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## Farming Statistics - Livestock Populations at 1 December 2020, 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 9. Key findings are below.

### Key Messages

In December 2020 in England there were:

- **5 million total cattle and calves**, a decrease of 2.4% since December 2019
- **1.8 million cattle in the breeding herd**, a decrease of 1.8% since December 2019
- **3.7 million total pigs**, a decrease of 0.7% since December 2019
- **3.3 million fattening pigs**, a decrease of 0.8% since December 2019
- **10.3 million total sheep and lambs**, a decrease of 2.0% since December 2019
- **6.3 million breeding ewes**, an increase of 0.4% since December 2019

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## What you need to know about this release

This section ensures any important information is clearly explained so users do not misunderstand the data.

### Contact details

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### 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.
- 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.

For general enquiries about National Statistics, contact the National Statistics Public Enquiry Service:

Tel: 0845 601 3034

Email: [info@statistics.gov.uk](mailto:info@statistics.gov.uk).

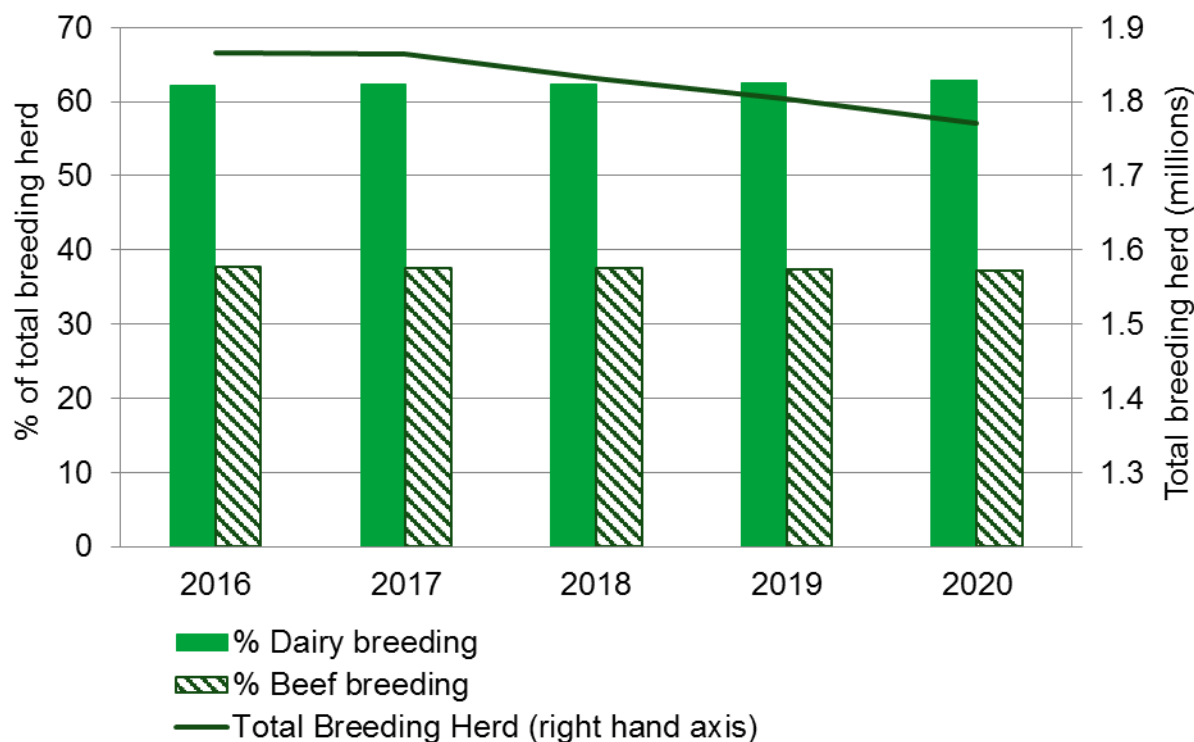
You can find National Statistics on the internet [on the Gov.uk website](#).

## Section 1 – Detailed results

### 1.1 Cattle

In December 2020 the total number of cattle and calves in England sat at just over 5 million. This equates to a decrease of 2.4% from December 2019.

**Figure 1: Female dairy and beef breeding herds at 1 December 2016 to 2020**



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 2020.

The breeding herd has shown a steady decrease over the last five years from 1.9 to 1.7 million animals. The dairy herd accounts for the majority (63%) of the breeding herd and decreased by 1.4% in December 2020 to 1.1 million animals. The beef herd decreased by 2.5% from 675 thousand in December 2019 to 657 thousand in December 2020.

The total number of male cattle in England is just over 1.3 million in December 2020, a decrease of 4.2% compared to December 2019.

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

Thousands

	2018	2019	2020	% change 2020/ 2019
<b>Total cattle and calves</b>	<b>5,261</b>	<b>5,146</b>	<b>5,020</b>	<b>-2.4</b>
<b>All female cattle</b>	<b>3,837</b>	<b>3,775</b>	<b>3,707</b>	<b>-1.8</b>
<b>Aged 2 years or more</b>	<b>2,194</b>	<b>2,149</b>	<b>2,078</b>	<b>-3.3</b>
Total breeding herd	1,832	1,803	1,770	-1.8
Beef herd	689	675	657	-2.5
Dairy herd	1,143	1,128	1,113	-1.4
Other female cattle	362	346	308	-11.1
Beef	176	177	158	-10.8
Dairy	186	169	150	-11.5
<b>Aged between 1 and 2 years</b>	<b>787</b>	<b>774</b>	<b>761</b>	<b>-1.6</b>
Beef	473	467	457	-2.3
Dairy	314	306	305	-0.5
<b>Less than 1 year</b>	<b>855</b>	<b>852</b>	<b>868</b>	<b>1.8</b>
Beef	536	535	539	0.8
Dairy	320	317	328	3.5
<b>All male cattle</b>	<b>1,425</b>	<b>1,371</b>	<b>1,313</b>	<b>-4.2</b>
Aged 2 years or more	166	164	136	-16.9
Aged between 1 and 2 years	548	520	494	-5.1
Less than 1 year	711	688	683	-0.6

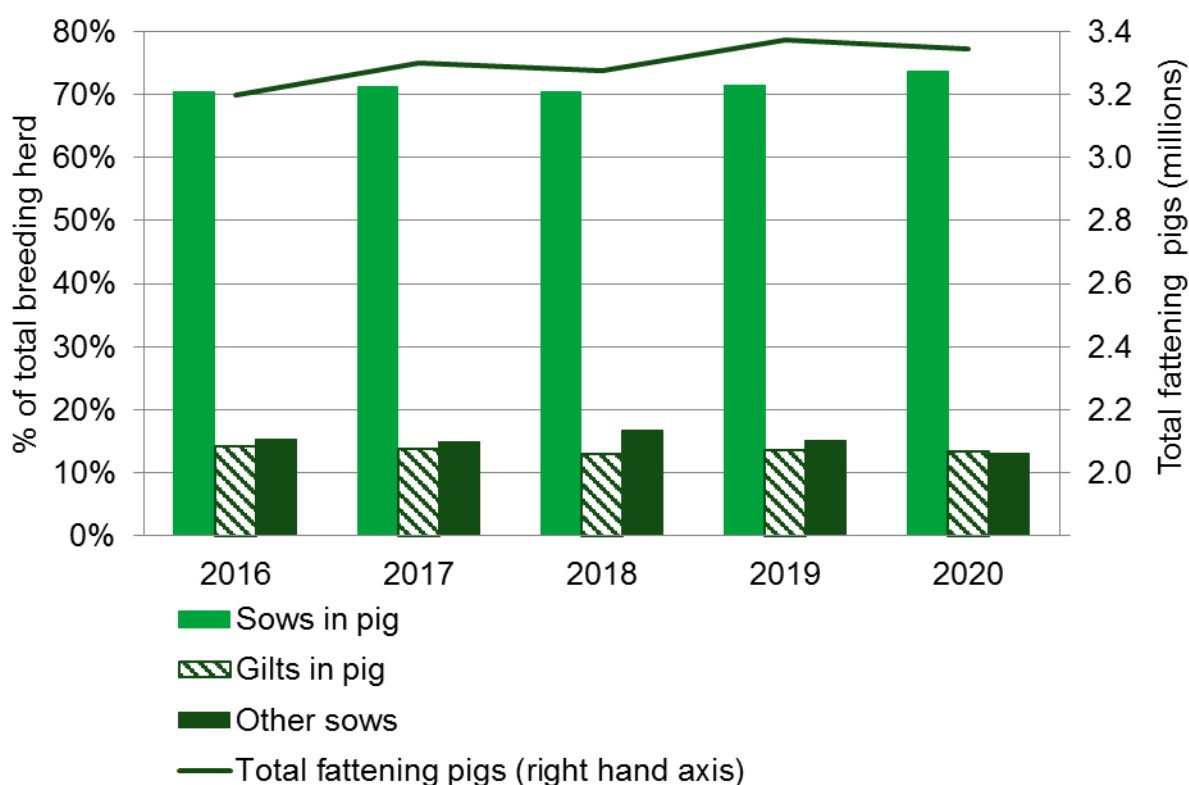
(a) These figures have been sourced from the Cattle Tracing System (CTS). The data include returns from all holdings with cattle so are not subject to survey error.

## 1.2 Pigs

The total number of pigs in England has decreased by 0.7% since December 2019 to just over 3.7 million. Fattening pigs, which accounts for 89% of the total pig population, has decreased by 0.8%, to just over 3.3 million.

The female pig breeding herd saw a decrease of 1.0% from 320 thousand in December 2019 to 317 thousand in December 2020. This decrease was driven by a 12.7% fall in the number of other sows (either being suckled or dry sows kept for further breeding) and a 1.8% fall in the number of gilts in pig. Sows in pig saw a rise of 1.5% compared to December 2019.

**Figure 2: Proportional make-up of the female breeding herd and the total number of fattening pigs at 1 December 2016 to 2020**



**Table 2: Pigs on commercial agricultural holdings on 1 December <sup>(a)</sup>**

Thousands

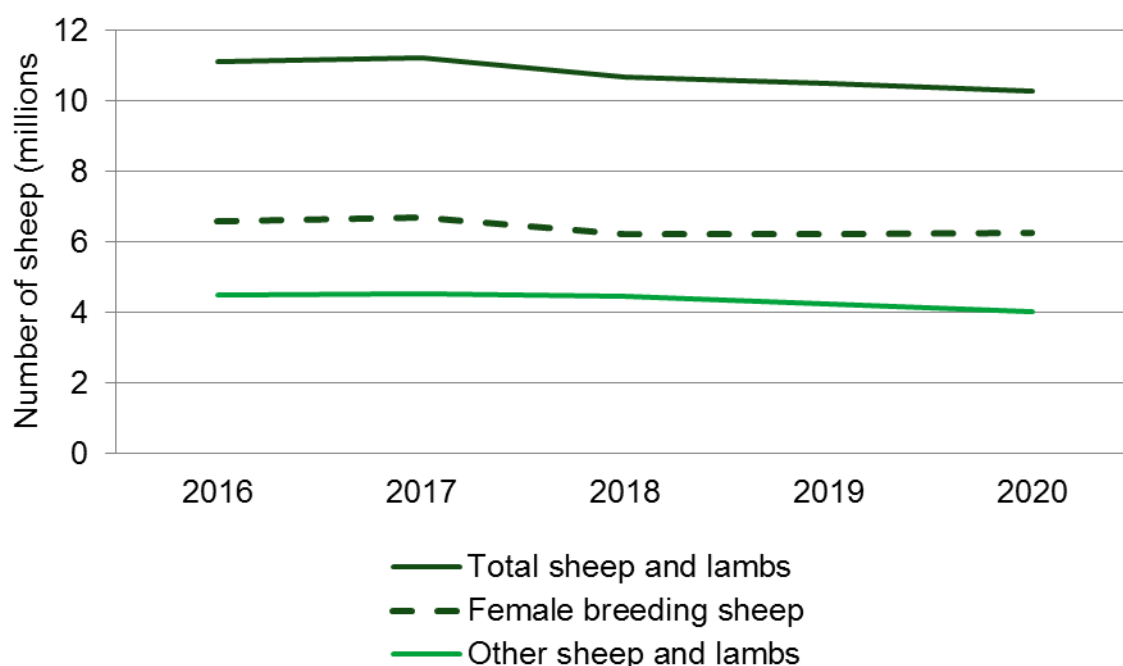
	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>% change 2020 / 2019</b>
<b>Total pigs</b>	<b>3,679</b>	<b>3,776</b>	<b>3,748</b>	<b>-0.7</b>
<b>Breeding pigs</b>	<b>405</b>	<b>404</b>	<b>402</b>	<b>-0.4</b>
<b>Female breeding herd</b>	<b>322</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>-1.0</b>
Sows in pig	227	230	233	1.5
Gilts in pig	42	43	42	-1.8
Other sows <sup>(a)</sup>	54	48	41	-12.7
<b>Other breeding pigs</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>2.0</b>
Boars being used for service	10	10	10	-5.6
Gilts intended for first time breeding	72	73	75	3.1
<b>Fattening pigs (incl. barren sows)</b>	<b>3,274</b>	<b>3,373</b>	<b>3,346</b>	<b>-0.8</b>

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

### 1.3 Sheep

The estimated total number of sheep and lambs in England fell by 2.0% from 10.5 million in December 2019 to just under 10.3 million in December 2020. This was driven by the decrease in the other sheep and lambs which saw a drop of 5.5% from approaching 4.3 million to 4.0 million animals. England's female breeding flock saw a slight increase in the same period of 0.4% to approximately 6.3 million animals.

**Figure 3: Total sheep and lambs at 1 December, 2016 to 2020**



**Table 3: Sheep and lambs on agricultural holdings on 1 December <sup>(a)</sup>**

	thousands			
	% change			
	2018	2019	2020	2020/2019
<b>Total sheep and lambs</b>	<b>10,666</b>	<b>10,504</b>	<b>10,293</b>	<b>-2.0</b>
Female breeding sheep	6,213	6,241	6,266	0.4
Other sheep and lambs	4,454	4,263	4,027	-5.5

(a) 2020 results are provisional.

Figures for 2019 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 2019**

	<b>Original</b>	<b>Revised</b>	<b>% change</b>
<b>Total sheep and lambs</b>	<b>10,481</b>	<b>10,504</b>	<b>0.2</b>
Female breeding sheep	6,225	6,241	0.3
Other sheep and lambs	4,257	4,263	0.2

## Section 2 – About these Statistics

### 2.1 Survey methodology

Data for this 2020 December livestock publication comes from a number of different sources.

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.

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 778 holdings, achieving a response rate of 85%, 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.

Further detail on why data is provided for commercial holdings only (see section 3.3 on thresholds) can be found in the [June Survey of Agriculture and Horticulture Methodology](#) document.

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). We 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 can be found at [Use of the sheep and goat inventory for estimating sheep populations](#) (PDF, 114KB, 6 pages)

## 2.2 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.

## 2.3 Data notes

- All percentage changes are based on unrounded figures.
- Totals may not necessarily agree with the sum of their components due to rounding.

## 2.4 Data uses and users

- This data 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.

## 2.5 Other survey results and publications

Results from all the Defra farming surveys can be viewed on the [Defra website](#). 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

- 25 March 2021: Farming Statistics Livestock Populations at 1 December 2020, United Kingdom

More detailed results can be found at the [Structure of the Livestock industry in England](#) webpage. 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 1996.

## 2.6 Feedback

We welcome feedback and any thoughts to improve the publication further. Please send any feedback to: [farming-statistics@defra.gov.uk](mailto: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?