Survey methodology

Data for this 2019 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 734 holdings, achieving a response rate of 90%, 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

- 19 March 2020: Farming Statistics Livestock Populations at 1 December 2019, 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.

Feedback

We welcome feedback and any thoughts to improve the publication further. Please send any feedback to: farming-statistics@defra.gov.uk. Suggested questions to help you structure your feedback are below but all feedback is welcome:
- How relevant is the current content of the publication to your needs as a user?
- What purpose do you require the data for?
- Which data do you find most useful?
- Is there any content that you did not find useful?
- Do you have any suggestions for further development of this release; including additional content, presentation and any other thoughts?