



## Farming Statistics - Livestock Populations at 1 December 2018, UK

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 to 10. Key findings are below.

In the UK on 1 December 2018 there were:

### Cattle ([Table 1](#))



**9.6 million**  
**total cattle**  
**and calves,**  
a decrease of 1.8% since  
December 2017



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

### Pigs ([Table 2](#))



**4.6 million**  
**total pigs,**  
a decrease of 1.4% since  
December 2017



**4.1 million**  
**fattening pigs,**  
a decrease of 1.5% since  
December 2017

### Sheep ([Table 3](#))



**22.5 million**  
**total sheep**  
**and lambs,**  
a decrease of 3.2% since  
December 2017



**14.1 million**  
**breeding ewes,**  
a decrease of 3.9% since  
December 2017

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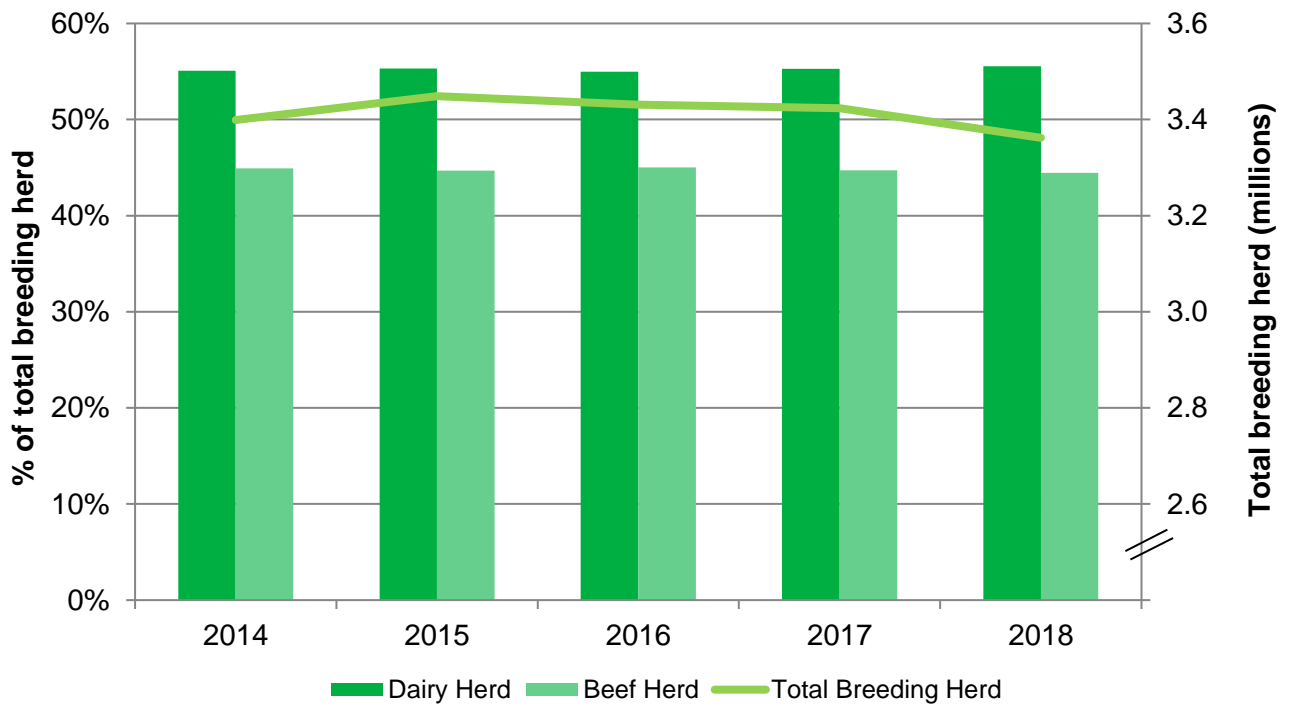
## Detailed results

### Cattle

The total number of cattle and calves in the UK decreased by 1.8% between December 2017 and December 2018 and now stands at 9.6 million animals.

The UK breeding herd, which is made up of dairy and beef cows over two years old with offspring, accounts for just over a third of total cattle and 48% of all female cattle. It too has decreased by 1.8% since last year and now totals just under 3.4 million. The beef breeding herd showed the larger decrease at 2.4% and stands at 1.5 million while the dairy breeding herd showed less of a decline at 1.3% and stands at just under 1.9 million.

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



**Table 1: Cattle and calves on UK agricultural holdings on 1 December <sup>(a)</sup>**

	Thousands					
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	% change 2018/2017
<b>Total cattle and calves</b>	<b>9 693</b>	<b>9 816</b>	<b>9 806</b>	<b>9 787</b>	<b>9 610</b>	<b>-1.8</b>
<b>All female cattle</b>	<b>7 076</b>	<b>7 153</b>	<b>7 149</b>	<b>7 141</b>	<b>7 033</b>	<b>-1.5</b>
<b>Aged 2 years or more</b>	<b>4 176</b>	<b>4 164</b>	<b>4 125</b>	<b>4 119</b>	<b>4 041</b>	<b>-1.9</b>
Total breeding herd	3 419	3 469	3 451	3 443	3 382	-1.8
Beef herd	1 536	1 551	1 554	1 539	1 503	-2.4
Dairy herd	1 883	1 918	1 898	1 904	1 879	-1.3
Other female cattle	757	696	673	676	659	-2.4
Beef	348	326	325	326	335	3.0
Dairy	409	370	349	350	324	-7.5
<b>Aged between 1 and 2 years</b>	<b>1 367</b>	<b>1 403</b>	<b>1 437</b>	<b>1 429</b>	<b>1 427</b>	<b>-0.1</b>
Beef	824	843	858	885	903	2.0
Dairy	543	560	579	544	524	-3.6
<b>Less than 1 year</b>	<b>1 532</b>	<b>1 586</b>	<b>1 587</b>	<b>1 592</b>	<b>1 564</b>	<b>-1.8</b>
<b>All male cattle</b>	<b>2 617</b>	<b>2 662</b>	<b>2 658</b>	<b>2 646</b>	<b>2 578</b>	<b>-2.6</b>
Aged 2 years or more	344	313	294	298	295	-0.9
Aged between 1 and 2 years	964	969	998	984	977	-0.7
Less than 1 year	1 309	1 380	1 365	1 364	1 305	-4.3

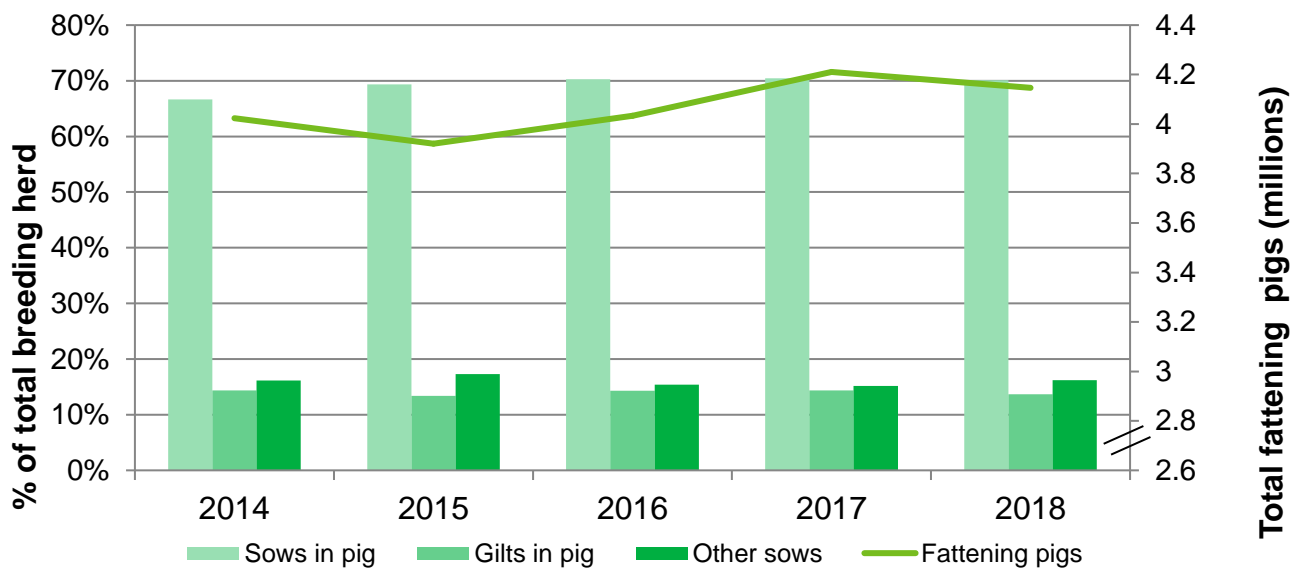
(a) Figures are sourced from the Cattle Tracing System (CTS) in England, Wales and Scotland and the equivalent APHIS system in Northern Ireland. The data include returns from all holdings with cattle so are not subject to survey error.

## Pigs

The total number of pigs in the UK is an estimated 4.6 million at 1 December 2018, a decrease of 1.4% from December 2017. The main driver for the overall decrease was the number of fattening pigs which fell by 1.5% (64 thousand animals) from December 2017 to 4.1 million pigs in December 2018.

The female pig breeding herd saw a small decrease of 0.4% from 407 thousand pigs in December 2017 to 406 thousand in December 2018. This decrease was driven by the fall in the number of sows and gilts in pigs which more than offset the rise in other sows.

**Figure 2: Proportion of pigs in the breeding herd and total number of fattening pigs UK at 1 December 2014 to 2018**



**Table 2: Pigs on commercial agricultural holdings on 1 December**

Thousands

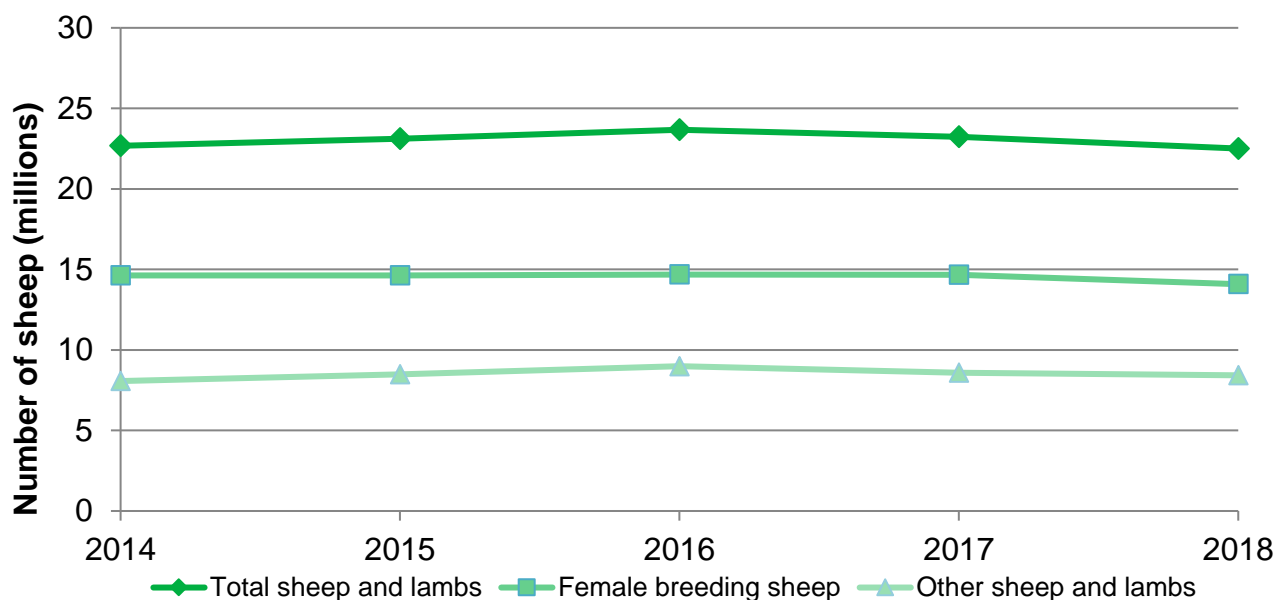
	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	% change 2018/2017
<b>Total pigs</b>	<b>4 510</b>	<b>4 422</b>	<b>4 538</b>	<b>4 713</b>	<b>4 648</b>	<b>-1.4</b>
<b>Breeding pigs</b>	<b>486</b>	<b>501</b>	<b>505</b>	<b>503</b>	<b>502</b>	<b>-0.2</b>
<b>Female breeding herd</b>	<b>390</b>	<b>401</b>	<b>409</b>	<b>407</b>	<b>406</b>	<b>-0.4</b>
Sows in pig	260	278	287	287	284	-0.9
Gilts in pig	56	54	59	59	55	-5.3
Other sows <sup>(a)</sup>	74	69	63	62	66	6.7
<b>Other breeding pigs</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>0.6</b>
Boars being used for service	13	13	14	12	12	-2.7
Gilts intended for first time breeding	83	87	82	83	84	1.1
<b>Fattening pigs (incl. barren sows)</b>	<b>4 024</b>	<b>3 921</b>	<b>4 033</b>	<b>4 211</b>	<b>4 146</b>	<b>-1.5</b>

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

## Sheep

The total number of sheep and lambs in the UK decreased by 3.2% between December 2017 and December 2018 and now stands at 22.5 million. Over the same period the female breeding flock dropped by 3.9% from 14.7 million to 14.1 million while other sheep and lambs showed a smaller decrease of 1.8% and fell from 8.6 million to 8.4 million animals.

**Figure 3: Total sheep and lambs in the UK at December 2014 to 2018**



Figures for England for 2017 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**

	2014	2015(a)	2016	2017	2018(b)	Thousands % change 2018/17
<b>Total sheep and lambs</b>	<b>22 687</b>	<b>23 106</b>	<b>23 671</b>	<b>23 239</b>	<b>22 506</b>	<b>-3.2%</b>
Female breeding sheep	14 617	14 622	14 680	14 659	14 084	-3.9%
Other sheep and lambs	8 069	8 485	8 991	8 581	8 423	-1.8%

(a) 2015 figures have been revised due to a calculation error, this has resulted in a minor change to the figures, see Table 5 for more detail.

(b) 2018 results are provisional.

**Table 4: Effect of revisions to Sheep figures for 2017**

	Thousands		
	2017		
	Original	Revised	% change
<b>Total sheep and lambs</b>	<b>23,310</b>	<b>23 239</b>	<b>-0.3%</b>
Female breeding sheep	14 697	14 659	-0.3%
Other sheep and lambs	8 614	8 581	-0.4%

Figures for 2015 have been revised due to a calculation error. Changes were minor but are shown in table 5 for clarity.

**Table 5: Effect of revisions to Sheep figures for 2015**

	Thousands		
	2015		
	Original	Revised	% change
<b>Total sheep and lambs</b>	<b>23,110</b>	<b>23 106</b>	<b>0.0%</b>
Female breeding sheep	14,630	14 622	-0.1%
Other sheep and lambs	8,481	8 485	0.0%

## 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 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:

[www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/182225/defra-stats-foodfarm-landuselivestock-june-results-BovineRegisters.pdf](http://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](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).

Further details of agricultural statistics in Wales can be found on the Welsh Government website at:

[gov.wales/statistics-and-research/?topic=Environment+and+countryside&lang=en](http://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 24,500 main holdings, 14,900 holdings were sampled and 9,500 responses received, giving a response rate of 64%. 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 11,000 forms were sent requesting sheep and goat data only, with 8,000 forms being returned (a response rate of 73%). Estimates are made for non-responses.

Final results for Scotland were published on 12 March 2019 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](mailto:agric.stats@scotland.gsi.gov.uk)) and are available online (search for “December Agricultural Survey”) at:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/>

## **Northern Ireland**

The 2018 December Survey conducted in Northern Ireland was a sample survey issued to 4,997 farms, 3,987 forms were returned, an 80% 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 were 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 28 February 2019 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/articles/december-agricultural-survey-final-results](http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/december-agricultural-survey-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 2020: Farming Statistics Livestock Populations at 1 December 2019, 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](http://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.