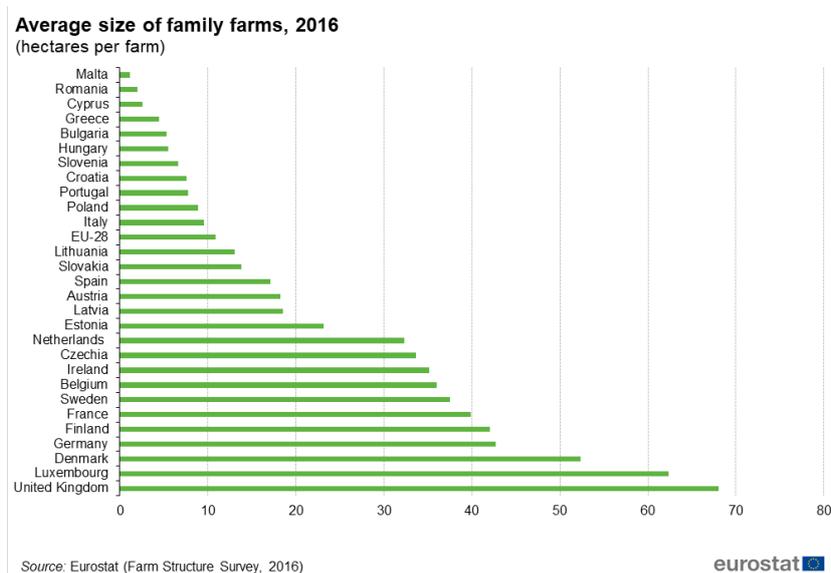


# Agriculture statistics - family farming in the EU

Statistics Explained

Data extracted in October 2019.  
Planned article update: March 2023.



**Average size of family farms, 2016 (hectares per farm)** Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

The United Nations' [Food and Agriculture Organisation \(FAO\)](#) defines a family farm as '... an agricultural holding which is managed and operated by a household and where farm labour is largely supplied by that household'. Family farms are by far the most common type of farm in the [European Union \(EU\)](#), encompassing a wide range of [agricultural holdings](#) (hereafter referred to as farms): from small, semi-subsistence farms with only family workers and farms which have to rely on other gainful activities for a diversified source of income, through to much larger, more productive farms which nevertheless are mostly managed by family members.

This article analyses the importance of family farming, the prevalence of family farms in the different Member States and the age and aging of the managers of family farms across the EU. It presents data from the most recent [farm structure survey \(FSS\)](#).

## Structural profile of farms - analysis for the EU

Family farms accounted for 19 in every 20 farms across the EU ...

Family farms dominate the structure of EU agriculture in terms of their numbers, their contribution to agricultural employment and, to a lesser degree, the area of land that they cultivate and the value of the **output** they generate. There were 10.5 million farms in the EU in 2016, with the vast majority of them (95.2 %) classified as family farms.

Based on the FAO definition, the term 'family farm' is hereafter used to refer to any farm under family management where 50 % or more of the regular agricultural labour force was provided by **family workers**. A more detailed division can be made between those farms where labour was provided exclusively by the family (farms with only family workers) and those where 50 % or more (but not 100 %) of the labour force were family workers. Most farms (93 %) in the EU in 2016 were farms with only family workers.

Across all the farms in the EU-28, family farms used 81.4 % of the regular agricultural labour force.

... but farmed a little less than two thirds of the total area of agricultural land cultivated

Family farms cultivated 108.0 million hectares of land in 2016, which represented a little less than two thirds (62.3 %) of the EU-28's **utilised agricultural area (UAA)** (see Table 1).

Family farms reared 62.5 % of all **livestock** and produced 59.5 % of the agricultural output in 2016.

**Farms by type of farm labour, 2016**  
(thousands except for standard output (million))

	Total farms	Family farms	Farms with only family workers	Farms where family workers make up 50% or more (not 100)	Non-family farms	Farms where family workers make up less than 50% (not 0)	Farms with no family labour force
<b>(thousands)</b>							
Number of holdings	10 465	9 956	9 728	228	509	176	333
Utilised agricultural area (hectares)	173 453	107 959	92 402	15 558	65 494	18 231	47 263
Livestock (livestock units)	125 240	78 936	62 278	16 658	47 304	17 961	29 343
Regular labour force (annual work units)	8 259	6 727	6 272	455	1 532	583	949
Standard output (million euro)	352 189	209 722	189 132	40 590	142 495	51 070	91 395
<b>(% of total)</b>							
Number of holdings	100	95.2	93.0	2.2	4.9	1.7	3.2
Utilised agricultural area (hectares)	100	62.3	53.3	9.0	37.7	10.5	27.2
Livestock (livestock units)	100	62.5	49.3	13.2	37.4	14.2	23.2
Regular labour force (annual work units)	100	81.4	75.9	5.5	18.5	7.1	11.5
Standard output (million euro)	100	59.5	48.0	11.5	40.5	14.5	26.0

Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

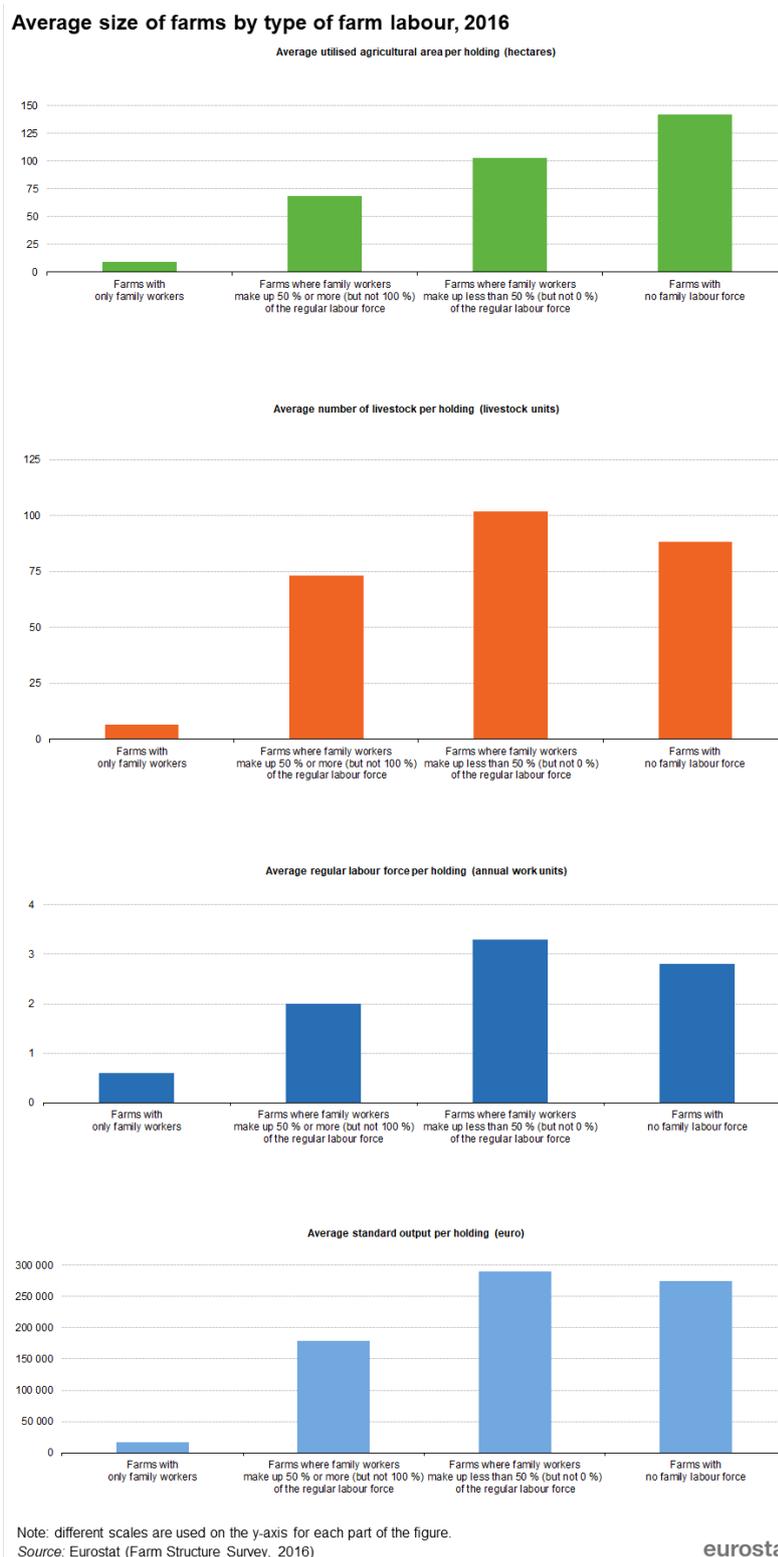
eurostat

**Table 1: Farms by type of farm labour, 2016 (thousands except for standard output (million))**Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

**Non-family farms represented less than 5% of the EU total number of farms in 2016 but cultivated just over one third of the total utilised agricultural area**

In 2016, there were about 509 000 farms in the EU that were not classified as family farms in 2016. Within this total, 176 000 were farms where family workers made up less than 50 % (but not 0 %) of the regular labour force and another 333 000 were farms that had no family labour force at all. Together, these 'non-family farms' accounted for 4.9 % of the total number of farms in the EU-28 but cultivated 37.7 % of the utilised agricultural area.

Family farms were, on average, consistently smaller than non-family farms in terms of the utilised agricultural area (see Figure 1); this was particularly true for farms with only family workers. Farms with no family labour force cultivated an average area that was almost 8 times larger than the average area cultivated by farms with only family workers. The farms with no family labour force had the largest average area.



**Figure 1: Average size of farms by type of farm labour, 2016** Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

In terms of average economic size, average number of workers and average number of livestock units (in order to facilitate the comparison of livestock data, the different species are converted into **livestock units** ), family farms were also consistently smaller than non-family farms. However, in these cases, the class with the largest size was always the one where family workers made up less than 50 % (but not 0 %) of the regular labour force.

## Structural profile of farms - analysis of EU Member States

### More than one third of family farms in the EU were located in Romania

There were 9.9 million family farms in the EU-28 in 2016, of which about one third (3.4 million) were located in Romania (see Table 2). A combined one third of the EU total was also located in Poland (1.4 million), Italy (1.1 million) and Spain (0.8 million), the three Member States with the next highest number of family farms.

**Number of farms by type of farm labour, 2016**  
(thousands)

	Total farms	Family farms	Farms with only family workers	Farms where family workers make up 50% or more (not 100)	Non-family farms	Farms where family workers make up less than 50% (not 0)	Farms with no family labour force
<b>EU-28</b>	<b>10 465</b>	<b>9 956</b>	<b>9 728</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>509</b>	<b>176</b>	<b>333</b>
Belgium	37	31	29	2	6	0	6
Bulgaria	201	190	187	3	11	3	8
Czechia	27	23	22	1	4	1	3
Denmark	35	30	27	3	5	3	2
Germany	276	251	223	28	25	20	5
Estonia	17	13	13	0	3	0	3
Ireland	138	136	124	12	2	2	0
Greece	685	676	664	12	9	8	1
Spain	945	823	787	36	121	34	87
France	457	312	277	35	144	27	117
Croatia	134	130	129	1	4	0	4
Italy	1 146	1 100	1 069	31	45	29	16
Cyprus	35	34	34	0	2	1	1
Latvia	70	67	64	3	2	2	0
Lithuania	150	147	145	2	4	3	1
Luxembourg	2	2	2	0	0	0	0
Hungary	430	418	415	3	12	3	9
Malta	9	9	9	0	0	0	0
Netherlands	56	50	43	7	6	2	4
Austria	133	124	119	5	8	4	4
Poland	1 411	1 393	1 383	10	17	13	4
Portugal	259	241	235	6	18	5	13
Romania	3 422	3 395	3 395	0	26	0	26
Slovenia	70	69	69	0	0	0	0
Slovakia	26	22	22	0	3	0	3
Finland	50	44	42	2	6	5	1
Sweden	63	57	53	4	6	1	5
United Kingdom	184	167	147	20	17	10	7

Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

eurostat 

**Table 2: Number of farms by type of farm labour, 2016 (thousands)** Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

Family farms in the EU used 108.0 million hectares of land for agricultural production in 2016 (see Table 3). Family farms in Spain used 14.1 million hectares (13.1% of the EU total), the most in any Member State, those in France 12.4 million hectares (11.5 % of the EU total) and family farms in Poland 12.3 million hectares (also 11.5%).

**Utilised agricultural area by type of farm labour, 2016**  
(thousands)

	Total farms	Family farms	Farms with only family workers	Farms where family workers make up 50% or more (not 100)	Non-family farms	Farms where family workers make up less than 50% (not 0)	Farms with no family labour force
<b>EU-28</b>	173 454	107 960	92 402	15 558	65 494	18 231	47 263
Belgium	1 354	1 103	1 013	90	251	14	237
Bulgaria	4 492	999	818	181	3 492	714	2 778
Czechia	3 455	756	624	132	2 700	284	2 416
Denmark	2 615	1 561	1 082	479	1 054	789	265
Germany	16 715	10 719	8 170	2 549	5 996	3 105	2 891
Estonia	995	304	270	34	691	45	646
Ireland	4 884	4 756	4 182	574	128	90	38
Greece	4 554	3 035	2 843	192	1 518	103	1 415
Spain	23 230	14 126	12 715	1 411	9 104	1 551	7 553
France	27 814	12 426	8 863	3 563	15 387	4 091	11 296
Croatia	1 563	988	913	75	574	15	559
Italy	12 598	10 467	9 443	1 024	2 131	1 122	1 009
Cyprus	112	85	80	5	27	10	17
Latvia	1 931	1 254	1 007	247	677	657	20
Lithuania	2 925	1 914	1 698	216	1 012	617	395
Luxembourg	131	110	86	24	21	20	1
Hungary	4 671	2 307	2 024	283	2 363	416	1 947
Malta	11	10	10	0	0	0	0
Netherlands	1 796	1 609	1 284	325	188	72	116
Austria	2 670	2 275	2 133	142	395	123	272
Poland	14 406	12 337	11 910	427	2 068	829	1 239
Portugal	3 642	1 865	1 658	207	1 778	410	1 368
Romania	12 503	6 861	6 848	13	5 641	65	5 576
Slovenia	488	460	454	6	29	3	26
Slovakia	1 890	307	271	36	1 583	67	1 516
Finland	2 233	1 837	1 680	157	396	300	96
Sweden	3 013	2 135	1 733	402	878	162	716
<b>United Kingdom</b>	16 764	11 351	8 589	2 762	5 413	2 558	2 855

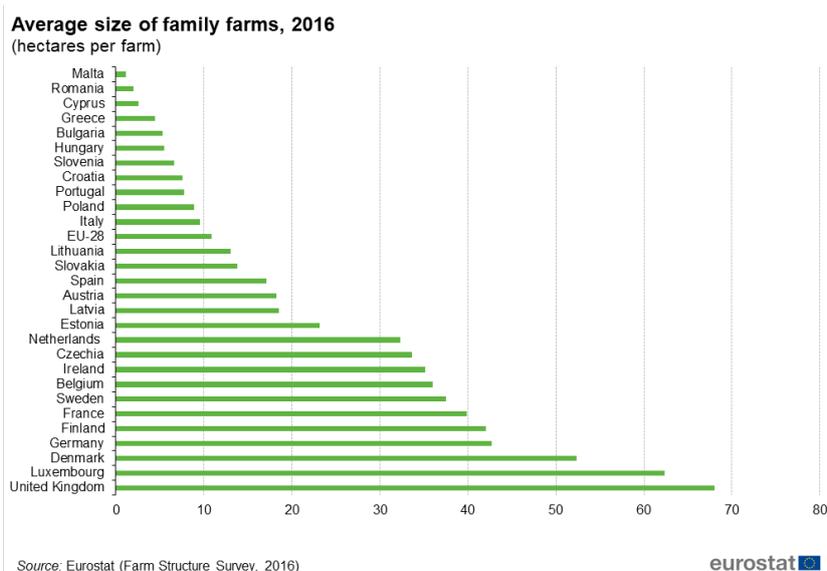
Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)



**Table 3: Utilised agricultural area by type of farm labour, 2016(thousands)**Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

The average size of family farms in Member States varied considerably .

Family farms were, on average, largest in the United Kingdom (68 hectares per holding), followed by Luxembourg (62 hectares per holding) and Denmark (52 hectares per holding). In contrast, the smallest family farms, with an average size of between 1 and 2.5 hectares were in Malta, Cyprus and Romania (see Figure 2).

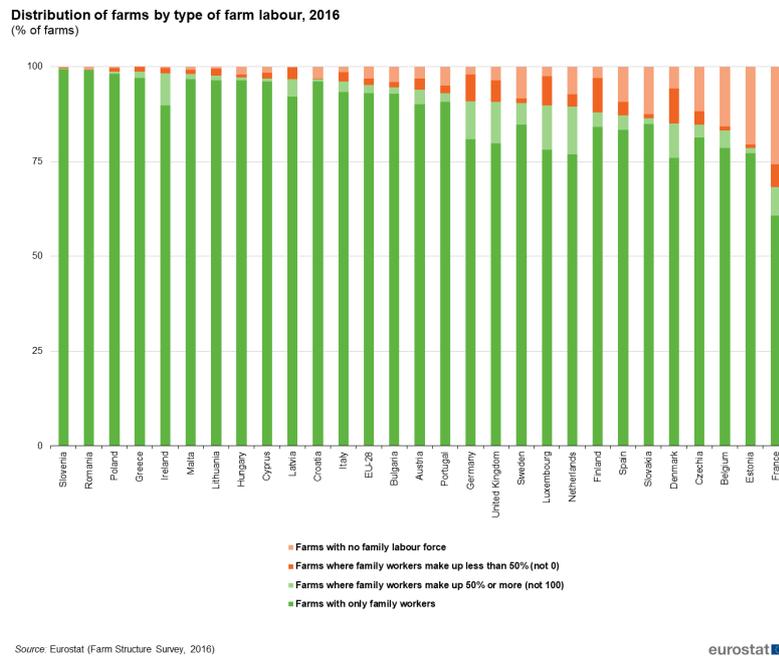


**Figure 2: Average size of family farms, 2016(hectares per farm)**Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

Family farms accounted for more than 90% of the total number of farms in 18 EU countries

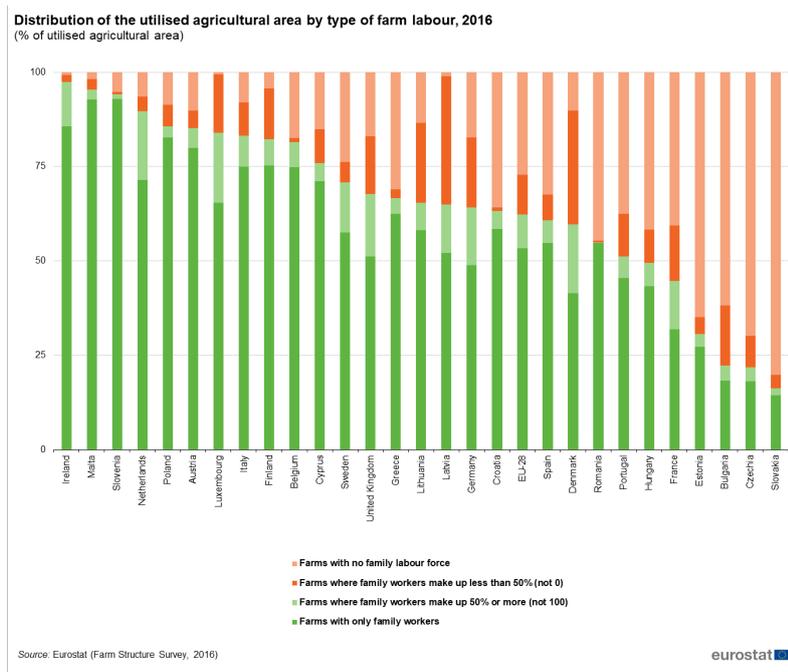
Figures 3 to 7 show the relative importance of family and non-family farms in Member States: data for family farms are presented in dark and light green and non-family farms in dark and light orange.

Family farms accounted for at least 90 % of all farms in 18 of the Member States (see Figure 3), with shares higher than 80 % in all the remaining countries with the exceptions of Estonia (78.6 %) and France (68.3 %).



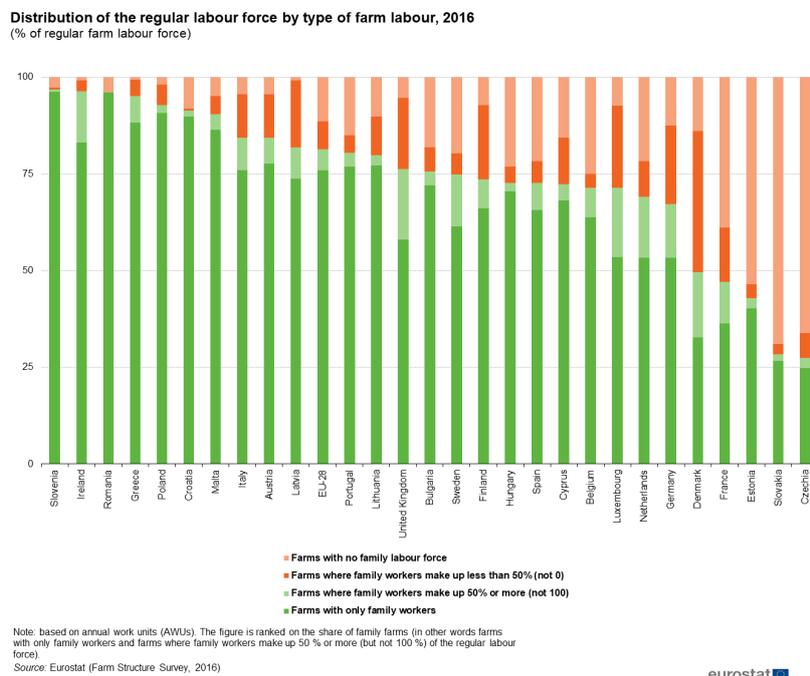
**Figure 3: Distribution of farms by type of farm labour, 2016(% of farms)Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)**

Family farms covered more than one half of the utilised agricultural area in 22 Member States. The lowest shares were in Slovakia (16.3 %), Czechia (21.9 %) and Bulgaria (22.2 %), much less than the EU-28 average (62.3 %). The highest shares of over 90 % were in Ireland, Malta and Slovenia (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4: Distribution of the utilised agricultural area by type of farm labour, 2016(% of utilised agricultural area)**Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

The labour on family farms was the equivalent of four fifths of all labour on all farms in the EU (see Figure 5). This proportion was lowest in Czechia (27.4 %), Slovakia (28.3 %) and Estonia (42.9 %).

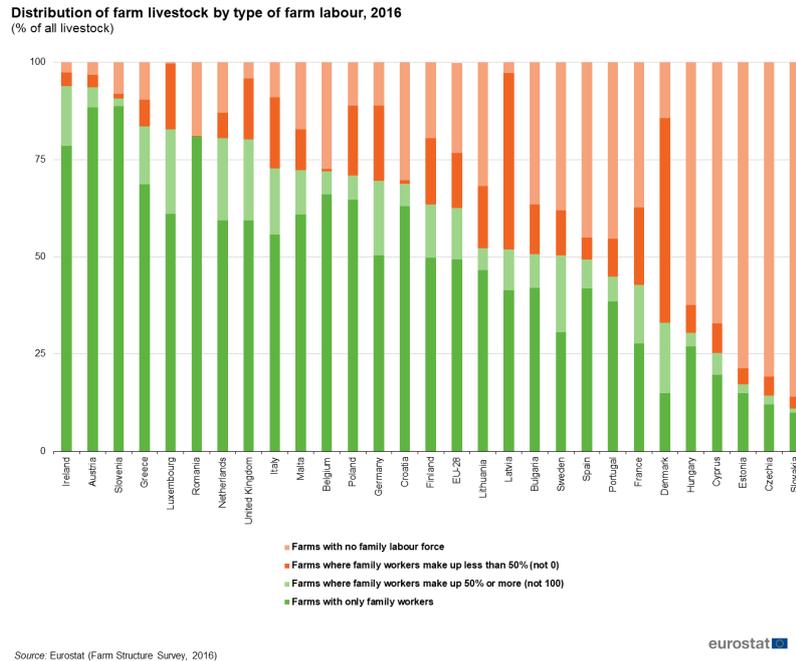


**Figure 5: Distribution of the regular labour force by type of farm labour, 2016(% of regular farm labour force)**Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

*The livestock reared and output generated was higher than 50 % in around two thirds of the Member States .*

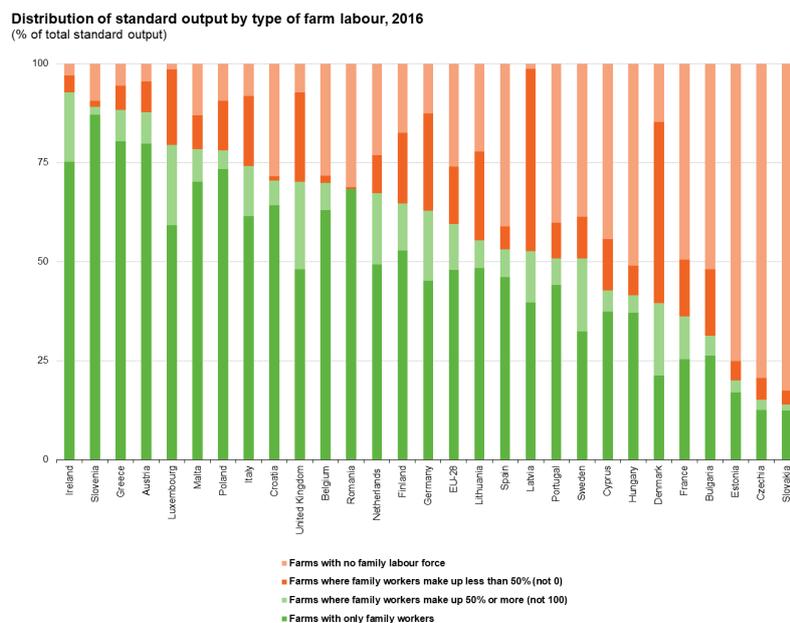
Family farms reared more than 90 % of the livestock (measured in livestock units) in Ireland, Austria and

Slovenia, well above the EU average (62.5 %). In contrast, this share was below 20 % in Slovakia, Czechia and Estonia (see Figure 6).



**Figure 6: Distribution of farm livestock by type of farm labour, 2016(% of all livestock)Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)**

Family farms also accounted for the vast majority of the value of agricultural output produced by the sector in many Member States (the EU average being 59.5 %) and particularly Ireland (92.8%), Slovenia (89.1%) and Greece (88.4%) (see Figure 7). This too was quite different to the family farms in Slovakia, Czechia and Estonia, that accounted for about or below 20 % of the monetary value of agricultural output produced by the sector.



Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

eurostat

**Figure 7: Distribution of standard output by type of farm labour, 2016(% of total standard output)Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)**

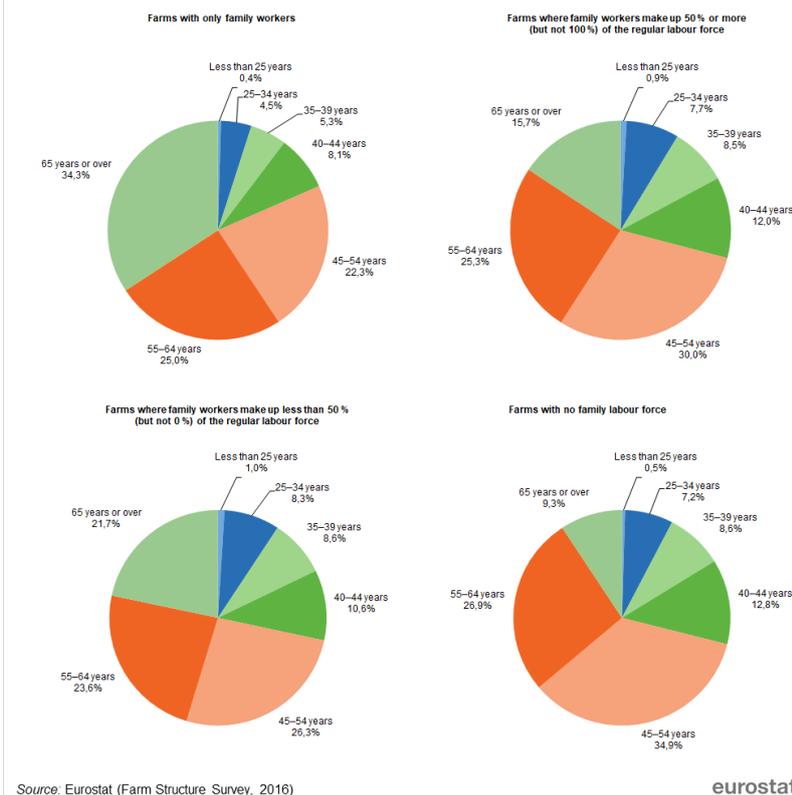
## Farm managers by age

**Almost one third of farm managers in the EU-28 were aged 65 years or over.**

One of the crucial issues related to family farming is the ageing of farm managers (see Figure 8 and Table 4). This phenomenon poses a serious risk to the sustainable development of family farming. In 2016, 3.3 million farm managers of family farms were aged 65 or over in the EU-28. This was more than one third of the total.

On farms with only family workers, the share of managers aged 65 or over (34.3 %) was much higher than in farms without any family labour (9.3 %). These figures suggest that farm managers working for corporations and cooperatives were much more likely to have stopped managing farms by the age of 65.

**Distribution of managers by age class and type of farm labour, 2016**  
 (% of total number of managers for the specified extent of the family labour force)



**Figure 8: Distribution of managers by age class and type of farm labour, 2016 (% of total number of managers for the specified extent of the family labour force) Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)**

However, the percentage of managers aged between 55 and 64 accounted for around one quarter of the total managers in all types of farm.

There were relatively few young farm managers in the EU-28 in 2016 (see Table 4). Managers younger than 40 years old accounted for about 10 % of all managers on farms with only family workers, although this share rose to 17 % in non-family farms.

Young farm managers (aged under 40) of family farms were more common in Luxembourg (26.0 %); Austria (21.7 %) and Poland (20.0 %) than in most Member States. They were far more scarce in Cyprus (2.9 % of all family farm managers) and Portugal (3.3 %), where family farm managers aged 65 or over were relatively common (43.7 % and 50.1 % respectively).

**Farm managers by age class and type of farm labour, 2016**  
(thousands)

	All managers on farms	Managers on family farms of any type				Managers on non-family farms of any type			
		Of all ages	Less than 40	40 - 64	65 years or over	Of all ages	Less than 40	40 - 64	65 years or over
<b>EU-28</b>	10 306	9 823	1 022	5 474	3 325	483	81	336	66
Belgium	37	31	3	21	7	6	1	4	1
Bulgaria	202	191	26	93	72	11	3	7	1
Czechia	26	23	2	14	7	5	1	3	1
Denmark	33	30	2	20	8	3	0	3	0
Germany	277	251	36	194	21	26	5	19	2
Estonia	15	12	1	7	4	3	1	2	0
Ireland	137	135	17	78	40	2	0	1	1
Greece	695	677	56	394	227	8	1	5	2
Spain	942	824	66	489	269	118	15	78	25
France	455	312	43	208	61	143	28	108	7
Croatia	134	130	13	73	44	4	1	3	0
Italy	1 146	1 101	86	556	459	45	5	30	10
Cyprus	35	34	1	18	15	1	0	1	0
Latvia	70	68	6	41	21	2	0	2	0
Lithuania	150	147	18	83	46	3	1	2	0
Luxembourg	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Hungary	430	418	52	236	130	12	2	8	2
Malta	10	10	1	6	3	0	0	0	0
Netherlands	57	50	4	36	10	7	1	5	1
Austria	130	124	28	87	9	6	1	4	1
Poland	1 410	1 393	282	948	163	17	4	12	1
Portugal	259	242	9	103	130	17	2	10	5
Romania	3 420	3 396	250	1 632	1 514	24	5	17	2
Slovenia	69	69	6	43	20	0	0	0	0
Slovakia	25	22	4	13	5	3	1	2	0
Finland	14	12	1	10	1	2	0	2	0
Sweden	23	18	2	11	5	5	1	3	1
United Kingdom	112	102	6	61	35	10	1	7	2

Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

eurostat

**Table 4: Farm managers by age class and type of farm labour, 2016(thousands)**Source: Eurostat (Farm Structure Survey, 2016)

## Source data for tables and graphs

- [Family farming in the EU: tables and figures](#)

## Data sources

All the statistics for farms and farmers were drawn from the Farm Structure Survey for 2016.

## Key indicators and concepts

Using data from the latest Farm Structure Survey, and applying the FAO definition for family farms at an operational level, it is possible to analyse farms on the basis of their labour input.

Family farms may be defined as:

- farms with exclusively family labour;
- farms that have predominately family labour (at least 50 % of the regular labour force).

By contrast, non-family farms are defined as:

- farms with predominantly non-family labour (less than 50 % of the regular labour force);
- farms without any family labour.

Labour force data are provided in terms of a simple count of the number of persons as well as being converted into [annual work units](#) . Due to the high share of seasonal and part-time work in agriculture, it is generally considered appropriate to assess labour input using data presented in annual work units. One annual work unit corresponds to the work performed by one person who is occupied on a farm on a full-time basis for a full year. Full-time means the minimum hours required by the national provisions governing contracts of employment. If these provisions do not explicitly indicate the number of hours, then 1 800 hours are taken to be the minimum (225 working days of eight hours each).

[Utilised agricultural area](#) is the total area taken by arable land, permanent grassland, permanent crops and kitchen gardens used by the holding, regardless of the type of tenure or of whether it is used as a part of common land.

A [livestock unit](#) is a reference unit which facilitates the aggregation of livestock from various species and age, through the use of specific coefficients established initially on the basis of the nutritional or feed requirement of each type of animal (with a set of coefficients for 23 different categories of animal). The reference unit used for

the calculation of livestock units is one adult dairy cow. For example, a single livestock unit corresponds to 10 sheep or goats.

The **standard output** of an agricultural product (crop or livestock) is the average monetary value of the agricultural output at farm-gate price, in euro per hectare or per head of livestock. There is a regional standard output coefficient for each product, as an average value over a reference period (5 years, except for the standard output 2004 coefficient calculated using the average of 3 years). The sum of all the standard output per hectare of crop and per head of livestock in a farm is a measure of its overall economic size, expressed in euro. The standard output is used to classify **agricultural holdings** by type of farming and by economic size.

## Context

### Family farming

The FAO [ [1](#) ] declared 2014 to be the International year of family farming. As a follow-up to this initiative, the Family Farming Knowledge Platform was created. It gathers information on family farming from all over the world, including national laws and regulations, public policies, best practices, relevant data and statistics, research, articles and publications.

More recently, in 2017, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a resolution which proclaimed the United Nations Decade of Family Farming for the period 2019-2028. Its main objective is to support family farms through a Global Action Plan, which consists of seven pillars of work containing measures on a local and global level.

EU support to family farms through the common agricultural policy (CAP) has also been explicit in the period 2014–2020. The small farmers' scheme has been part of the post-2013 CAP reforms, providing small farmers with the opportunity to reduce red tape and accept a one-off, lump-sum payment to replace all direct payments. The CAP reforms for 2014–2020 have also promoted greater integration with regional and structural funds. It includes the possibility for small family farmers to receive business start-up aid, with young farmers being eligible for a combination of measures including start-up grants, training and advisory services. All these efforts are designed to support the development of family farming, especially on a smaller (though commercial) scale.

### Benefits of family farming

According to FAO family farming preserves traditional food products, while contributing to a balanced diet and safeguarding the world's agro-biodiversity and the sustainable use of natural resources. At the same time it also represents an opportunity to boost local economies, especially when combined with specific policies aimed at the social protection and well-being of communities.

### Challenges for family farmers

The main challenges facing family farms often reflect issues that are common for all types of small business: access to resources (such as land and capital) or access to markets (particularly in relation to the bargaining power of small farms in the food chain). Demographics provide a social challenge for family farms, as inter-generational succession issues may impact upon the sustainability of family farming. This challenge is further complicated in some of the EU Member States by legislation over inheritance (which may influence land consolidation/fragmentation).

## Other articles

- [Agriculture, forestry and fishery statistics](#)
- [Farm structure survey — all articles](#)

## Tables

- [Agriculture \(t\\_agri\)](#) , see:

Farm structure (t\_ef)

## Database

- [Agriculture \(agri\)](#) , see:

Farm structure (ef)

Farm structure — 2008 legislation (from 2005 onwards) (ef\_main)

Key farm variables (ef\_kv)

Overview — Farm land use (ef\_olu)

Overview — Farm livestock (ef\_ols)

Overview — Farm labour force (ef\_olf)

Farm land use — Arable land (ef\_ala)

Farm land use — Permanent crops, other farmland, irrigation (ef\_po)

Farm livestock and fodder crops (ef\_lsf)

Farm labour force (ef\_lf)

Other gainful activities and support for rural development (ef\_oga)

Farm management and practises (ef\_mp)

Survey on agricultural production methods (SAPM, 2010) (ef\_pm)

Farm structure – 1988 legislation (1990–2007) (ef\_historic)

## Dedicated section

- [Agriculture](#)

## Publications

- [Agriculture, forestry and fishery statistics — 2019 edition](#) (Statistical book)
- [Agriculture, forestry and fishery statistics — 2018 edition](#) (Statistical book)
- [Agriculture, forestry and fishery statistics — 2017 edition](#) (Statistical book)

## Methodology

- [Farm structure](#) (ESMS metadata file — ef\_esms)
- [Farm structure survey — national methodological reports](#)
- [Farm structure survey \(FSS\)](#) (background article)
- [Farm structure survey – survey coverage](#) (background article)

## Legislation

- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1166/2008](#) on farm structure surveys and the survey on agricultural production methods
- [Regulation \(EC\) No 1200/2009](#) implementing Regulation (EC) No 1166/2008 on farm structure surveys and the survey on agricultural production methods, as regards livestock unit coefficients and definitions of characteristics

## External links

- [European Commission — Common Agricultural Policy after 2013](#)
- [European Commission — Family farming: a dialogue towards more sustainable and resilient farming in Europe and the world](#)
- [European Commission — Rural Development Policy 2014–2020](#)
- [United Nations \(FAO\) — International Year of Family Farming](#)
- [United Nations \(FAO\) — Family Farming Knowledge Platform](#)