Meat production statistics

Data from August 2015. Most recent data: Further Eurostat information, Main tables and Database. Planned article update: May 2019.

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This article gives an overview of European meat production, based on data provided to Eurostat by the EU-28 Member States under Regulation (EU) No 1166/2008 concerning livestock and meat statistics. Data on livestock population categories are gathered from all European Union (EU) Member States through a livestock survey conducted at least once a year (see Data sources and availability).

Figure 1: Changes in livestock population, EU-28, 2005–14 (2005 = 100) Source: Eurostat (apro_mt_lscatl), (apro_mt_lspig), (apro_mt_lssheep) and (apro_mtlsgoat)

Figure 2: Meat production, by species, EU-28, 2009–14 (million tonnes) Source: Eurostat (apro_mt_pann) and (apro_mt_sloth)
Table 1: Statistics on slaughtering, all species, by country, 2014
Source: Eurostat

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Bovine animals</th>
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<th>Goats</th>
<th>Totality</th>
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<td>domestic</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>slaughter</td>
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<tr>
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(1) = EU 28 excluding Greece and the UK

Table 2: Other slaughtering, all species, by country, 2014
Source: Eurostat
Figure 3: Number of non-dairy cows, EU-28 and EU-15, 2007–14 (1)(million heads)Source: Eurostat (apro_mt_lscat)

Figure 4: Beef and veal production, EU-28, 2009–14(million tonnes)Source: Eurostat (apro_mt_pann)

Figure 5: Gross indigenous production forecast for bovine animals, EU-28, 2010–15(million heads)Source: Eurostat (apro_mt_pcatlhs)
Figure 6: Bovine livestock and its production cycle, 2014(number of heads)Source: Eurostat (apro_mt_lscatl)

Figure 7: Livestock and slaughter in the pig sector, EU-15, 2006–14(2005 = 100)Source: Eurostat (apro_mt_lscatl) and (apro_mt_lspig)
Table 3: National ewe flocks and dairy share, by location of main breeding countries, 2014

Source: Eurostat (apro_mt_lssheep)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of ewes (1,000 heads)</th>
<th>% of dairy ewes</th>
<th>Dairy</th>
<th>Non-dairy</th>
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</table>

(*) Countries in the northern group do not have territories to the south of parallel 45 North, while countries in the southern group do.

Figure 8: Sheep livestock and its production cycle, 2014 (number of heads)

Source: Eurostat (apro_mt_lssheep)
Figure 9: Distribution of sheep in the EU-28, 2014 Source: Eurostat (apro_mt_lssheep)

Figure 10: Share of goatmeat by main European producers, 2010–14(%) Source: Eurostat (apro_mt_pann)

(*) Data estimated for Romania.
Main statistical findings

Since the decoupling of subsidies in 2003, following the mid-term review of the Common agricultural policy (CAP), the total numbers of livestock have decreased for the various species.

Between 2005 and 2014, there was a drop in total livestock (Figure 1). This trend continued until 2013 for pigs and sheep. However, the herds of bovine animals increased in 2012, while the herds of goats stopped decreasing in 2013. During 2014 there was a slight increase in all of the livestock categories, which was the highest for pigs (1.4%) and the smallest for goats (0.1%).

From 2005 to 2014 sheep livestock showed the most pronounced fall (−12.1%) for the 14 EU Member States.
with more than 500,000 sheep\(^1\), followed by live pigs (− 7.3 %) for the EU-28. The number of bovine animals fell (− 2.2 %) as well as the number of goats (− 0.6 %) for the five EU Member States with more than 500,000 goats\(^2\).

Greening of agricultural systems was one of the objectives pursued under the latest reform of the CAP. Livestock farmers are therefore required to adapt their farming systems if they wish to preserve their income and offer products geared to market needs and to society’s demand for environmentally friendly farming practices.

In 2010, according to the **Farm structure survey (FSS)** nearly seven million holdings (6.92 million) reared livestock, representing 56.5 % of EU-28 farms. As a proportion of all farms, 23.5 % reared pigs, 21.4 % bovine animals (cattle, buffaloes, etc.), 18.7 % broilers, 7.7 % sheep and 4.4 % reared goats.

From 2009 to 2013, there was a significant rising trend in poultry meat (Figure 2), which saw an overall increase of 7.0 %, but in 2014 the production dropped to 2009 levels (11.9 million tonnes). From 2009 to 2014 pigmeat increased (+3.6 %) while bovine meat decreased by 5.7 % and the reduction in sheep and goat meat was 7.2 %.

The economic relevance of animal production in agricultural accounts is underlined by the fact that it accounts for 43.1 % (EUR 167 billion)\(^3\) of the total EU-28 agricultural output. Animal production covers two items: output for animals and animal products. Output for animals, which represents 57.5 % of animal output, is the value of animals produced either directly for slaughter, or used alive for herd renewal or for further growing and fattening. Animal products account for the remaining 42.5 % and cover eggs, milk, wool, etc.

**Slaughtering**

Table 1 draws a general picture of European meat production based on the 2014 slaughtering statistics. Pigmeat was the most significant meat category: over 22.1 million tonnes were produced, 51 % of annual production of all meats, followed by poultry meat with 13.0 million tonnes (30 %). Bovine meat production totalled 7.3 million tonnes (17 %) and the meat from sheep and goats together accounted for only 0.8 million tonnes, around 2 % of all meat.

The special case of 'other slaughtering'

So-called other slaughtering is carried out in places other than in slaughterhouses. In the EU, it is a marginal phenomenon, primarily arising from own-consumption and traditional or ritual slaughter (Table 2). It can also reflect weaknesses in the national veterinary information system. It can be locally significant in part due to incomplete implementation of hygiene legislation. The EU has rigorous hygiene rules, and food is tracked at all stages of the production chain, including slaughtering, processing and distribution, in order to guarantee food safety throughout Europe (see data sources and availability).

In 2014, 81.3 % of other slaughtering was recorded in those Member States that joined the EU in 2004 or later. In relative terms, other slaughtering accounted for 11.3 % of total slaughtering in the 13 newest EU Member States and 0.4 % in the EU-15 (the first 15 Member States of the EU).

The general trend is a decrease: other slaughtering fell by 44 % in the EU-28 between 2009 and 2014, but it remains at a significant level in Bulgaria and Romania.

The contribution of the various species to other slaughtering is much higher for pigs (62.3 %) than for small grazing livestock (19.3 %) and bovine animals (18.4 %). For this latter category, 'adult cattle' (one year and older) account for 12.3 % and calves and young cattle for 6.8 %.

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\(^1\)The figures on sheep population are due only from EU Member States with at least 500,000 sheep. They are Bulgaria, Germany, Ireland, Greece, Spain, France, Croatia, Italy, Hungary, Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Sweden and the United Kingdom (see Data sources and availability — Table 5).

\(^2\)The figures on goat population are due only from EU Member States with at least 500,000 goats. They are Greece, Spain, France, Italy and Romania (see Data sources and availability — Table 5).

\(^3\)Taken from the table Economic accounts for agriculture - values at real prices - aact_eaa04.
**Beef and veal (bovine meat)**

In terms of value, bovine animals represent 8.1 % of total agricultural output and 18.8 % of animal output, without taking animal products (e.g. milk) into account.

In the EU-28, between 2007 and 2014, the number of non-dairy cows decreased by 4 %, from 12.5 to 12.0 million head (Figure 3). This trend was especially striking in the EU-15, where the decrease reached 6 %. Most of the meat bovine herd is located in four EU Member States: France (34.4 %), Spain (15.2 %), the United Kingdom (12.8 %) and Ireland (8.7 %). Together, they host more than 70 % of the European meat herd. This type of herd is sensitive to changes in the sector’s limited profitability and is thus reactive to the level of subsidies from the CAP.

Between 2009 and 2014, production of meat from heifers and bulls fell in both the EU-28 (– 7 %) and the EU-15 (– 8 %). However, there has been an increase for veal, i.e. meat from calves (aged under 8 months) and young cattle (aged between 8 and 12 months), and for which production increased by around 4 % in the EU-28 and 6 % for the EU-15 during this period. Meanwhile, the average carcass weight has increased by 3 % for adult cattle (aged one year and over) and by 7 % for calves and young cattle.

Bovine production forecasts are expressed as **gross indigenous production (GIP)**, defined as the number of bovine animals slaughtered plus or minus the net exports of live bovine animals. This indicator is more likely to be produced based on current livestock rather than slaughtering.

Compared with pigmeat production, beef production has a longer production cycle (see Figure 6), its feed efficiency is lower and the value of individual animals is higher. In addition, the diversity of animals produced for slaughter (feeding mode, age, dairy or meat breeds) makes the production systems more complex. All these factors have led to tight margins and low profitability. The purchasing power of consumers is also a key determinant of the level of meat consumption. This is noticeable especially in the beef and veal sector where prices are significantly higher than for pig (or poultry) meat. This explains the consumer preference and for pig- and poultry meat.

**Pigmeat**

Pigmeat represents 9.0 % of the total EU agricultural output. As already highlighted, pigmeat is the major type of meat produced in the EU-28.

From 2006 to 2014, the total number of pigs decreased by 1.0 %. This trend can be explained mainly by lower profitability, due to economic and regulatory conditions, with impacts on the weakest farms. For instance, as a result of requirements laid down on their welfare conditions, **Council Directive 2008/120/EC** on the protection of pigs contributed to increasing the cost per sow. The larger pig farm size, as measured by the number of sows, comes across as an efficient market response in this context. They represent a higher share of the sector in the EU-15 than in the other EU Member States. It also reflects the disappearance of the smallest and less productive pig-farming activities. Although the total number of pigs has decreased since 2004, pigmeat production has remained stable over the years and even registered peaks in 2008 and 2011 (see Figure 7). This reflects efficiency gains in pig farming despite stronger regulatory constraints. This is more evident in the EU-15 than in the other EU Member States.

**Meat from sheep and goats**

Sheep and goat meat represents 1.4 % of the total EU agricultural output.

Based on the 2010 FSS, 7.7 % of farms in the EU had sheep and nearly half of the sheep belonged to flocks of over 500 heads. Goat farms accounted for 4.4 % of farms and 51.5 % of goats belonged to flocks of over 200 heads. These average figures somewhat conceal the contrasts between small herds, either in small rural farms or as a
side-production in larger ones, and larger herds, especially in regions with natural or environmental constraints\(^4\).

Under the legislation in force (see Data sources and availability\(^4\)), the 14 EU Member States with more than 500 000 sheep and the five EU Member States with more than 500 000 goats must provide statistics on the relevant livestock populations. Therefore, all the figures presented in this document refer only to these countries.

The 14 EU Member States reporting on sheep population can be distinguished depending on the share of dairy ewes in the ewe flock (see Table 3). The ‘northern’ countries have no or limited dairy production whereas dairy ewe sheep farming is significant in the ‘southern’ countries.

The farming systems for sheep and goats in the southern countries have similar levels of complexity in terms of their organisation as those for bovine animals in the EU generally, with both dairy and fattening flocks co-existing. Individual dairy animals are more profitable than meat animals and therefore they are more likely to be supported by technology than meat animals (feeding, genetic progress, farm equipment, farmer education, etc.). Several types of meat are produced, either from young animals in the dairy herd or from heavier sheep in the meat herd, fattened on grassland or with feedstuff. Milk processing on farms is more frequent, as daily milk volumes are lower than from cows’ milk, i.e. milk collection by a dairy is suitable only where dairy farm density within the territory is sufficient.

Between 2005 and 2014, the sheep flock of the 14 reporting countries went down by 11.4 million animals. The drop reflects the significant fall observed in the main sheepmeat producing countries. Spain lost 31\% of its flock (7.1 million sheep), Portugal 30\%, Ireland 22\%, Germany 21\% and France 18\%. The Netherlands and Croatia, with a smaller share of the total number of sheep, also decreased their flock (−38\% and −24\% respectively). The United Kingdom, which is by far the most important sheepmeat producer (28\% of EU-28 production), lost 3\% of its flock. In contrast, the sheep flock grew in three countries: Romania (+25\%) and Greece (+4\%), where more than 90\% of ewes are dairy ewes, and in Sweden where the apparent increase (+23\%) also reflects changes in the survey methodology.

The overall contribution of goat meat to the EU-28 meat production is modest (0.1\%) and is concentrated in seven EU Member States representing 95.6\% of the total EU goat meat production. It can be described as a by-product of dairy production. Goat slaughtering is recorded to ensure a complete overview of the sector.

Sheep and goat farming is possible in areas with limited agronomic potential (rough grazing), but only at low levels of profitability per head. The trend is either one of increasing herd size or of turning to dairy production. It can also take advantage of poor lands and be part of the overall activity of diversified farms. It is therefore important for rural development policy and no specific direct support is designed for the product at EU level. Several EU Member States (e.g. Greece, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal) have introduced specific national support measures for sheep and goats.

### Poultry meat

Poultry meat value represents 5.5\% of total agricultural output and 12.7\% of animal output in the EU, totalling approximately EUR 21.2 billion.

Poultry meat production is therefore relatively integrated. Production constraints introduced by legislation (such as environment, hygiene and welfare issues) have increased production costs and limited profitability thresholds. Further commitments under quality schemes have also increased costs, but the higher costs are more than offset by the added value gained. In a competitive market, this has favoured the development of larger poultry farms.

According to the 2010 FSS\(^5\), 18.5\% of all European farms raised broilers. Farms with more than 5 000 broilers (professional farms) represent barely 1\% of the total number of broiler farms, but they accounted for 93.5\% of...
of broilers. More than three quarters of farms with more than 5 000 broilers were located in France, Spain, Poland, Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom. The data also illustrates that the number of broiler farms was extremely high in Romania, Poland, Portugal and Greece but, in contrast, these countries also accounted for 91 % of the farms with fewer than 5 000 broilers.

In 2014, the EU-28 produced 13 million tonnes of poultry meat, 9 % more than in 2007. Four countries together produced half of the EU’s poultry meat: Poland (13.9 % of the EU-28 total), France (12.9 %), closely followed by the United Kingdom (12.6 %), and Germany (11.8 %). Poultry meat is mostly from chicken (79.8 %) and turkey (14.8 %) while ducks account for only 3.6 %. The remaining 1.8 % is from other poultry (see Table 4).

Chicken meat (10.1 million tonnes) was mostly produced in seven EU Member States, each producing more than 0.8 million tonnes: Poland, the United Kingdom, Spain, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy. Excluding the Netherlands, the same countries together produced 93 % of EU turkey meat (1.9 million tonnes). France was by far the largest producer of duck meat, accounting for more than half of the total 0.5 million tonnes produced in the EU. Other poultry refers, for example, to guinea fowl or geese.

Data sources and availability

- The Farm Structure Survey (FSS), a robust survey with a wide scope

Since 2009, the structure of livestock farms no longer forms part of an EU survey as such. Thus, the data are drawn from the FSS. Although this provides a wider scope (including land use, livestock, labour force, etc.) and a longer reference period, the results are less informative about the animal population than the data previously collected through the Livestock survey. Every tenth year the FSS is carried out as an agricultural census and meanwhile two sample surveys are conducted. The FSS data can be used for describing the structure of animal herds. The legal basis for the FSS is Regulation (EC) No 1166/2008 of the European Parliament and of the Council.

The EU Member States collect information on land use, livestock numbers, rural development, management and farm labour input from individual agricultural holdings. Based on the share of virtual value for standard output, activities of the farm (e.g. cows, other than dairy cows) are used to classify the type of farming. If the share of standard output from a particular activity is more than two thirds of the total farm output, it is classified as 'specialist activity' (e.g. specialist cattle — rearing and fattening).

- Livestock and meat statistics

The legal basis of the data collection on slaughtering and meat production is Regulation (EC) No 1165/2008. It establishes a common legal framework for statistics on livestock (bovine, pig, sheep and goat), slaughtering (bovine animals, pigs, sheep, goats and poultry) and production forecasts (bovine, pig, sheep and goat meat). In order to limit administrative burdens, Member States with a limited contribution to EU results are asked to deliver fewer statistics, or to deliver them less often. The threshold for bovine population is, for instance, 1.5 million heads (see Table 5).

The livestock survey provides information about the livestock population at national and regional level. Designed for this purpose, the results on the number of animals are intended to be more reliable than the farm structure survey figures. Furthermore, the nomenclature of livestock is more detailed, especially in order to establish production forecasts. The surveys are conducted in all EU Member States at least once a year (in November/December). The figures on sheep population are due from only 14 EU Member States and the figures on goat population from only five. In this article, the figures presented refer only to these countries. A second survey is conducted in May/June for bovine (12 EU Member States) and pig (12 EU Member States) populations where relevant. The November/December survey results are also provided at regional level.

Data on slaughtering are collected on a monthly basis; other slaughtering (carried out other than in slaughterhouses) is estimated annually. Nevertheless, where other slaughtering is significant, the corresponding figures are provided monthly on a voluntary basis.

Gross indigenous production (GIP) is forecasted once a year or, where significant, twice a year. Quarterly (pig) or half-yearly forecast production covers a one- to two-year period depending on the country status and on the animal species concerned.

Meat production statistics
Regulation (EC) No 1165/2008, which entered into force in 2009, introduced a classification based on the age of the slaughtered animals instead of the weight. This may have an impact on some slaughtering figures and break the relevant time series. In particular, the figures for slaughtered young cattle (under 1-year-old) and heifers (1–2 years) were affected.

- **Economic Accounts for Agriculture (EAA)**

  The economic accounts for agriculture (EAA) is a satellite account of the European System of Accounts providing complementary information and concepts adapted to the particular nature of the agricultural sector. Although their structure very closely matches that of national accounts, their compilation requires appropriate rules and methods. Agricultural output measures the value of agricultural products (crop and animal products) produced during the accounting period. It includes the value of agricultural services and excludes the intra-unit consumption (consumption by the farms of their own products).

**Context**

This article draws a portrait of meat production in the EU in 2014, with a particular focus on slaughtering. It also deals with the structure of European farms and the livestock population.

Data on meat production is used to monitor these market sectors. Statistical trends are observed for the management of the various policy instruments of the meat sectors.

**See also**

- [Agriculture, forestry and fishery statistics — 2016 edition](#) (Statistical book)
- [Agriculture, forestry and fishery statistics - 2014 edition](#)
- [All farm structure articles by country (2007)](#)
- [Farm structure statistics](#)

**Further Eurostat information**

**Main tables**

- [Agriculture, forestry and fisheries](#), see:

  Agricultural production (t_apro)
  
  Livestock and meat(t_apro_mt)
  
  Production of meat: pigs (tag00042)
  
  Production of meat: cattle (tag00044)
  
  Production of meat: sheep and goats (tag00045)
  
  Production of meat: poultry (tag00043)
  
  Number of dairy cows (tag00014)
  
  Number of cattle (tag00016)
  
  Number of sheep (tag00017)
  
  Number of pigs (tag00018)
  
  Holdings with dairy cows (tag00015)

**Database**

- [Agriculture](#), see:

  Agricultural production(apro)
  
  Livestock and meat (apro_mt)
Dedicated section

- Agriculture
- Agricultural production
- Farm Structure Survey

Methodology / Metadata

- Livestock and meat (ESMS metadata file — apro_mt_esms)

Source data for tables and figures (MS Excel)

- Meat production statistics: tables and figures

Other information


- Directorate General for Agriculture and rural development - Market sectors:

  Beef and veal
  Sheepmeat and goatmeat
  Pigmeat
  Poultry meat

View this article online at http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Meat_production_statistics

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Notes