



CHAVEREYS

CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS & FINANCIAL ALCHEMISTS



Monthly Farming Update

March 2025

Policy issues

1. The Government is to measure the source of food acquired by the public sector with a view to ensuring that food is sourced from suppliers who adopt standards equivalent to those employed by British producers.
2. The UK has outlined its commitment to the implementation of UN COP15 biodiversity framework by publishing the National Biodiversity Strategy & Action Plan for 2030.
3. Shortly after the Farm Safety Foundation revealed that 91 per cent of farmers said mental health is the ‘biggest danger in farming’, Defra confirmed that the £10 million Farming Resilience Fund, introduced in October 2022 to provide farm businesses with advice and mental health support, will close at the end of this month.
4. While it has taken 25 years of negotiations, the EU and Mercosur have reached a trade agreement which will see tariff reductions and quotas in key sectors as well as mechanisms for settling tariff disputes. The agreement will need to be ratified by member states while there has been opposition from the agricultural sectors of France and Poland.

Reform

1. Defra has published data on the uptake of the Sustainable Farming Incentive as at 1 January:
 - There were 32,200 active agreements in England, a 23 per cent increase on October.
 - Areas with the highest uptake are Devon, East Anglia and North Yorkshire. Uptake is lowest in London, West Midlands, Merseyside and Great Manchester, all not surprising given the urban areas included.
 - Since October, the most popular actions are “Assess soil, produce a soil management plan and test soil organic matter” and “Assess nutrient management and produce a review report.”
 - The action covering the most land is “Assess soil etc” covering 3.27 million hectares, 38 per cent of the Utilised Agricultural Area.
 - There are 295,000 hectares of land in options which temporarily take land out of production, 3.4 per cent of the Utilised Agricultural Area.
2. Payment rates under a number of Higher Level Stewardship options are to be increased although no figures have yet been given. Those who qualify will be entitled to the increase with effect from the 2025 claim year and will be paid from December 2025. Agreement holders should be notified of the new rates by April.
3. As at 31 December, approximately 5.6 million hectares of land in England was in one or more of the agri-environment schemes, 64 per cent of the Utilised Agricultural Area.

4. Although the Scottish Preparing for Sustainable Farming payments were due to end this month, activities such as soil analysis, carbon audits and animal health and welfare interventions performed during 2025 will continue to be funded and claims will be accepted until February 2026.
5. The Environmental Land Management Capital Grants scheme is to re-open this summer with £45 millions available. The Rural Payments Agency is currently processing the remaining 4,000 applications held when the scheme paused.
6. The Scottish Government has announced £20 millions of extra capital support in 2025 increasing to £25 millions in 2026. Of the total, £14 millions will be for flexible capital grants under a Future Farming Investment Scheme. Other measures include:
 - An extra £7 millions for the Agri-environment climate scheme to undertake activities supporting nature, climate and biodiversity alongside food production.
 - A 3-year programme of national land Lidar laser scanning to accurately map terrain.
 - £75,000 for RSABI to provide mental health support for farmers and crofters.
 - A commitment to an ultra-high frequency electronic identification system for cattle.
7. Farming Innovation Programme grants totalling £42.5 millions are to be made available concentrating on unlocking the benefits of precision breeding and supporting the net zero transition.
8. A new ADOPT fund, with £20 millions available, will provide funding for farmer-led trials that bridge the gap between new technologies and their real-world application.
9. The first round of the Farming Equipment and Technology Fund will open in the Spring with grants of between £1,000 and £25,000 available.

Grants/regulations/legislation/environment

1. Defra has announced that the National Soils Inventory, which underpins the understanding of soils in England and Wales, will become open for access to land managers, farmers and planners having previously been held under licence by Cranfield University.
2. The Agri-climate report 2024 has been published. Relevant points are:
 - UK agricultural greenhouse gas emissions fell by 12 per cent between 1990 and 2022 as a result of reduced livestock numbers and lower use of manufactured fertilizers.
 - Between 1990 and 2022, UK emission intensities from cattle, dairy and pigs fell by 4 per cent, 22 per cent and 46 per cent respectively but sheep emissions increased by 5 per cent.

- In 2022, agriculture contributed 12 per cent of all UK greenhouse gas emissions, unchanged from 2021. While it contributed 70 per cent of nitrous oxide emissions and 49 per cent of methane emissions, it only accounted for 2.3 per cent of carbon dioxide emissions.
 - The 2024 Farm Practices Survey shows that 58 per cent of farmers in England consider it important to bear in mind greenhouse gas emissions while making farm business decisions while 39 per cent considered it unimportant.
3. The 2023 survey reveals that the UK ‘all bird species’ index has fallen by 16 per cent since 1970 with falls of 2 per cent in the UK and 7 per cent in England since 2018. Farmland bird populations have declined by 61 per cent in long-term and 9 per cent in the short-term; woodland bird populations have declined by 35 per cent and 10 per cent respectively; water and wetland populations have remained unchanged across the UK but have declined by 7 per cent in England; while upland bird populations have fallen by 7 per cent in the long-term but have experience little change in the short-term. As regards farmland bird populations:
- Generalist species have declined by 43 per cent in the long-term and by 57 per cent in the short-term.
 - Specialist species have declined by 75 per cent in the long-term and by 33 per cent in the short-term.
 - Of the generalist species, which use a wider range of habitats, long-term declines are the greenfinch (68 per cent), the yellow wagtail (70 per cent) and the kestrel (52 per cent). However, numbers of woodpigeon and jackdaw have more than doubled. In the short-term, numbers of greenfinch have decreased by 20 per cent, partly attributable to the disease trichomoniasis.
 - Of the specialist species, turtle dove numbers are down 99 per cent in the long-term and 54 per cent in the short; tree sparrows are down 93 per cent and 25 per cent respectively; grey partridges are down 92 per cent in the long-term but are stable in the short-term; corn buntings are down 87 per cent in the long-term but numbers have risen by 21 per cent in the short-term; greenfinch numbers are down 68 per cent and 20 per cent respectively; and kestrel numbers are down by 52 per cent and 9 per cent respectively.
 - Of the woodland species, bullfinches are down 50 per cent in the long-term and 22 per cent in the short-term; tawny owls are down 49 per cent and 20 per cent respectively; and the song thrush is down 47 per cent in the long-term but numbers are stable in the short-term.

4. Led by CABI, a not-for-profit inter-governmental organisation specialising in natural solutions for invasive non-native plants, and funded by the Environment Agency, a South American weevil has been approved for release in the UK after a decade of safety testing to reduce the spread of floating pennywort where the current annual cost of control is estimated at £25 millions. Floating pennywort can spread at rates of up to 20cm per day and forms dense mats which disrupt ecosystems, cause deoxygenation, block flood defences, impact on recreational activities and contribute to flood risk. The trial has concentrated on the Carn Washes SSSI.
5. The Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill has been introduced to the Scottish Parliament. The Bill would place a duty on Ministers to set legally-binding nature restoration targets and will modernise how national parks and deer are managed.
6. Information has been published on fly-tipping in England in 2023/24:
 - Local authorities dealt with 1.5 million fly-tipping incidents, up 6 per cent on 2022/23.
 - 60 per cent of incidents involved household waste, a total of 688,000, up 5 per cent.
 - 37 per cent of incidents occurred on pavements and roads, a total of 427,000, down 1 per cent.
 - 31 per cent of incidents were the size of a ‘small van load’ with 28 per cent being the size of a ‘car boot or less.’
 - 4 per cent of incidents were of ‘tipper lorry load’ size or more resulting in a clearance cost of £13.1 millions.
 - 63,000 fixed penalty notices were issued, down 5 per cent.
 - The average court fine increased marginally to £530 but the number of court fines fell by 8 per cent to 1,378.
7. The Scottish Government’s Small Producers Pilot Fund has provided £15,000 to Orkney Auction Mart to help build the case for a new, fit-for-purpose abattoir.

Other matters of farm finance and tenure

1. According to the June survey, 8.747 million hectares of land in England was in use for farming in England in 2024, 9 per cent smaller than when records began in 1983. The total crop area was 3.567 million hectares, 15.8 per cent down on 1983 with cereal land down 26.2 per cent to 2.45 million hectares, much the same as when compulsory set-aside was introduced. The potato cropping area has fallen by 41.2 per cent since 1983 with other horticultural crops down 45.6 per cent. Between 2023 and 2024, the uncropped arable area leapt by 600 per cent. Again, since 1983, temporary grassland has fallen by 14.2 per cent to 820K hectares, permanent pasture by a similar percentage to 3.364 million hectares and rough grazing by 43.1 per cent to 435K hectares, yet woodland on farmland has almost doubled to 400K hectares.

2. According to House of Commons data, farm numbers have fallen by 30,000, or 22.7 per cent, since 2003 with dairy farms down 50 per cent to 9,083.
3. The National Farm Research Unit has revealed that, this year, 14 per cent of a total of 1,829 English farmers polled have taken land out of production with 62 per cent reporting that the area fallowed was greater than in previous years. 85 per cent of those who had fallowed land were arable farmers and those with more than 100 hectares were taking more land out of production than those with less hectares.
4. Results from the 2023/24 Farm Business Survey show:
 - The average Basic Payment fell from £28,400, representing 55 per cent of Farm Business Income in 2020/21, to £18,300 representing 40 per cent of Farm Business Income in 2023/24.
 - On a per hectare basis, the Basic Payment fell by 36 per cent between 2020/21 and 2023/24.
 - Grazing livestock, mixed farms and cereal farms were most reliant on the Basic Payment.
 - In 2020/21, average income from agri-environment schemes ranged from £800 for horticulture farms to £10,400 for Less Favoured Area livestock farms. By 2023/24, these figures had increased to £2,600 and £14,700 respectively.
 - The number of farms in agri-environment schemes increased from 49 per cent of the total in 2020/21 to 70 per cent in 2023/24.
 - In 2023/24, 29 per cent of farm businesses were planning to make a major change to their business within the agricultural transition period, no change from 2020/21. 42 per cent did not intend to make any change.
 - The proportion of farm businesses which felt too uncertain to make specific plans for the future fell from 36 per cent in 2020/21 to 22 per cent in 2023/24.
5. A survey conducted by McCain of arable-farming decision makers has revealed that over half of farmers are considering leaving the industry due to rises in energy costs, fertilizer costs and environmental threats. 55 per cent of those surveyed claimed that financial pressures were the primary factor straining farmers' mental health.
6. The Council for the Protection of Rural England has demanded that England's Agricultural Land Classification system, which was devised in the 1940s and last updated in the 1980s, be updated to safeguard the Best and Most Versatile land is preserved for food production and protected from development.
7. Defra data covering England in 2024 shows that:
 - 8,877,474 hectares of land made up agricultural holdings, down 1.3 per cent, the lowest area this century.
 - 6,118,882 hectares comprised owned land, down 1 per cent, the lowest since 2018.

- 2,876,081 hectares comprised land rented in for more than one year, down 0.8 per cent, the lowest this century.
 - 1,128,836 hectares was let under full agricultural tenancies, down 2.1 per cent. This category has fallen every year this century.
 - 1,253,753 hectares was let under Farm Business Tenancies, down 0.3 per cent.
 - 493,492 hectares was let under other forms of agreement, up 1.1 per cent. This category has almost consistently grown over the past 10 years.
 - 573,840 hectares were seasonally rented in, up 1.7 per cent, the highest this century.
 - 498,472 hectares were seasonally let out, up 1 per cent.
8. The Agricultural Price Index for outputs for December shows increases of 0.7 per cent, compared to November, and 4.7 per cent compared to a year earlier. The index for inputs shows falls of 0.1 per cent and 3.7 per cent respectively.
 9. The Seasonal Worker visa scheme has been extended for a further 5 years but the sector has been put on notice that the number of seasonal workers allowed entry into the UK will be reduced over time.
 10. The Soil Association Certification's annual Organic Market Report has revealed that land in conversion to organic in the UK has doubled during the past year.
 11. HM Revenue & Customs has published a consultation on the application of the changes to Agricultural and Business Property Relief to lifetime transfers and the use of trusts.

Product prices

A. Market background

1. Sterling closed up against the Euro and US Dollar this month, albeit via slightly different routes. Sterling opened the month at 83.6p per Euro and steadily, but with daily volatility mixed in, climbed to a closing peak of 82.5p per € (1.1p stronger). Against the US Dollar, Sterling opened at 80.6p and fell to 81.5p in the first few days, however, thereafter the rate improved to a late month peak of 78.7p, before relaxing in the final days to close the month at 79.5p per \$ (1.1p stronger).
2. The gold price closed higher again this month, having hit an all-time high earlier in the month. Opening at £2,261 per troy ounce, it rose to peak at £2,383 before falling back to £2,285 per troy ounce, up £24.

3. Crude oil prices remained volatile but with a negative trend overall. Whilst prices improved in the early weeks, they fell in the latter, ultimately closing marginally down. Brent Crude opened at \$75.67 per barrel and twice peaked above \$76.50 before falling to a low of \$71.90 and eventually closing at \$72.79 per barrel, down \$2.88.

B. Crops

1. The cereals market closed flat this month, having been marginally bolder mid-month, whilst the longer-term market outlook appears weaker. The factors driving the market have shifted, with Argentina's prolonged dry spell looking set to break and US and French plantings now seen as better than previously thought. The Black Sea issues remain, however, retaining some volatility; all aspects were accentuated by the added strength of Sterling. Feed wheat futures closed down, more so in the longer-term, having been more buoyant throughout the month; by late February deliveries for November 2025 and 2026 were £192/tonne (-3) and £198/tonne (-5) respectively. The oilseed rape market, by contrast, improved further, led by the ongoing limitation of availability of current season crop and with short-term support from forecast weather patterns in South America. Average spot prices in late February (per tonne ex-farm): feed wheat £176 (-); milling wheat £202 (-5); feed barley £158 (+3); oilseed rape £430 (+17); feed peas £219 (+7); feed beans £220 (+8).

C. Livestock

1. The average live-weight cattle prices for steers and heifers both made further gains this month. The average steer price, from its opening average of 329p/kg lw, rose week on week to close at 359p/kg lw (up 30p, to sit 83p/kg above the average a year earlier). The average finished heifer price rose more sharply in the early weeks, with smaller gains in the latter part of the month: from its opening position of 339p/kg lw, it climbed throughout, to a closing average of 367p/kg (up 28p, to sit 88p above the average a year earlier). The average dairy cow price remained volatile, gaining for most of the month before collapsing in the final week: climbing from its opening position of £2,092 per to peak at to £2,256 before falling hard to close the month at £1,674 per head (down £418 overall to sit £259 above the prior year average). The average finished lamb price (SQQ liveweight, old season) continued to climb this month but closed on a downward turn. Opening at 370p/kg lw, the average rose to peak at 400p/kg, but fell back to close the month at 377p/kg, up 7p/kg to sit 89p/kg above the average a year earlier.
2. The average finished lamb price (SQQ liveweight, new season) started the year with vigour but relaxed a little as the month progressed. Starting from an average of 325p/kg it peaked early on at 341p/kg lw but softened thereafter, sinking to 331p/kg, before jumping in the final days to a closing average of 345p/kg (up 20p/kg and 12p/kg above the average a year earlier).

3. The average UK standard pig price (SPP - used in light of the lack of a quoted APP) fell back for much of the month but recovered at the month end. From an opening position of 204.2p/kg dw, it fell back to a low of 202.8p/kg, before recovering to 203.9p/kg, down 0.3p/kg overall, and 7.7p/kg below the previous year.
4. The UK all milk price has continued to improve, but less vigorously, with the final figures for November showing a rise of 0.78ppl, and December showing a rise of 0.36p to sit at 46.58ppl - 8.65p above a year earlier and 9.49p above the 5-year rolling average. The final EU average farmgate milk price for December sat marginally below the UK average at 46.50ppl, up 0.55ppl and 5.14ppl above the average a year earlier.

Other crop news

1. According to the AHDB, at the end of November, 44 per cent of the GB wheat crop was in good or excellent condition with only 9 per cent rated as poor or very poor.
2. The US Department for Agriculture has reported that global maize stocks at the end of 2024/25 are expected to be 290.3Mt, a 10-year low.
3. In the period July to December, UK flour mills milled 2.995Mt of wheat, down 6.1 per cent on a year earlier. The milling of home-grown wheat fell by 18.2 per cent to 2.147Mt while the milling of imported wheat rose by 50.4 per cent to 848Kt. Total flour production fell by 7.6 per cent to 2.314Mt. Brewers, maltsters and distillers' usage of barley fell by 7.6 per cent to 893Kt but usage of wheat grew by 10.9 per cent to 592Kt. The milling of oats fell by 4.2 per cent to 244Kt.
4. The Agricultural Price Index for December shows increases of 1.6 per cent for barley, compared to November, 1.4 per cent for oats, 3.1 per cent for forage plants and 3 per cent for fresh vegetables but there were falls of 4.4 per cent for potatoes, 17.7 per cent for oilseed rape and 1 per cent for fresh fruit. Compared to a year earlier, there were increases of 20.4 per cent for oilseed rape and 13 per cent for forage plants but falls of 3 per cent for wheat, 13.9 per cent for barley, 31.7 per cent for oats, 16.5 per cent for potatoes, 12.1 per cent for fresh vegetables and 0.8 per cent for fresh fruit.
5. In association with NIAB, SRUC, ADAS and Teagasc, BASF has compiled the Barley Agronomy Guide. The guide can be obtained from agricentre.basf.co.uk.
6. Brazil's National Supply Company, Conab, has forecast a record grain harvest this year of 325.Mt, up 9.4 per cent. The cultivated area has increased by 2.1 per cent and the yield by 7.1 per cent.
7. The NFU Combinable Crops Board has published 'Harvesting Growth', a policy statement detailing aims for the future of the sector.

- 8.** The British Beet Research Organisation has added 6 new varieties to the 2026 sugar beet list. Antler and Gadwall, from SESVanderHave are high yielding conventional varieties which bolsters the beet cyst nematode portfolio of genetics. Aslan from Hillehog has returned to the list as a high yielding conventional variety. Generose, from KWS is a virus-tolerant variety while Smart Nelda, also from KWS, comprises the trait combination of beet cyst nematode and acetolactate synthase resistance.
- 9.** Three studies backed by the Chinese Academy of Sciences have shed light on the physiology and chemistry behind key characteristics of apples including colour and sweetness and calcium availability in apple trees. Researchers from Shandong Agricultural University have revealed the relationship between nitrogen and calcium in apple leaves where excess nitrogen and a calcium deficiency can lead to bitter pit and cork spot. Other scientists at Shandong have assessed how levels of aroma production are influenced by saline stress while researchers at Qingdao Agricultural University have studied the role of DNA methylation in the fading of skin colour.
- 10.** BeeHero has expanded its application of the Pollination Insight Platform to apple growers.
- 11.** The World Apple and Pear Association has forecast a 5.5 per cent increase in apple production in the southern hemisphere in the coming season but a 3.3 per cent fall in pear production. South Africa will retain its status as the leading apple producer, up 3.4 per cent, followed by Brazil, up 14.2 per cent, Chile, up 0.7 per cent and New Zealand, up 5.6 per cent. Exports are expected to increase by 5.3 per cent to 1.654Mt. The pear crop is forecast to be 1.447Mt, with increased production in South Africa, Chile and Australia but Argentina, the largest pear growing country, is expected to be down 10.9 per cent.
- 12.** A new mapping initiative developed by the University of New England's Applied Agricultural Remote Sensing Centre in partnership with Future Food Systems CRC, which allows fruit growers to log location data, allows first responders and authorities to rapidly plan protection zones during pest and disease incursions.
- 13.** Reaching a market value of £2 billions for the first time, a volume increase of 4.3 per cent and a market penetration of 85.3 per cent, British Berry Growers has had a successful year. However, despite an average price increase of 6.9 per cent, a new EY report has found that the British Berry industry is having an outsized effect on the UK economy, adding £624 millions to GDP, paying £134 millions in taxes and supporting 16,317 jobs. Yet growth has significantly decelerated in recent years, falling from 7.8 per cent between 2012 and 2019 to 1.3 per cent between 2019 and 2023 mainly due to increased costs of production such as energy and labour costs.

Of those growers surveyed, 71 per cent had experienced cost increases in excess of 20 per cent between 2020 and 2023 while 85 per cent reported that revenue returns did not match cost increases. While the retail price of berries increased by 14.5 per cent between 2020 and 2023, the average price paid to growers only increased by 11.2 per cent. Further, the share of British berries in the UK market has shrunk by 2.54 per cent while the volume of imported berries has risen by 15.11 per cent.

- 14.** Researchers at Sao Carlos Institute of Chemistry at the University of Sao Paulo have developed an edible biofilm that can increase the life of strawberries. Ingredients including pomegranate peel and chemicals found in the skulls of crustaceans were used. Treated fruit lost 11 per cent less weight when refrigerated for 12 days and took 2-4 days longer to become contaminated with fungi.
- 15.** A trial involving the use of seaweed extract *Ascophyllum nodosum* on strawberries has revealed a 16.8 per cent increase in total yield; earlier fruiting resulting in more than twice the yield of control plants by the second harvest; a 10 per cent increase in Grade 1 berries; a 6.2 per cent increase in the size of berries and a 12.2 per cent increase in weight; and a 7.3 per cent increase in sugar content.
- 16.** The Summer Berry Company has signed a 5-year licensing agreement with Advanced Berry Breeding thereby acquiring the right to produce raspberry varieties Malaika and Zawadi at its production site in Portugal.
- 17.** Global berry breeder Planasa has acquired Dutch company ABZ Seeds, a specialist in breeding F1 hybrid strawberry varieties propagated from seed.
- 18.** Dutch propagator Flevoplant is to stop the propagation and cultivation of strawberry plants due to high costs and regulatory burdens.
- 19.** Light Science Technologies has announced an exclusive agreement with Gravita International to distribute Agrolux LEDs in the UK and Ireland.
- 20.** According to Tesco and grower Place UK, demand for rhubarb from consumers is soaring. Demand in the first two months of the year has doubled at Tesco stores and Place UK reports sales of forced rhubarb up 170 per cent to 25 tonnes per year.
- 21.** Latest data from Wine GB reveals that vines now cover 4,209 hectares in England and Wales, up by 123 per cent in the past 10 years. During 2023 alone, 87 new vineyards were registered taking the total to about 1,000.
- 22.** A team of researchers from NIAB, the Regenerative Viticulture Foundation and Vinescapes have revealed that soil health and biodiversity boosts vineyard resilience to climate change.
- 23.** The Next Gen Fruit Conference takes place on 27 March in Reading focusing on climate change.

Other livestock news

1. Defra has issued a consultation document on whether England and Wales should change its livestock feed controls to allow:

- poultry processed animal protein in porcine feed.
- porcine processed animal protein in poultry feed.
- insect processed animal protein in pig and poultry feed.
- ruminant collagen and gelatine in non-ruminant feed.

The existing control measures were introduced to prevent the spread of transmissible spongiform encephalopathies including scrapie in sheep and goats, 'Mad Cow disease' in cattle, chronic wasting disease in deer and variant Creutzfeldt Jakob disease in humans. The consultation closes on 1 April

2. During February, further outbreaks of Bluetongue disease occurred in Suffolk, Kent, Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Hertfordshire and Dorset. The restricted zone was extended to include Dorset, additional areas of Wiltshire and parts of Somerset and East Devon.
3. The Welsh Government has approved all three BTV-3 bluetongue vaccines for use by livestock keepers.
4. The Climate Change Committee has stated that livestock numbers must be reduced by 27 per cent and meat consumption must fall by 25 per cent if the UK is to meet climate objectives. In its 7th Carbon Budget, it claims that, by 2050, agriculture will be the UK's largest emissions producer unless steps are taken to cut consumption.
5. While beef production grew by 4 per cent in 2024 to 934,000 tonnes, the latest AHDB forecast suggests that production will fall by 5 per cent in 2025 to 885,000 tonnes. Prime cattle for slaughter are forecast to fall by 6 per cent to 1.99 million head and, based upon calf registrations, the reduction is expected to continue into 2026. However, consumer demand is expected to decrease by 1 per cent with imports to rise by 12 per cent and exports to fall by 7 per cent.
6. During January, UK prime slaughterings rose by 1.9 per cent, compared to a year earlier, to 178,000 head; beef and veal production rose by 3.7 per cent to 83,000 tonnes; sheep slaughterings fell by 6.3 per cent to 923,000 head; mutton and lamb production fell by 7.3 per cent to 22,000 tonnes; pig slaughterings rose by 4.5 per cent to 868,000 head; and pigmeat production rose by 4.6 per cent to 82,000 tonnes.

- 7.** In the year to September, the number of new herd bovine TB incidences was unchanged, compared to the previous year, but there were increases of 1 per cent in both the High risk and Edge areas while the Low risk area showed a fall of 14 per cent. There were falls of 33 per cent in Scotland and 9 per cent in Wales. The number of herds not officially TB free due to a bovine TB incident fell by 4 per cent in England with falls of 5 per cent in the High risk area and 12 per cent in the Low risk area but a rise of 2 per cent in the Edge area. There was a fall of 46 per cent in Scotland but no change in Wales.
- 8.** Legume Technology, based in Nottingham, has revealed that maize yields can be increased by as much as 12 per cent with arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi applied to soil before planting. The fungus colonises plant roots helping the crop to access greater quantities of nutrients and water than it can manage through its own root system alone.
- 9.** In 2024/25, global milk production is expected to increase by 0.6 per cent following a 0.1 per cent decrease in 2023/24. Increases are forecast in Australia (2.2 per cent), New Zealand (1.2 per cent), UK (2 per cent) and EU (0.4 per cent) but falls of 0.7 per cent are expected in the US and 6.9 per cent in Argentina.
- 10.** The UK Dairy Carbon Network project has been launched by the Agri-Food and Biosciences Institute with the aim of supporting the dairy industry to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through the use of innovative mitigation measures. A network of 56 dairy farms across Northern Ireland, Cumbria and South West Scotland, North West England and South/South West England and West Wales will be demonstration hubs where farmers, members of industry, scientists and policy representatives will work together to measure the real world impact of solutions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- 11.** The Kingshay Dairy Antimicrobial Focus Report, covering data from 879 dairy herds and 121 veterinary practices in 2023/24, has revealed the average total antimicrobial usage to be 12.7mg/Population Correction Unit, down from 13.7mg in 2023 and 15.7mg in 2020.
- 12.** Analysis by ForFarmers has revealed that starch levels in maize silage have been falling over the past 3 years, from 30.3 per cent in 2022 to 27.6 per cent in 2024. Reasons would seem to include reduced sunshine hours in summer and early harvesting due to fears of wet ground conditions.
- 13.** Saputo Dairy UK has given 12 months' notice to 13 dairy producers in the South West.
- 14.** Arla is to invest £90 millions into its Lockerbie processing plant with the intention of creating a Centre of Excellence for the production of UHT and Lactofree milk. However, the investment could result in the closure of the Settle site and a possible downgrading of the Stourton site.

15. The June 2024 survey reveals:

- The total number of cattle and calves in England fell by 2 per cent, compared to a year earlier, to 5 million head. The breeding herd fell by 2.2 per cent to 1.7 million head while the dairy herd was stable at 1 million head.
- The total number of pigs rose by 1.3 per cent to 3.7 million head. The breeding herd fell by 1 per cent to 326,000 head but fattening pigs rose by 1.5 per cent.
- The number of sheep and lambs fell by 4.3 per cent to 13.8 million head. The female breeding flock fell by 5.6 per cent to 6.6 million head while lambs fell by 3.6 per cent to 6.9 million head.
- Poultry numbers fell by 1.5 per cent to 129 million birds. Broilers fell by 3.5 per cent to 88 million birds while the breeding and laying flock was stable at 32 million birds. Turkey numbers rose by 25 per cent to 3.1 million birds.

16. During January, average butterfat fell by 0.7 per cent, compared to December, and by 1.2 per cent compared to a year earlier, to 4.39 per cent. Average protein fell by 0.6 per cent and 1.3 per cent respectively, to 3.41 per cent.

17. The Agricultural Price Index for December shows increases of 2.1 per cent for cattle and calves, compared to November, 6.3 per cent for sheep and lambs, 0.1 per cent for poultry and 0.8 per cent for milk but there was a fall of 0.2 per cent for pigs. Compared to a year earlier, there were increases of 1.41 per cent for cattle and calves, 19.4 per cent for sheep and lambs, 24.2 per cent for milk and 4.9 per cent for eggs but falls of 4.2 per cent for pigs and 13.1 per cent for poultry.

18. According to AHDB, sheep meat production is forecast to grow by 2 per cent in 2025 to 272,000 tonnes as a consequence of a higher carryover of lambs from 2024. However, the lamb crop for 2025/26 is expected to fall by 2 per cent to 15.5 million head as a result of the reduction in the female breeding flock.

19. The EU has recorded the lowest sheep headage since records began with 57.5 million sheep at the end of 2023, down 2.5 per cent on 2022 and 5 per cent on 2021. In 2024, sheep and goat meat production is estimated to be 512,000 tonnes, down 4.9 per cent on 2023. In the period January to November 2024, there were falls in production of 27 per cent in the Netherlands, 29 per cent in Italy and 16 per cent in Spain.

20. British wool has reported that 57 per cent of the 2024 wool crop has been sold with demand strong and average prices up by 25 per cent.

21. The AHDB full economic cost of pork production for the 3 months to December has been estimated to be 197p/kg deadweight with a margin per slaughter pig of £10.31 per head and 11.5p/kg deadweight. The estimated cost of production rose by 7p/kg compared to the previous quarter mainly due to increased feed costs which make up 63 per cent of the total cost of production.

- 22.** UK pork production is expected to remain stable in 2025 with pig slaughter volumes at 10.32 million head, down 0.1 per cent on 2024. While the UK breeding herd is expected to rise by 1 per cent to 330,000 head, herd numbers are expected to return to 2023 numbers by 2027. Average carcass weights are expected to remain at 90kg.
- 23.** During February, highly pathogenic avian influenza H5N1 has been confirmed at premises near Bromborough, on Merseyside; Bodmin, Cornwall; Market Weighton and Driffield, East Riding of Yorkshire; Pocklington, East Riding of Yorkshire; Teignmouth, Devon; Malpas, Cheshire; and Fownhope, Herefordshire.
- 24.** With effect from 16 February, keepers of birds in Herefordshire, Worcestershire, Cheshire, Merseyside and Lancashire have had to follow strict security measures as required by the Avian Influenza Protection Zone.
- 25.** With effect from 10 February, all gatherings of poultry, galliforme or anseriforme birds are banned in England, this includes ducks, geese, swans, pheasants, partridge, quail, chickens, turkeys and guinea fowl. Gatherings of other captive birds are permitted provided all the requirements of the captive bird gathering general licence are met.
- 26.** In the 3 months to December, 254 million dozen eggs were produced in the UK for human consumption, up 4.2 per cent on a year earlier but the same as in the September quarter. The average farm-gate price was 146p per dozen, up 6 per cent on a year earlier and 0.9 per cent on the September quarter. The production of egg products totalled 14,000 tonnes, down 22.2 per cent on a year earlier and 20 per cent on the September quarter.
- 27.** River Action, The Rivers Trust, Friends of the Wye and the Angling Trust have joined forces to challenge restaurant chain Nando's to take responsibility for the environmental impact its business is having on the River Wye claiming its industrial farming suppliers have turned the river into a 'brown lifeless mess.' Nando's has agreed to conduct an independent audit of its supply chain.
- 28.** During January, UK commercial chick placings rose by 28 per cent, compared to a year earlier, to 3.6 million chicks; broiler chick placings rose by 3.7 per cent to 110.4 million chicks; turkey chick placings rose by 8.6 per cent to 700,000 chicks; turkey slaughterings fell by 29 per cent to 500,000 birds; broiler slaughterings rose by 3.5 per cent to 111.5 million birds; and total poultry meat production rose by 1 per cent to 198,600 tonnes.
- 29.** Influenza of avian origin has been detected in grey seals on the North Norfolk coast.

VIII Inputs/Supply businesses

1. In the middle of February, UK natural gas futures reached 141.25p/therm, their highest point over two years and double the price a year earlier. Domestic storage levels had fallen to 25.7 per cent while EU storage levels were 48.5 per cent, both well below where they should be at that time of year.
2. In January, the price of Ammonium Nitrate averaged £352/t compared to £334/t in December but still much lower than the 5-year average of £429/t.
3. The European Commission has published its new Vision on Agriculture and Food in which it states ‘the Commission will establish a principle that the most dangerous pesticides banned in the EU for health or environmental reasons cannot return to the EU via imported products.’ The EU executive stressed that it would pursue ‘a greater alignment of production standards applied to imported products, particularly in pesticides and animal welfare.’
4. The House of Lords Environment and Climate Change Committee has launched a review of efficient nitrogen use, including usage by farming.
5. The Agricultural Price Index for December shows a fall of 0.5 per cent for buildings maintenance, compared to November, but increases of 0.3 per cent for seeds, 1.4 per cent for energy and lubricants, 0.5 per cent for fertilizers, 0.6 per cent for chemicals, 0.1 per cent for veterinary services and 0.2 per cent for equipment maintenance. Compared to a year earlier, there were falls of 0.4 per cent for seeds, 7.7 per cent for energy and lubricants, 6.9 per cent for fertilizers, 14.3 per cent for chemicals, 8.6 per cent for animal feedingstuffs and 0.1 per cent for buildings maintenance but increases of 12.7 per cent for veterinary services and 5.3 per cent for equipment maintenance.
6. Scientists at Koppert, with assistance from Wageningen University, have released information concerning a mutation of *Myzus persicae*, the green peach aphid. Growers had become aware that all standard treatments were failing. The scientists discovered that the new strain showed a reduced sensitivity to previously reliable solutions and exhibited a much faster development rate meaning infestations could quickly overwhelm crops. The pest is particularly prevalent in sweet peppers, egg plants and cucumbers. The mutation has been found throughout Europe but also in Canada and Mexico.

Marketing

1. In December, exports of wheat totalled 18,523 tonnes, up 29 per cent on November and the highest this season to date. However, in the season as a whole, exports were 70,151 tonnes, down 230 per cent on the same period in 2023/24. Barley exports totalled 68,130 tonnes, again the highest in the season to date, and up 12.5 per cent on November. To date exports have totalled 257,162 tonnes, down 158 per cent on 2023/24.

Oats exports in December totalled 6,813 tonnes with the season to date being 12,265 tonnes, way below the previous year's figures of 74,251 tonnes.

2. The Office of National Statistics has reported that food inflation was up 3.3 per cent in January, compared to a year earlier, and was up from 2 per cent in December.
3. In December, imports of wheat totalled 243,271 tonnes, down 25.7 per cent on November. In the season to date, imports have totalled 1.703Mt, up 60.5 per cent on 2023/24. Imports of barley fell heavily at 8,785 tonnes, down from 31,047 tonnes in November and the lowest in the season to date. So far imports are up 27 per cent at 110,280 tonnes. Maize imports totalled 233,409, tonnes, down 29.7 per cent on November, but in the season to date, imports are up 14 per cent at 1.421Mt. Soyabean and soyabean meal imports in December totalled 278,778 tonnes, down 22 per cent on November while in the season to date, imports have totalled 1.722Mt, up 21 per cent on 2023/24. Rapeseed imports in December fell by 28 per cent to 73,166 tonnes but, in the season to date, they are up 5.9 per cent at 489,586 tonnes.
4. According to Kantar, in the 12 weeks to 29 December, average household spending on take-home Christmas groceries was a record at £460 with sales in the 4 weeks to 29 December up 2.1 per cent on a year earlier. The detail includes:
 - The average household made 17 separate shopping trips, the most since the pre-lockdown rush in March 2020.
 - Branded goods sales accelerated by 4.2 per cent while premium own-label lines increased by 14.6 per cent.
 - Premium own-label lines now account for 7 per cent of all sales.
 - 5.6 million households opted for Christmas shopping on-line.
 - On-line spending was a record at £1.5 billions.
 - Ocado increased sales by 9.6 per cent; Lidl by 6.6 per cent; Tesco by 5 per cent; and Sainsbury's by 3.5 per cent. Only Asda suffered a reduction at 5.8 per cent and Co-op at 0.2 per cent.
5. In 2024, the UK imported 789,300 tonnes of pigmeat, up 1 per cent, while the 4th quarter imports rose 2.7 per cent as EU prices fell substantially. Volumes of bacon fell by 2.2 per cent and processed meat by 7 per cent but sausages grew by 4.8 per cent and fresh and frozen pork by 21.4 per cent. Exports totalled 298,100 tonnes, down 0.1 per cent. Shipments to China grew by 7 per cent to 120,100 tonnes and the Philippines by 18 per cent to 20,400 tonnes.

6. According to Kantar, in the 12 weeks to 26 January, spend on beef products increased by 5.8 per cent, compared to a year earlier, with a 0.7 per cent increase in volumes and a 5.1 per cent increase in average prices. Total primary beef volumes increased by 0.9 per cent with mince up 2 per cent, diced beef up 7.9 per cent, steak up 3.7 per cent, burgers and grills up 3.3 per cent and sausages up 32.5 per cent. Added value products increased by 7.2 per cent with sous vide up 6.4 per cent and marinades up 11.8 per cent.
7. In 2024, fresh and frozen beef imports totalled 241,000 tonnes, up 8 per cent, with imports from Ireland up 13 per cent. The value of imports grew by 11 per cent to £1.38 billions with produce from Ireland up 16 per cent at £1.06 billions. Export volumes grew by 9 per cent to 113,000 tonnes with exports to France up 15 per cent and the Netherlands up 14 per cent while exports to Ireland fell by 7 per cent to 33,000 tonnes. The value of exports increased by 16 per cent to £567 millions.
8. According to NIQ Homescan POD, volume sales of milk in the year to 25 January fell by 1.8 per cent with value sales down by 4.6 per cent. Cheese volumes increased by 4.2 per cent with spend up 2.5 per cent. Cheddar volumes increased by 5 per cent but Stilton and British Blue were down 1.1 per cent. Butter volumes fell by 3.4 per cent with value sales down 0.1 per cent with butter spreads down 7.3 per cent but block butter up 7 per cent and plant-based spreads up 7.7 per cent. Yoghurt and fromage frais volumes grew by 6.2 per cent with spend up 7.7 per cent. Plain yoghurt grew by 21.9 per cent with healthy yoghurt up 16 per cent. Cream volumes rose by 1.9 per cent.
9. In 2024, imports of sheep meat rose by 37 per cent to 76,500 tonnes with values up 29 per cent to £353 millions mainly due to lower UK supply and higher farmgate prices. Imports from New Zealand rose by 51 per cent to 45,800 tonnes and those from Australia rose by 62 per cent to 19,000 tonnes. Imports of frozen legs of lamb rose by 27 per cent while frozen boneless cuts rose by 19 per cent. Exports fell by 5 per cent to 86,800 tonnes but values increased by 6 per cent to £599 millions.
10. In 2024, total exports of dairy products were 1.22 Mt, down 0.3 per cent on 2023. Exports of cheese and curd rose by 9.9 per cent to 17,700 tonnes while whey and whey products rose by 26.2 per cent to 12,600 tonnes and yoghurts by 22.1 per cent to 8,000 tonnes. Imports rose by 8.3 per cent to 1.25Mt with yoghurt up 15.5 per cent to 40,900 tonnes, milk and cream by 11.7 per cent to 27,700 tonnes and cheese and curd by 3.7 per cent to 16,800 tonnes. Whey and whey products increased by 11.7 per cent and 8,500 tonnes and butter by 9.7 per cent and 5,600 tonnes. Milk powder imports fell by 4.9 per cent.
11. Exports of Scotch whisky fell in value by 3.7 per cent in 2024 to £5.4 billions although volume sales rose by 3.9 per cent. India has overtaken France as the largest market by volume while the US retained its position as the largest by value at £971 millions.

12. Somerset cidemaker Thatchers has won its appeal against the High Court ruling that Aldi's Taurus Cloudy Lemon Cider had not 'copy catted' Thatchers Cloudy Lemon Cider. Aldi has said it will appeal the judgement.

Miscellaneous

1. Results of Defra's Farming Opinion Tracker for 2024 have been published. These show:
 - Farmers on 60 per cent of holdings either fully (8 per cent) or partially (52 per cent) understand Defra's vision for farming, down from 64 per cent in April.
 - Farmers on 35 per cent of holdings are making changes to their farm business while a further 45 per cent will need to make changes in the ensuing 5 years.
 - Farmers on 51 per cent of holdings will be making changes to their agri-environment scheme within a year.
 - Farmers on 81 per cent of holdings believed that Defra paying for environmental outcomes will be very (60 per cent) or moderately (21 per cent) important to their business.
 - Farmers on 66 per cent of holdings are not confident that changes to schemes and regulations will lead to a successful future for farming.
 - Farmers on 5 per cent of holdings feel very positive about their future in farming with 30 per cent somewhat positive.
2. A survey of 750 farmers undertaken by the Farm Safety Foundation has revealed that 90 per cent of respondents consider mental health is the 'biggest hidden problem' for farmers.
3. The Tackling Food Surplus at the Farm Gate scheme has opened for applications with £15 millions available to food redistribution charities. Grants of at least £20,000 are available and charities must submit bids showing how they intend to form relationships with farmers to access any surplus food and how they would seek to increase their capacity to redistribute this food to communities.
4. The latest Farm Confidence Survey from Federated Farmers has revealed that confidence amongst New Zealand farmers has reached its highest level in more than a decade with falling interest rates, rising levels of income and more favourable farming rules.
5. Defra is seeking the views of farmers about the usefulness of the annual Farm Practices Survey. The survey can be completed on farming-statistics@defra.co.uk and will remain open until 1 September.
6. The Big Farm Tea Break is due to take place from March 24 to 30 to encourage farmers to put their mental health wellbeing first.
7. The Environment Agency has launched its 3rd National Waste Crime Survey to gain a greater understanding of waste crimes across England.

8. NFU Education, in association with the Outward Bound Trust, has launched an AgriFuture Scholarship Programme aimed at improving diversity and inclusion within British agriculture by supporting young people from underrepresented backgrounds to pursue careers in farming.
9. Bionema Group, a UK-based biocontrol technology company, is creating 50 science and technology apprenticeships over the next 3 years. The apprenticeships will cover training in biopesticides, biostimulants, biofertilisers, integrated pest and nutrient management and precision formulation and manufacturing.
10. Harper Adams University has launched a series of courses to help develop new brewers, winemakers and distillers.
11. Scottish John Deere dealer J & S Montgomery has acquired fellow John Deere dealer DKR Agricultural Services enabling the buyer to expand in Lanarkshire, South Stirlingshire and West Lothian from the depot in Coulter, near Biggar.
12. A new business – Househam Group Ltd – has been formed to acquire the business and assets of Lincolnshire-based Housesham Sprayers Ltd which entered administration last month.
13. Aberdeenshire farmer Andrew Connon has been elected NFU Scotland president.

Postscripts

1. A Scotsman goes to Canada on holiday. One day he goes to the bar and see in animal head hanging on the wall. “What’s that” he asks? “A moose”, answers the bartender. “Jesus Christ, how big are the cats here?!”
2. A man walks in the countryside and meets a farmer with his cows. “How is your work? Isn’t it too hard?” he asks. “Not at all! Look at my cows, the black ones are wonderful. They make ten thousand litres of milk each year and eat very little.” “Impressive! And the white ones?” “So do they!” “Ah? Hum ... and you have maybe something else?” “Oh yes! I have sheep! Some black and some white. The dark sheep produce meat so good I can sell them at the double of the price of my neighbours. A true blessing these sheep!” “And the white sheep are not as good?” “The white sheep are exceptional too! Wonderful beasts!” “Well, whatever. Say, I hear some chickens. They are good too?” “Oh yes, the chickens! Some are white and some are black. The black are the best chickens in the world!” “And ... not the white ones?” “The white ones too of course, silly!” “Excuse me, sir. I don’t understand. You say you have some black something and some white something, that the black ones are exceptional because this and because of that! But in the end, you always tell me that the whites are as good as the black!!! Why do you do this???”

“Oh, I’m so sorry. I didn’t say that to upset you. You see, this is because the black ones are mine.” “Really? And the white ones?” “The white ones too, of course!”

3. A Scottish cow farmer sees an Englishman crossing his field. The Englishman stoops down to a little stream to take a drink. The Scotsman yells, “Ye cannae drink tha! It’s fool of coo piss an’ shite!” To which the Englishman says, “I can’t understand you. Speak English properly.” The Scotsman responds, “I said use both hands!”
4. Farmer Dave went to see his neighbour Dan one day, and when he pulled up he was surprised to not see Dan out in the field working. So he looked around a bit and found Dan in the barn with some R&B playing and a candlelit dinner set out by the John Deere. Dave asked what was going on, and Dan said, “Well, if you gotta know my marriage has been on the rocks a bit. We went to couples therapy and the Doc said that I’m not putting enough effort into our relationship and I need to do something sexy to a tractor.”
5. What do you call a British Police Officer’s nightshift payments? Copper Nitrate.
6. What do you call a pig that does karate? A pork chop.
7. Apparently, you can’t use “beef stew” as a password. It’s not stroganoff.
8. Why are there gates around cemeteries? Because people are dying to get in.
9. What happens to a frog’s car when it breaks down? It gets toad away.
10. How do trees access the internet. They log in.

Who is going to Feed the Nation!

By the time you read this month's Monthly Farming Update, the Environment Secretary will have delivered a speech announcing that the public sector procurement policy is to be overhauled whereby public contracts will favour "domestic produce over cheaper imports." A target will be set whereby at least half the food supplied to the public sector will be sourced from the highest welfare farms, although not necessarily British, as otherwise international trade obligations would be breached.

Recently, Angela Rayner announced her intention to see 1.5 million homes built in a 5-year period, most of which will consume prime agricultural land, possibly as much as 150,000 acres.

The June 2024 agricultural survey has reported that the area of land in England occupied for the purposes of agriculture was 8.747 million hectares, 9 per cent lower than in 1983. The area used for cereals, potatoes and horticultural crops is down 15 per cent at 3.567 million hectares and it is assumed that it is this land on which most of Ms Rayner's houses will be built.

The latest Defra announcement reports that 295,000 hectares of agricultural land has been taken out of agricultural production under Sustainable Farming Initiative agreements, and, in total, 5.6 million hectares of land is in one form of agri-environment agreement or another. So, a further loss of productive land.

Now the main point of this article: In 1983, there were 49 million people living in England. The latest figures from the Office for National Statistics show that, by mid-2023, the population had risen by 18 per cent to 58 millions. In 2023 alone, the population grew by 580,000 of which 10,000 related to net births and 570,000 related to immigration.

There have been huge technological advances in agricultural and horticultural production over the past 40 years but the policy of successive Governments towards housing, immigration and the environment means there is an ever-decreasing area of land available to produce food for an ever-increasing population.

Yet now Steve Reed claims to be putting farmers at the head of the public sector purchasing chain. Remember the emphasis is on buying from the 'highest welfare farms.' Such farms exist throughout the world, particularly in the EU.

So one element of Government policy offers farmers a crumb while most others are removing the rest of the loaf.

One day, someone in authority will realise we urgently need to help farmers feed the nation, but does that person exist? It would seem unlikely.

Monthly Farming Update

We welcome feedback on the MFU.
Does this issue raise any questions in your mind?
Would you like more information on a particular item?

Please ring one of our agricultural specialists:

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