

# STATISTICAL NEWS RELEASE

## RESULTS OF THE DECEMBER 2015 AGRICULTURAL SURVEY

The results of the December 2015 agricultural survey have been released by the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

This survey provides estimates of the numbers of cattle, sheep and pigs on farms at the beginning of December. In addition, it provides information on levels of hay and silage production and sowings of winter cereals.

Cattle data (except heifer estimates) are extracted from APHIS, the identification, registration and movement database for cattle in Northern Ireland. Sheep data are obtained from the Annual Sheep and Goat Inventory. Pig numbers and all the crop areas are derived from a sample survey of farmers.

The main changes between December 2014 and December 2015 are:

- **Dairy herd:** The dairy herd stood at 313,600 cows in December 2015, a year on year increase of 2 per cent. Expansion in cow numbers was accompanied by an increase in the volume of milk produced. Total milk output from farms was 2.3bn litres in 2015, 2.7 per cent higher than in 2014. Cow numbers are currently the highest on record.
- **Beef herd:** The number of beef cows in December 2015 was 261,000 an increase of 3 per cent compared with the previous year. Cow numbers are in keeping with year-end values observed since support payments were decoupled in 2005. Over the last 10 years numbers have tended to vary within a relatively narrow range of between 250,000 and 275,000 cows.
- **All cattle:** In total there were 1.611 million cattle in December 2015, a 3 per cent increase on the previous year. Changes in total cattle numbers

follow the trend set by the breeding herd. Increases in both beef and dairy cow numbers have had a knock-on effect on the number of other cattle and this is seen in the higher numbers of animals under 1 year old. Stocks of winter forage and short price movements can also impact the timing of sales and therefore the total number of cattle present on farms during December.

- **Sheep:** There has been a 3 per cent increase in the size of the sheep breeding flock between December 2014 and December 2015. It now stands at 914,200. This is the second year of increased numbers from a low of 864,600 recorded in 2013.
- **Pigs:** The pig breeding herd stood at 43,400 in December 2015, 6 per cent higher than the previous year. The total herd stood at 533,400 in December 2015, an increase of 7 per cent on December 2014 but 6 per cent lower than June 2015.
- **Hay and silage:** The area of hay cut decreased by almost one-third in 2015 but yields improved. As a consequence overall production was 115,000 tonnes, some 26 per cent lower than in 2014 and similar to levels recorded in December 2011. The production of silage also decreased from 2014 to approximately 9.4 million tonnes. The area cut was unchanged while yields were 4 per cent lower.
- **Winter crops:** The area of cereal crops in the ground at 1st December 2015 is estimated at 17,700 hectares, a 6 per cent increase compared with 2014. The area sown to winter wheat was up 6 per cent to 8,600 hectares. The area in winter barley increased by 15 per cent to 8,200 hectares, the highest recorded since December 1997 when 9,400 hectares was sown. In contrast, winter oats decreased by more than one-third to 900 hectares.

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### **Notes for Editors**

- 1 The survey results were prepared by the Policy and Economics Division of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Dundonald House, Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, BT4 3SB.
- 2 All media queries to DARD Press Office on 028 90524619
- 3 All recent DARD statistical press releases can be found at [www.dardni.gov.uk/topics/statistics/statistical-bulletins](http://www.dardni.gov.uk/topics/statistics/statistical-bulletins)

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## Northern Ireland Agricultural Survey Results for December 2015

**Table 1 Cattle**

	December 2013	December 2014	December 2015	% Change 2015/2014
<b>Total cows mainly for producing milk for sale</b>	281.8	306.3	313.6	2
<b>Total cows mainly for producing and rearing calves for beef</b>	258.4	254.1	261.0	3
<b>TOTAL COWS</b>	<b>540.3</b>	<b>560.4</b>	<b>574.7</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Heifers in calf with first calf intended mainly for producing milk</b>				
Heifers in calf with first calf (2 yrs +)	26.7	27.1	26.6	-2
Heifers in calf with first calf (< 2 yrs)	39.2	34.5	35.0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>65.9</b>	<b>61.7</b>	<b>61.6</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Heifers in calf with first calf intended mainly for producing calves for beef</b>				
Heifers in calf with first calf (2 yrs +)	27.5	23.6	23.7	1
Heifers in calf with first calf (< 2 yrs)	27.6	22.8	23.0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>55.1</b>	<b>46.4</b>	<b>46.7</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>All other cattle and calves 2 years old and over</b>				
Male	49.9	51.6	47.7	-8
Females for slaughter	40.0	43.3	36.0	-17
Females for breeding but not in calf	18.1	17.0	15.9	-7
<b>Total</b>	<b>108.0</b>	<b>111.8</b>	<b>99.6</b>	<b>-11</b>
<b>1 year old and under 2 years</b>				
Male	165.5	157.9	161.7	2
Females for slaughter	77.6	89.1	93.9	5
Females for breeding but not in calf	93.7	80.5	81.3	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>336.8</b>	<b>327.6</b>	<b>337.0</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>6 months old and under 1 year</b>				
Male	117.0	112.9	126.1	12
Female	134.7	132.0	142.1	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>251.7</b>	<b>244.9</b>	<b>268.2</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Under 6 months old</b>				
Male	90.8	96.7	104.3	8
Female	105.8	114.1	118.5	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>196.6</b>	<b>210.8</b>	<b>222.9</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>TOTAL CATTLE AND CALVES</b>	<b>1,554.3</b>	<b>1,563.6</b>	<b>1,610.6</b>	<b>3</b>

Source - APHIS / Survey

## Northern Ireland Agricultural Survey Results for December 2015

**Table 2 Sheep and Pigs**

	December 2013	December 2014	December 2015	% Change 2015/2014
<b>Sheep<sup>1</sup></b>				
<b>Breeding flock</b>				
Ewes	803.5	797.0	824.7	3
Ewe lambs tupped	61.1	93.3	89.5	-4
<b>Total breeding flock</b>	<b>864.6</b>	<b>890.3</b>	<b>914.2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Other sheep</b>				
Rams for service	28.4	29.4	30.0	2
Other sheep 1 year and over	25.0	22.3	27.8	24
<b>Lambs</b>				
Lambs under 1 year old	315.4	351.3	346.5	-1
<b>TOTAL SHEEP AND LAMBS</b>	<b>1,233.3</b>	<b>1,293.3</b>	<b>1,318.5</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pigs</b>				
<b>Breeding herd</b>				
Sows in pig	26.9	27.7	29.3	6
Gilts in pig	5.4	6.3	6.7	6
Others sows (being suckled or dry sows kept for further breeding)	8.1	6.9	7.4	8
<b>Total female breeding herd</b>	<b>40.5</b>	<b>40.8</b>	<b>43.4</b>	<b>6</b>
Gilts 50kg (110lb) liveweight and over, not yet in pig	5.3	5.7	5.2	-10
Boars being used for service	0.6	0.7	0.7	-6
<b>Other Pigs</b>				
Suckling/Weaners/Finishers/Culls	409.0	449.8	484.2	8
<b>TOTAL PIGS</b>	<b>455.3</b>	<b>497.1</b>	<b>533.4</b>	<b>7</b>

<sup>1</sup> Source - Sheep Inventory

# Northern Ireland Agricultural Survey

## Results for December 2015

**Table 3 Hay, silage & winter-sown crops**

	December 2013	December 2014	December 2015	% Change 2015/2014
<b>Hay</b>				
Area cut ('000 ha)	20	21	14	-31
Production ('000 tonnes)	143	157	115	-26
Yield (tonnes/ha)	7.3	7.6	8.1	7
<b>Silage</b>				
Area cut ('000 ha)	291	309	308	0
Production ('000 tonnes)	9,070	9,812	9,357	-5
Yield (tonnes/ha)	31.2	31.7	30.4	-4
<b>Crops sown by 1<sup>st</sup> December</b>				
Wheat ('000 ha)	8.6	8.1	8.6	6
Barley ('000 ha)	7.9	7.2	8.2	15
Oats ('000 ha)	0.5	1.4	0.9	-36
<b>Total Cereals</b>	<b>17.0</b>	<b>16.7</b>	<b>17.7</b>	<b>6</b>

**Notes:**

The December 2015 results were compiled from 4,000 survey responses.

Cattle data (except heifer estimates) were extracted from the APHIS database.

Sheep information was extracted from the Annual Sheep and Goat Inventory.