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[Department  
for Environment  
Food & Rural Affairs](#)

National statistics

# Livestock populations in England at 1 December 2022

Updated 15 September 2023

**Applies to England**

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# Livestock Populations in England 1 December 2022

This release shows the number of cattle, pigs and sheep on agricultural holdings in England on 1 December 2022. A full timeseries containing detailed breakdowns is available at [Livestock populations in England at June and December \(dataset\)](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1138013/Livestock-populations-eng-junedecember-23feb23.ods) ([https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1138013/Livestock-populations-eng-junedecember-23feb23.ods](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1138013/Livestock-populations-eng-junedecember-23feb23.ods)).

## Key findings

- There were 5 million cattle and calves on farms on 1 December 2022, almost unchanged since December 2021.
- There were 3.7 million pigs on farms, a decrease of 9.2% since last December.
- There were 10.6 million sheep and lambs on farms, an increase of 1.8% since last December.

## Section 1 – Detailed results

### 1.1 Cattle

The female breeding herd (dairy and beef) accounts for 46% of all female cattle in December 2022.

The breeding herd has shown a steady decrease over recent years to 1.7 million (Figure 1). This is largely due to a gradual reduction in the beef herd, which continued the downward trend falling by 2.9% between December 2021 and December 2022 to 623 thousand animals.

In comparison, the dairy herd has remained largely stable at 1.1 million animals.

**Figure 1: Female dairy and beef breeding herds on 1 December 2018 to 2022**

### 1.2 Pigs

The total number of pigs in England has decreased by 9.2% since December 2021 to 3.7 million. This is a return to more usual levels after the large increase in December 2021 when large numbers of fattening pigs were backed up on farm due to abattoir labour shortages.

The fall in pig numbers comprises a 7.9% reduction in the number of fattening pigs (which account for 92% of all pigs) and a 20% decrease in the female breeding herd as producers have held back further production. Decreases were seen across all breeding categories (Figure 2).

**Figure 2 - Female pig breeding herd: 2018 to 2022**

(1) Other sows are those either being suckled, or dry sows kept for further breeding.

### 1.3 Sheep

The number of sheep and lambs in England increased by 1.8% to 10.6 million in December 2022. This comprises a 2.0% increase in the female breeding flock and a 1.5% increase in the number of Other sheep and Lambs (Figure 3).

Note: a new methodology for producing estimates has been introduced in 2022 so 2021 figures have been backdated on the same basis. See “Survey Methodology”

**Figure 3: Sheep populations at 1 December 2018 to 2022**

## Section 2 – About these Statistics

### 2.1 Survey methodology

Data in this publication is mainly sourced from administrative data.

Cattle population data are sourced from the Cattle Tracing System (CTS). The data include returns from all holdings with cattle so are not subject to survey error. The background report is available on the [CTS Review](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182225/defra-stats-foodfarm-landuselivestock-june-results-BovineRegisters.pdf) ([https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/182225/defra-stats-foodfarm-landuselivestock-june-results-BovineRegisters.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182225/defra-stats-foodfarm-landuselivestock-june-results-BovineRegisters.pdf)) web page.

Pig population data is collected through a small survey of pig farms, along with additional data from the head offices of some of the largest pig companies. There were 870 responses in total (a response rate of 76%) so the results are subject to a degree of sampling error.

Pig population estimates relate to commercial\* holdings only.

Sheep data is sourced from the Sheep and Goat Inventory (a regulatory exercise requiring all sheep and goat keepers to record animals under their keepership on 1 December each year). The register of sheep holdings in England is maintained by the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) and the data is primarily used for livestock tracing and identification purposes but we also use this data to estimate the size of the English sheep flock. In December 2022, the methodology for dealing with non-responses and the population definition was changed to align more closely with the methodology used in the June Survey of Agriculture. December sheep estimates now relate only to sheep on commercial\* agricultural holdings.

Results for 2021 have been re-produced using the updated methodology and are presented in Table 1 on both bases, so users can see the scale of change.

**Table 1: Impact of methodology change on 2021 sheep estimates**

|                       | <b>Dec 2021 final results all holdings (a)</b> | <b>Dec 2021 commercial* holdings only</b> | <b>% Change</b> |
|-----------------------|--|---|-----------------|
| Total sheep and lambs | 10,688,209                                     | 10,428,609                                | -2.4            |
| Female breeding sheep | 6,241,817                                      | 6,212,635                                 | -0.5            |
| Other sheep and lambs | 4,446,391                                      | 4,215,975                                 | -5.2            |

(a) Revised since provisional estimates were published in 2022 based on additional data validation and late inventory returns. Provisional estimates were revised down by around 2.4% in all categories.

As expected, the estimates using the new methodology are lower than the previous estimates as they now only relate to sheep on commercial holdings. The largest change is seen in the other sheep and lambs category as these are the sheep more likely to be kept as pets or by hobby keepers. The breeding flock is less impacted by the change as the majority are likely to be on commercial holdings still covered by these results.

\* Commercial holdings definition

Commercial holdings are defined as those with significant levels of farming activity. This covers holdings with more than either 5 ha agricultural land, 1ha orchards, 0.5ha

vegetables, 0.1ha protected crops, 10 cows, 50 pigs, 20 sheep, 20 goats or 1,000 poultry.

## 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.

Population totals are estimated for each livestock category to account for the non-sampled and non-responding holdings. This is done using the technique known as ratio raising, in which the trend between the response data and base data (previous June Survey response data) is calculated for each item. The calculated ratio is then applied to the previous June Survey population data to give England level estimates for December.

## 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

- The data are used to monitor changes in livestock populations over time which indicates changes to farming structures.
- The data are also used in forecasts of meat and milk production to inform industry of the availability of supply. This in turn affects prices.
- The data are also used to value the livestock industry and to estimate the farming contribution to GDP.
- The December Sheep and Cattle location data (from administrative sources) is also used by APHA to 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 \(https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs/about/statistics\)](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 will be UK results, provisionally scheduled for the end of March. The definitive publication date will be announced on the research and statistics webpage on gov.uk. Livestock populations will be provided for cattle and sheep in the UK. Pig estimates are no longer produced by the Devolved Administrations in December.

A full timeseries on the number of cattle, sheep and pigs in England and the UK each year are available here [Livestock populations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\) \(https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/livestock-populations\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/livestock-populations)

## 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?

## Section 3 - What you need to know about this release

### 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 \(https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/statistics-on-agriculture/\)](https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/statistics-on-agriculture/) by the UK Statistics Authority against the [Code of Practice for Statistics \(https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/\)](https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/).

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.
- 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:

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You can find National Statistics on the internet [on the Gov.uk website. \(http://www.statistics.gov.uk/\)](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/)

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