Farming Statistics - Livestock Populations at 1 December 2019, 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 7 to 9. Key findings are below.

In the UK on 1 December 2019 there were:

Cattle (Table 1)

9.5 million total cattle and calves,
a decrease of 1.6% since December 2018

3.3 million cattle in the breeding herd,
a decrease of 1.3% since December 2018

Pigs (Table 2)

4.7 million total pigs,
an increase of 2.0% since December 2018

4.2 million fattening pigs,
an increase of 2.2% since December 2018

Sheep (Table 3)

22.8 million total sheep and lambs,
An increase of 2.1% since December 2018

13.8 million breeding ewes,
a decrease of 0.4% since December 2018

Detailed results

Cattle

The total number of cattle and calves in the UK decreased by 1.6% between December 2018 and December 2019 and now stands at 9.5 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 1.3% since last year and now totals 3.3 million. The beef breeding herd showed the larger decrease at 2.2% and stands at 1.5 million while the dairy breeding herd showed a 0.6% decrease and stands at just under 1.9 million.

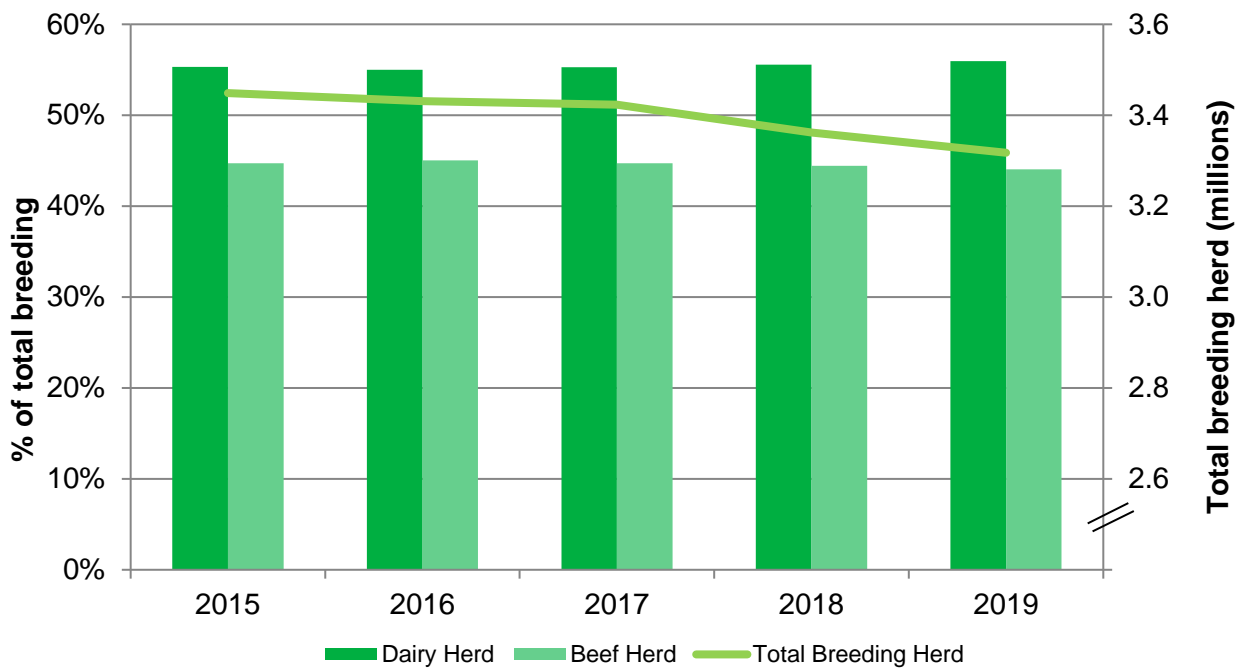**Figure 1: Female dairy and beef herds at 1 December 2015 to 2019**

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

Thousands

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	% change 2019/2018
Total cattle and calves	**9 816**	**9 806**	**9 787**	**9 610**	**9 459**	**-1.6**
All female cattle	**7 153**	**7 149**	**7 141**	**7 033**	**6 954**	**-1.1**
Aged 2 years or more	**4 164**	**4 125**	**4 119**	**4 041**	**3 975**	**-1.7**
Total breeding herd	3 469	3 451	3 443	3 382	3 337	-1.3
Beef herd	1 551	1 554	1 539	1 503	1 470	-2.2
Dairy herd	1 918	1 898	1 904	1 879	1 867	-0.6
Other female cattle	696	673	676	659	637	-3.4
Beef	326	325	326	335	338	0.7
Dairy	370	349	350	324	299	-7.6
Aged between 1 and 2 years	**1 403**	**1 437**	**1 429**	**1 427**	**1 405**	**-1.5**
Beef	843	858	885	903	886	-1.9
Dairy	560	579	544	524	519	-0.9
Less than 1 year	**1 586**	**1 587**	**1 592**	**1 564**	**1 574**	**0.7**
All male cattle	**2 662**	**2 658**	**2 646**	**2 578**	**2 504**	**-2.8**
Aged 2 years or more	313	294	298	295	289	-2.0
Aged between 1 and 2 years	969	998	984	977	929	-4.9
Less than 1 year	1 380	1 365	1 364	1 305	1 286	-1.5

(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 4.7 million at 1 December 2019, an increase of 2.0% from December 2018. The main driver for the overall increase was the number of fattening pigs which rose by 2.2% (93 thousand animals) from December 2018 to 4.2 million pigs in December 2019.

The female pig breeding herd saw a small decrease of 0.3% from 406 thousand pigs in December 2018 to 404 thousand in December 2019. Despite modest increases in sows in pigs and gilts in pigs the number of other sows (either being suckled or dry sows kept for further breeding) has fallen and this has driven the overall decrease of the female pig breeding herd.

Figure 2: Proportion of pigs in the breeding herd and total number of fattening pigs UK at 1 December 2015 to 2019
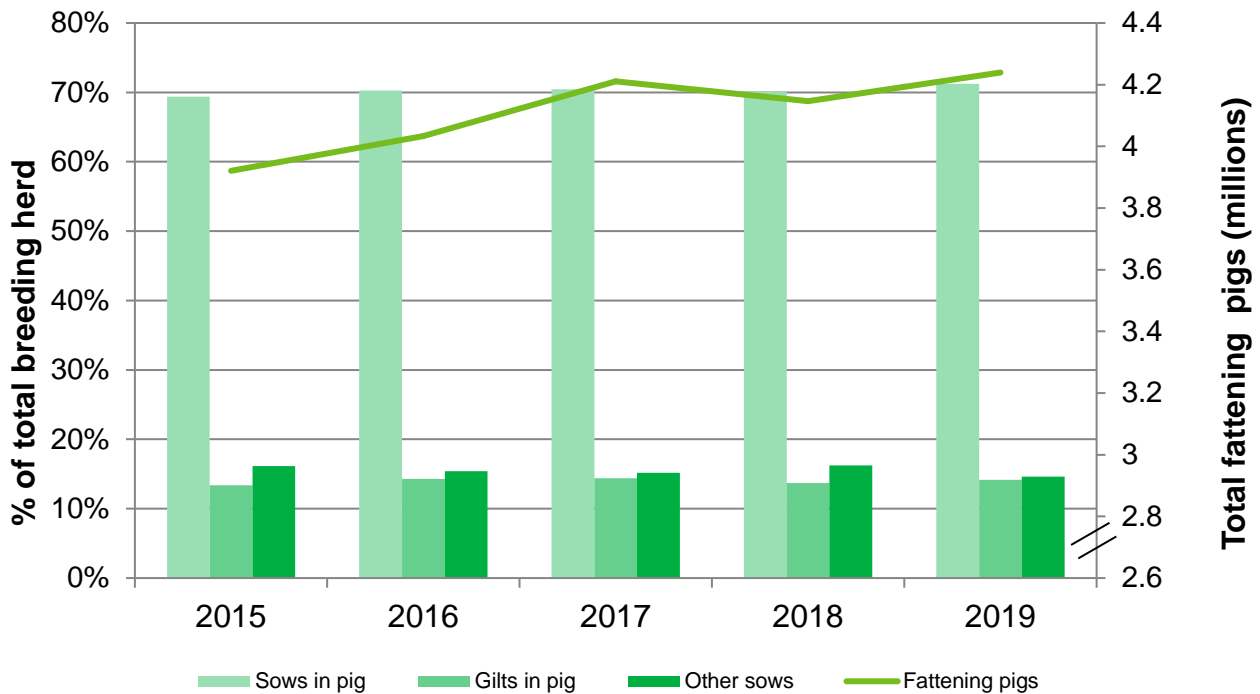
Table 2: Pigs on commercial agricultural holdings on 1 December

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

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	% change 2019/2018
Total pigs	**4 422**	**4 538**	**4 713**	**4 648**	**4 741**	**2.0**
Breeding pigs	**501**	**505**	**503**	**502**	**502**	**0.0**
Female breeding herd	**401**	**409**	**407**	**406**	**404**	**-0.3**
Sows in pig	278	287	287	284	288	1.3
Gilts in pig	54	59	59	55	57	3.2
Other sows[a]	69	63	62	66	59	-10.2
Other breeding pigs	**100**	**96**	**95**	**96**	**97**	**1.4**
Boars being used for service	13	14	12	12	12	-1.2
Gilts intended for first time breeding	87	82	83	84	85	1.8
Fattening pigs (incl. barren sows)	**3 921**	**4 033**	**4 211**	**4 146**	**4 239**	**2.2**

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

Sheep

The total number of sheep and lambs in the UK increased by 2.1% between December 2018 and December 2019 and now stands at 22.8 million. Over the same period the female breeding flock dropped by 0.4% from 13.9 million to 13.8 million while other sheep and lambs showed an increase of 6.3% and rose from 8.4 million to 8.9 million animals.

Figure 3: Total sheep and lambs in the UK at December 2015 to 2019

Figures for England for 2018 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 shows the effect of the revisions.

Table 3: Sheep and lambs on agricultural holdings on 1 December

Thousands

	2015(a)	2016	2017	2018	2019(b)	% change 2019/18
Total sheep and lambs	**23 106**	**23 671**	**23 239**	**22 283**	**22 756**	**2.1%**
Female breeding sheep	14 622	14 680	14 659	13 898	13 841	-0.4%
Other sheep and lambs	8 485	8 991	8 581	8 385	8 915	6.3%

(a) 2015 figures were revised in March 2019 due to a calculation error.
(b) 2019 results are provisional.

Table 4: Effect of revisions to Sheep figures for 2018

Thousands

	2018		
	Original	Revised	% change
Total sheep and lambs	**22 506**	**22 283**	**-1.0%**
Female breeding sheep	14 084	13 898	-1.3%
Other sheep and lambs	8 423	8 385	-0.4%

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 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:
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 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:
https://gov.wales/survey-agriculture-and-horticulture

Scotland

The December agricultural survey is based on a sample of main holdings and covers crops, livestock and machinery. From a population of 24,400 main holdings, 14,600 holdings were sampled and 8,900 responses received, giving a response rate of 61%. 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 11,300 forms were sent requesting sheep and goat data only, with 7,600 forms being returned (a response rate of 67%). Estimates are made for non-responses.

Final results for Scotland were published on 17 March 2020 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 (search for "December Agricultural Survey") at:
https://www.gov.scot/publications/

Northern Ireland

The 2019 December Survey conducted in Northern Ireland was a sample survey issued to 5,008 farms, 3,561 forms were returned, a 71% response rate.

Information is compiled from a number of administrative data sources. Cattle data is taken from the Animal and Public Health Information System (APHIS), Sheep data is taken from the NI Sheep and Goat Inventory and Pig data is from the NI Pig inventory. This administrative data is supplemented by the June and December Agricultural surveys in order to create representative estimates for all of Northern Ireland as at December.

Final results for Northern Ireland were published on 19 March 2020 by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for Northern Ireland, Dundonald House, Belfast, BT4 3SB (telephone: Belfast (02890) 525450) and will be available at: https://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 2021: Farming Statistics Livestock Populations at 1 December 2020, 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.

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.