



CHAVEREYS
CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS & FINANCIAL ALCHEMISTS



Monthly Farming Update

January 2026

Policy issues

1. The graph of the Government's policy-making decisions reminds one of the waves on an electrocardiograph. Another policy change has seen the 100 per cent limit on Agricultural and Business Property Reliefs increased from £1m to £2.5m. A welcome change but only a complete reversal will suffice.
2. The Farming Profitability Review, produced by Baroness Minette Batters, has been published (see this month's Business Box). The author was forbidden from assessing the impact of changes to Inheritance Tax reliefs.
3. Defra has announced the creation of a Farming and Food Partnership Board, chaired by Environment Secretary Emma Reynolds, with Dame Angela Eagle as deputy. The Board will involve senior leaders from farming, food production, retail, finance and government to 'take a practical, partnership-led approach from farm to fork to strengthen our food production.'
4. The Government has claimed that trail hunting could be used as a smokescreen to facilitate illegal hunting. It therefore intends to ban the practice and a consultation will shortly be launched on how to deliver a ban.
5. The Government has reportedly revoked rules that stated decisions to build on the Green Belt were in the hands of local authorities. Apparently, now planning inspectors will be able to impose top-down demands on scrapping Green Belt land for housing. The Government is expected to demand that councils must notify it if they intend to refuse a planning application for 150 homes or more so that ministers can 'call in' the project for review.
6. Defra has published a consultation document seeking views on the contractual relationships in the combinable crops sector. It is asking participants to air their thoughts on:
 - how the combinable crops sector currently works
 - the nature of relationships in the supply chain
 - whether the functioning of the combinable crops supply chain can be improved and howThe consultation closes on 4 February.
7. The European Parliament and the Council of the EU have agreed new rules for plants obtained using new genomic techniques (NGTs). Once implemented, the measures will create two distinct pathways for NGT plants to be placed on the market:
 - NGT plants that could also occur naturally or by conventional breeding will be subject to a verification procedure based on set criteria. Those that meet the criteria will be exempted from the requirements of the genetically modified organisms legislation.
 - For all other NGT plants, the requirements of the current genetically modified organisms legislation would apply.

Before they can be marketed, they will be subject to a risk assessment and authorisation procedure and must be labelled as GMOs.

Reform

1. Defra has confirmed the Fruit and Vegetable Aid Scheme has now closed and there is no indication of an imminent replacement.
2. The Basic Payment Scheme (Tapering, Payments Entitlements and Closure (Wales)) Regulations 2025 has been passed by the Senedd. Payments will be phased out by 2028.
3. The Welsh Government has published the full scheme guidance for the Universal Layer of the Sustainable Farming Scheme. The Universal Layer operates on an annual basis and started on 1 January. The Single Application Form will be available from 2 March. From 1 January to the deadline for the submission of the application form, all farmers will be treated as meeting the Universal Layer requirements.
4. Over 95 per cent of all claimants in Wales had received their Basic Payment by 12 December following the issue of advance payments from 14 October onwards.

Grants/regulations/legislation/environment

1. The Government has published details as to how the Nature Restoration Fund, part of the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, will operate.

The Nature Restoration Fund, which enables housing and infrastructure developers to meet their environmental responsibilities, will be delivered through Environmental Delivery Plans:

- Natural England will prepare a draft Environmental Delivery Plan (EDP) for an impact on a protected species or site affected by development in a specific area. The plan will include a charging schedule that will include covering costs of the conservation measures which developers will pay to meet the relevant legal obligations. There will be a minimum 28-day public consultation following which a decision will be made by the Secretary of State.
- The majority of EDPs are expected to be voluntary with developers being able to choose whether or not to utilise it. An EDP will only be mandatory on recommendation to the Secretary of State by Natural England. An EDP can be relied upon by a developer in a planning application in place of the required habitats assessment or species licence. Once planning is approved, the developer is committed to pay the levy.
- EDP reports will be published at the mid-point and end-point of an EDP. Natural England will publish organisational annual reports showing levy income and the expenditure under each EDP.

2. The latest review of the Environment Improvement Plan includes the following targets:
 - reduce total nitrogen, phosphorus and sediment pollution from agriculture to the water environment by at least 12 per cent by December 2030 and by 18 per cent in catchments containing protected sites in unfavourable condition due to nutrient pollution.
 - by December 2030, double the number of farms providing sufficient year-round resources for farm wildlife, compared with 2025.
 - restore or create 250,000ha of a range of wildlife-rich habitats outside of protected sites by 2030.
 - increase England's tree canopy and woodland cover by 0.33 per cent of land area by December 2030 from the 2022 baseline of 14.9 per cent equivalent to a net increase of 43,000 hectares.
3. According to the Environment Agency, during November, the East Midlands had 218 per cent of average rainfall, the most since 1871, while the West Midlands had 185 per cent, the most since 1970. Both areas have moved out of drought status.
4. The Government is to consider the introduction of a close season for the shooting of hares.
5. An NFU survey has revealed that 78 per cent of respondents had witnessed an increase in drought over the past 10 years while 56 per cent had seen an increase in flooding. Of those farms impacted by severe weather events, 47 per cent reported losses of at least £10,000 while 12 per cent suffered losses in excess of £100,000.
6. Data on England's biodiversity has been published showing long-term trends, over 10 years, and short-term trends, over 5 years. The data shows:
 - Over the long-term, 22 per cent of indicators are improving, 12 per cent show little or no overall change while 32 per cent have deteriorated.
 - Over the short-term, 12 per cent of indicators show improvement, 25 per cent show little or no overall change while 30 per cent have deteriorated.
 - Of the 22 measures which relate to natural capital assets, 13 have deteriorated in the long-term while only 5 have improved. Of those relating to the state of species, only 2 have improved in the long-term and none in the short-term.
 - Of the 13 indicators which have deteriorated, 3 have stabilised in the short-term, being the relative abundances of all species, of priority species and of all-species of butterfly.
 - Of the 5 indicators which have been improving in the long-term, 3 have shown no improvement in the short-term, being relative abundance of wintering waterbirds, extent of protected areas on land and relative abundance of bat populations.

- Of the 13 indicators which have deteriorated in the long-term, 10 have also deteriorated in the short-term, being the relative abundance of all breeding birds, of breeding birds on farmland, of breeding birds in woodland, of breeding wetland birds, of breeding upland birds, of habitat specialist butterflies, of farmland specialist butterflies, of woodland specialist butterflies and the percentage of habitats and species of European importance in favourable or improving conservation status.
- 7. The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust has claimed that badgers are responsible for 41.7 per cent of wader bird nest predation followed by foxes at 23 per cent.
- 8. The Government is to ban the use of snare traps and will conduct a review of other traps used to catch wildlife such as older spring traps, mole traps and live capture traps used to catch corvids.
- 9. The Welsh Government has pledged £265,000 towards the cost of a diagnostic centre for notifiable animal diseases at the University of Aberystwyth.
- 10. The first National River Walk has been announced covering 21km along the Mersey Valley Way from Stockport, through Manchester, to Trafford.
- 11. During November, nests of Asian Hornet were destroyed in Swyre, Dorset; Ewhurst, East Sussex; Etchingham, East Sussex; and Broad Oak, East Sussex. In 2025, there were 544 credible sightings and 161 nests were destroyed.

Other matters of farm finance and tenure

- 1. The CPRE has revealed that, of 13 new housing schemes, comprising 1,250 homes, 88 per cent will be built on 'grey land'. While prior to the last General Election, the present Government defined the grey belt as being 'poor-quality scrubland, mothballed on the outskirts of towns', it is now accepted that this can include green belt land as 'there were simply not enough sites on which to deliver its target of 1.5m homes'.
- 2. The US Government is to provide \$12 billions in aid to American farmers to finance inputs as a result of the loss of sales of soya beans to China due to the imposition of tariffs.
- 3. Data on agricultural land use in the UK as at 1 June has been published, with comparisons to a year earlier:
 - The utilised land area remained at 16.8 million hectares, 69 per cent of the total land area.
 - The total croppable area remained at 6.1 million hectares, 36 per cent of the utilised agricultural area.
 - The area of arable crops was down 1.1 per cent to just below 4.1 million hectares.
 - Cereals accounted for 74 per cent of the arable crop area, up 1.6 per cent at 3 million hectares.

- The area of uncropped arable land fell by 6.5 per cent to 576,000 hectares.
- The wheat area grew by 9.1 per cent to 1.7 million hectares.
- Barley fell by 9.6 per cent to 1.1 million hectares.
- Oilseed crops fell by 18 per cent to 261,000 hectares with oilseed rape down by 18 per cent to 241,000 hectares.
- The potato area increased by 7.2 per cent to 127,000 hectares.
- The area of horticultural crops increased by 3.5 per cent to 147,000 hectares with vegetables and salad crops up 6.7 per cent to 103,000 hectares.

4. The Chief Executive of Aldi UK and Ireland has claimed disappointment not to have seen 'at least a review of the proposed changes to Inheritance Tax in the Autumn 2025 Budget'. He further claimed that the increased tax will result in higher food prices.

5. Data has been published on the agricultural workforce in the UK as at 1 June, with comparisons to a year earlier:

- The number of people working on commercial agricultural holdings fell by 1.5 per cent to 446,196.
- The number of farmers, partners, directors and spouses fell by 1.4 per cent to 288,877, the fall being entirely in the part-time category.
- The number of regular employees, salaried managers and casual workers fell by 1.7 per cent to 157,319.

6. Labour MP Markus Campbell-Savours, who represents Penrith and Solway, has had the party whip removed after voting against the changes to Inheritance Tax.

7. Data has been published on Off-Farm Income in England in 2023/24:

- Average OFI was £12,500, an increase of 2 per cent.
- Equalised to the level of a single adult household, the figure was £8,300.
- 73 per cent of farms had some form of OFI, up 2 per cent.
- Income from self-employment was consistently lower than income from employment. Self-employment income was highest among lowland grazing livestock farms at 25 per cent and lowest in pig and poultry farms at 6 per cent.
- Equalised OFI was highest in horticulture farms at £8,800 while dairy farms had the lowest OFI at £600.
- Pensions and investments were the highest sources of OFI, both registering 29 per cent, while green energy technology income was found at only 2 per cent of farms.

8. The Agricultural Price Index for outputs for October increased by 5.4 per cent, compared to a year earlier, but fell by 0.1 per cent compared to September. The index for inputs increased by 1.9 per cent, compared to a year earlier, but fell by 0.5 per cent compared to September.

9. Defra has decided to introduce a new method for measuring the income of farming households. The new method will be named Farming Household Earnings although statistics on Farm Household Income will continue to be published. The new method will measure the disposable income of farm households will use the sum of:
 - The household's share of private drawings which includes the household's portion of the outgoings which are shared by the business and the household, such as utility bills and private drawings from the farm business.
 - Any wages paid to household members by the farm.
 - The off-farm income of household members.
10. Historic England has published Heritage at Risk Register 2025 which shows that almost 1,000 churches, chapels, meeting houses and cathedrals were at risk of 'neglect, decay or inappropriate change.' A report from the National Churches Trust early in 2025 found 40 per cent of the 3,628 churches surveyed were at risk with one in three using reserves on basic costs. The situation has been exacerbated by a reduction of £19 millions, to £23 millions, in the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme with a cap of £25,000 on claims and the scheme due to end in March.

Product prices

A. Market background

1. Sterling closed up against the Euro (marginally) and the US Dollar (more convincingly) this month; both retained a level of volatility but the range of movement was modest. Having opened the month at 87.6p per Euro, Sterling's movement was small, with a low of 88.0p and a peak of 87.1p, closing the month at 87.2p per € (0.5p stronger). By contrast, the movement against the US Dollar was more active, with Sterling opening at 75.5p and, after an early-stage fall to 75.7p, climbing to peak at 73.9p, before relaxing back to close the month at 74.2p per \$ (1.3p stronger).
2. The gold price rose to a new all-time high this month but relaxed to close the month only marginally up. Opening at £3,187 per troy ounce, the price climbed to peak at £3,375 near the end of the month and fell to close 2025 at £3,209 per troy ounce, up £22 overall.
3. Crude oil prices closed down, having been marginally higher and significantly lower during the month, impacted by the unknown effect of the US action in Venezuela. Brent Crude opened at \$62.33 per barrel and edged up early on to peak at \$63.75 before dropping to a mid-month low of \$58.92 and, after another lower peak at \$62.38, closed at an average price of \$60.85 per barrel, down \$1.48 overall.

B. Crops

1. The cereals market closed broadly unchanged with low price movement overall. Milling wheat prices moved marginally more, having fallen in the first half of the month before improving in the latter half. Global supplies remain abundant in the context of the long-term averages, underpinned by reports of favourable growing conditions in Argentina and the US. Forex continued to impact on UK domestic prices softening export prices with stronger Sterling. Feed wheat futures closed down across the board, having been significantly lower during the month; by late November, deliveries for November 2026, and 2027 were £173/tonne (-3) and £182/tonne (-4) respectively. Oilseed rape prices closed down, suppressed by lower crude oil prices and softening demand. High global plantings point to supply exceeding demand in the coming season; Crop outlook in Australia and Canada underpins this further.

Average spot prices in late December (per tonne ex-farm): feed wheat £165 (-1); milling wheat £182 (+2); feed barley £149 (+1); oilseed rape £407 (-7); feed peas £209 (-4); feed beans £202 (-5).

C. Livestock

1. The average live-weight cattle prices for steers and heifers both closed down, albeit still at a relatively bold level. The average steer price, from its opening average of 375p/kg lw, peaked in the early days at 385p/kg, before falling back to close the month at 369p/kg lw (down 6p and sitting 67p/kg above the average a year earlier). The average finished heifer price climbed in the early stages from its opening position of 386p/kg to 404p/kg, before falling back to a closing average of 380p/kg (down 6p and 71p above the average a year earlier). The average dairy cow price remained volatile this month with a wide price swing. From an opening position of £1,749 it dropped to £1,328, rose to a peak of £1,847 before falling back to a closing average of £1,637 per head (down £112 to sit £192 below the prior year average).
2. The average finished lamb price (SQQ liveweight, new season) fell back in the first half of the month before recovering much off the loss before the markets shut down for Christmas. From an opening average of 329p/kg, it fell to a low of 316p/kg but bounced back to a late December close of 324p/kg (down 5p, sitting 12p/kg above the average a year earlier).
3. The average UK standard pig price (SPP deadweight) fell in the lead up to the festive break. From an opening position of 200.7p/kg dw, it fell to a late December average of 198.0p/kg (down 2.7p/kg overall, 8.4p/kg below the previous year).
4. The UK all milk price for October, reported this month, recorded an increase of 0.50ppl to 46.56ppl, sitting 1.09ppl above a year earlier and 6.71ppl above the rolling 5-year average.

Other crop news

- 1.** Final estimates have been published of the UK harvest, with comparisons to a year earlier:
 - The UK wheat harvest increased by 7.3 per cent to 12 million tonnes. The area increased by 9.1 per cent to 1.7 million hectares but the yield fell by 1.7 per cent to 7.2 tonnes per hectare.
 - The barley harvest fell by 10 per cent to 6.4 million tonnes. Spring barley fell by 16 per cent, with yields down 5.4 per cent, while winter barley production grew by 1.2 per cent but the yield fell by 7.2 per cent.
 - Oats production fell by 2.3 per cent to 963,000 tonnes. The area increased by 8.8 per cent to 198,000 hectares but the yield fell by 10 per cent to 4.9 tonnes per hectare.
 - Oilseed rape production increased by 7 per cent to 893,000 tonnes. The area was down by 18 per cent but the yield grew by 30 per cent to 3.7 tonnes per hectare.
 - Production of wheat straw was unchanged at 2.6 million tonnes but barley straw fell by 24 per cent to 1.3 million tonnes.
- 2.** FranceAgriMer has reported that, by 1 December, 96 per cent of winter barley and emerged soft wheat crops were in good or excellent condition, up from 81 per cent and 86 per cent last year.
- 3.** The December crops report from the Australian Bureau of Agriculture and Resource Economics and Sciences shows that winter crop production is expected to increase by 10 per cent in 2025/26 to 66.3Mt, the second largest on record. The wheat forecast is up 1.8Mt on the September estimate to 35.6Mt, barley is up 1.1Mt to 15.7Mt and canola is up 1.2Mt to 7.2Mt.
- 4.** Details of AHDB 2026/27 Recommended Lists have been published:
 - DSV Arlington, a Group 1 milling wheat, has achieved a 99 per cent treated yield with a Hagberg falling number of 309, a specific weight of 78.9 kg/hl and protein of 12.9 per cent.
 - KWG Grebe is a Group 2 milling wheat which has resistance to orange wheat blossom midge.
 - Sparkler is a new Group 4 soft wheat with a treated yield of 106 per cent.
 - Group 4 hard wheat Aintree has a treated yield of 110 per cent but only scores 3 for yellow rust resistance.
 - LG Defiance offers a treated yield of 109 per cent and good disease resistance.
 - Charland is a UKFM Group 1 white spring wheat, the first to receive a UKFM recommendation.
 - Marhawa and LOPB Clifden are new hard Group 4 spring wheats.

- The feed winter barley list includes LG Catapult, which yields at 104 per cent but has a lodging rating of only 6, and Senova's Darcle which offers a treated yield of 106 per cent but is only recommended for the East.
- Six-row feed winter barley SY Barnabas from Syngenta has the highest treated yield in its category at 108 per cent.
- Four new spring barleys are under test for malting. Trailblazer has a treated yield of 106 per cent; Roulette has a strong brown rust rating; Shona has a treated yield of 105 per cent but is only recommended for the East; and Nolan shows a very strong net blotch rating.
- Three hybrid winter oilseed rape varieties have been added, DSV's Dompteur, NPZ's Karat and KWS Domingoes.

5. The latest estimate from Statistics Canada puts the Canadian canola cop at 21.8Mt, a record. The wheat crop is also expected to hit a record at 40Mt.

6. The Agricultural Price Index for October shows increases of 1.2 per cent for potatoes, compared to a year earlier, 1.1 per cent for oilseed rape and 29 per cent for forage plants but falls of 13.1 per cent for wheat, 9.7 per cent for barley, 11.4 per cent for oats, 3.8 per cent for fresh vegetables and 1.6 per cent for fresh fruit. Compared to September, there were increases of 0.1 per cent for wheat, 0.9 per cent for barley, 0.1 per cent for oats, 1.4 per cent for oilseed rape and 1.6 per cent for forage plants but falls of 2.9 per cent for potatoes, 2.6 per cent for fresh vegetables and 12.4 per cent for fresh fruit.

7. The Scottish Government has published final estimates of the 2025 cereal harvest:

- Overall, the cereal harvest was a 10-year high with total production at 3.14 million tonnes, 5 per cent up on 2024.
- Wheat production rose by 25 per cent to 1.03 million tonnes with the planted area up 10 per cent and a 13 per cent increase in average yield.
- Winter barley yield increased by 9 per cent resulting in a 11 per cent increase in production to 363,000 tonnes.
- Spring barley production fell by 6 per cent to 1.566 million tonnes, with average yields down 4 per cent and a 2 per cent fall in planted area.
- While average yields of oats fell by 4 per cent, a 7 per cent area increase resulted in a 2 per cent rise in production to 185,000 tonnes.
- Oilseed rape production increased by 15 per cent to 153,000 tonnes. Although the planted area fell by 11 per cent, a 29 per cent increase in yield to a 20-year record high of 4.7 tonnes per hectare led to the increase.

8. World Potato Markets has estimated the 2025 UK potato crop at 4.9 million tonnes, 300,000 tonnes down on the 2024 crop as published by Defra although industry sources claim the 2024 crop was nearer to 4.7 million tonnes.

9. Defra has confirmed that the Colorado beetle has been eradicated in the UK, having been found in Kent in 2023.

- 10.** Tesco has reported demand for coloured vegetables as being up 100 per cent last Autumn compared to a year ago. Demand for rainbow chard was up 70 per cent, cavolo nero up 30 per cent and purple broccoli up 10 per cent.
- 11.** BASF Nunhems has reintroduced Sunions, a tearless onion. They have been supplied to Waitrose.
- 12.** Funded by Innovate UK, led by Altered Carbon and supported by APS Produce, Fargro Ltd and the UK Agri-Tech Centre, the TomatoGuard project aims to lead to early detection of pests and stress in UK tomato glasshouse production. The sensor tool combines graphene-based volatile organic compound sensors, embedded electronics and machine-learning into a grower-friendly cloud platform. In trials, the sensor revealed biochemical stress signals from plants which will enable earlier detection, more precise biological control and reduce reliance on chemical interventions.
- 13.** Niab at East Malling has released rootstock MM200 after 20 years of extensive testing in the UK and Europe. It is reported to be 35 per cent more productive and 15-20 per cent more rigorous than M9 and has performed well on replanted soils. It would appear to be more resistant to crown rot, apple canker and fireblight.
- 14.** Rymer, an English culinary apple, which was thought to be extinct, has been rediscovered through DNA analysis of apple rootstocks in Australia and Kashmir. Rymer was transported to New South Wales in the mid-1800s while it is believed to have been introduced to Kashmir by serving British officers. Rymer was paired with Northern Greening as the parents of Annie Elizabeth and Newton Wonder. Both Rymer and Northern Greening are parents or grandparents of Bramley's Seedling.

Other livestock news

- 1.** Details of the livestock population in the UK as at 1 June have been published, with comparisons to a year earlier:
 - The number of cattle and calves fell by 1.3 per cent to 9.3 million head.
 - The cattle breeding herd fell by 1.3 per cent to 3.1 million head.
 - The beef breeding herd fell by 4.1 per cent to 1.3 million head.
 - The dairy breeding herd grew by 0.7 per cent to 1.8 million head.
 - The number of pigs remained unchanged at 4.7 million head.
 - Fattening pigs increased by 0.9 per cent to 4.3 million head.
 - Breeding pig numbers fell by 3.2 per cent to 407,000 head.
 - The female breeding herd fell by 3.3 per cent to 316,000 head.
 - Other breeding pigs fell by 2.8 per cent to 91,000 head.
 - The number of sheep and lambs fell by 1.7 per cent to 30.5 million head.
 - The female breeding flock fell by 0.7 per cent to 14.8 million head.
 - Other sheep and lamb numbers fell by 2.7 per cent to 15.7 million head.

- Lamb numbers fell by 2.9 per cent to 14.8 million head.
- Poultry numbers increased by 4.1 per cent to 183 million birds.
- Broiler numbers increased by 7.6 per cent to 121 million birds.
- The number of breeding and laying fowl fell by 1.2 per cent to 54 million birds.
- The breeding flock fell by 12 per cent to 11 million birds.
- The number of egg laying hens and pullets increased by 2 per cent to 43 million birds.

2. In the year to September, with comparisons to the previous year, the number of new herd bovine TB incidents fell by 7 per cent, with falls of 8 per cent in the High risk area, 1 per cent in the Edge area and 2 per cent in the Low risk area. However, there were increases of 21 per cent in Scotland and 1 per cent in Wales. The number of herds not officially TB free in September fell by 11 per cent in England, with falls of 11 per cent in the High risk area, 10 per cent in the Edge area and 3 per cent in the Low risk area. While Wales fell by 8 per cent, there was an increase of 57 per cent in Scotland.
3. During December, cases of BTV-3 bluetongue diseases were reported in Cornwall, Derbyshire, Devon, North Wales, Cheshire, Somerset, Kent, Powys, South Yorkshire, Cumbria, Greater Manchester, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire and East Sussex.
4. Since October, France has reported 19 outbreaks of Lumpy Skin Disease, with 13 along the border with Spain. 3 further outbreaks have been recorded in Sardinia.
5. The Global Dairy auction at the start of December saw an average fall of 4.3 per cent, the 8th consecutive decline. Butter fell by 12.4 per cent, whole milk powder by 2.4 per cent and skimmed milk powder by 1.6 per cent.
6. Barber's Cheesemakers has reduced the price of a standard litre by 2.5ppl to 35.10ppl.
7. The latest AHDB survey has revealed an estimated loss of 30 dairy producers in Great Britain in the period April to October but year-on-year there was a fall of 190 producers, or 2.6 per cent. Latest BCMS figures, to 1 July, show a fall of 0.6 per cent in the milking herd to 1.6 million head. Average milk volume per farm has increased by 6.6 per cent to 1.82 million litres.
8. First Milk has reduced its price by 3.6ppl to 32.25ppl.
9. Peste des petits ruminants has been reported for the first time in Croatia with two cases. Since June, there have been further outbreaks in Albania, Turkey and Kosovo.

- 10.** Muller has reduced its price by 1.5ppl to 38.5ppl.
- 11.** The third cycle of targets from its Targets Task Force have been released by the Responsible use of Medicines in Agriculture Alliance, representing commitments from each livestock sector for the period 2025-2029.
- 12.** During October, 1,255 million litres of milk was available to processors, up 6 per cent on September. Liquid milk production rose by 3 per cent to 512 million litres; cheese production rose by 5.6 per cent to 41,900 tonnes; and butter production rose by 0.3 per cent to 14,100 tonnes.
- 13.** During November, with comparisons to a year earlier:
 - UK prime cattle slaughterings fell by 4.5 per cent to 169,000 head.
 - Beef and veal production fell by 2.2 per cent to 78,000 tonnes.
 - Sheep slaughterings fell by 13 per cent to 886,000 head.
 - Mutton and lamb production fell by 12 per cent to 20,000 tonnes.
 - Pig slaughterings rose by 1.4 per cent to 867,000 head.
 - Pigmeat production rose by 1.2 per cent to 83,000 tonnes.
- 14.** Cambridge University's School of the Biological Sciences has recommended that the teaching of veterinary courses at the university cease and that Queen's Veterinary School Hospital is closed.
- 15.** Since June, Romania has reported 21 outbreaks of sheep and goat pox, Bulgaria 196 outbreaks, Greece 1,388 outbreaks and Turkey 74 cases.
- 16.** Defra is to publish a consultation document on reforms to the Veterinary Surgeons Act.
- 17.** The Agricultural Price Index for October shows increases of 35.3 per cent for cattle and calves, compared to a year earlier, 9 per cent for sheep and lambs, 0.5 per cent for poultry, 2.4 per cent for milk and 1 per cent for eggs but a fall of 2.4 per cent for pigs. Compared to September, there were increases of 2.6 per cent for cattle and calves and 1.1 per cent for milk but falls of 1.6 per cent for pigs, 0.8 per cent for sheep and lambs and 4.1 per cent for poultry.
- 18.** The Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) Act 2025 has passed into law. Fines have increased from £1,000 to an unlimited amount when a dog is found to have chased or attacked livestock. Police will have the power to detain dogs believed to pose an ongoing threat to livestock.
- 19.** The Moredun Research Institute has acquired Firth Mains Farm, a mixed upland and lowland farm south of Edinburgh, to help evaluate new farming methods and their effects on animal health.
- 20.** Moredun Research Institute has partnered with Dutch pharmaceutical company Kernfarm to develop the first commercial vaccine for louping ill in sheep since the previous vaccine was withdrawn in 2017.

- 21.** Spain has confirmed its first case of African swine fever since 1994.
- 22.** The GB Pig Surveillance Dashboard, administered by the Animal and Plant Health Agency and SRUC, has confirmed that cases of swine dysentery, caused by *brachyspira hyodysenteriae*, have increased from 8 in 2001 to 54 in 2024. AHDB has obtained a 12-month licence for a Biocheck tool, used by vets to assess individual farm biosecurity and highlight areas for improvement.
- 23.** Red Tractor is to introduce two new modules to its Pigs Scheme, Enhanced Welfare Outdoor Bred and Free Range.
- 24.** The Wales Veterinary Science Centre has secured funding of £40,000 from the Welsh Government to establish the prevalence of iceberg diseases in sheep flocks. The funding will be used to test 300 flocks for the presence of Johne's disease, maedi visna and caseous lymphadenitis.
- 25.** During December, outbreaks of HPAI H5N1 avian influenza have occurred in commercial poultry units in West Lindsey, Lincolnshire (3); Newington, Kent (three); Thirsk, North Yorkshire (two); Wells, Norfolk; Newark, Nottinghamshire (two); York, North Yorkshire; Market Rasen, Lincolnshire; Dereham, Norfolk (three); Tewkesbury, Gloucestershire; Bridgwater, Somerset; and Alvechurch, Worcestershire.

VIII Inputs/Supply businesses

- 1.** Bionema Group has reported major progress in its Innovate-UK funded Biofilm Tech programme to create a new generation of biological fertilizers capable of supporting multiple plant functions from a single integrated microbial system. Early results suggest stronger nutrient availability, improve crop resilience and consistent root activity across different soils and climates.
- 2.** Scientists in China have suggested that earthworms can reduce the harmful effects of microplastics in soil by promoting soil nutrient and organic matter cycling. They also promote an increase in the relative abundance of microbial communities involved in nitrogen, phosphorus and carbon cycling in soils contaminated with microplastics.
- 3.** The Agricultural Price Index for October shows falls of 0.8 per cent for seeds, compared to a year earlier, 1.3 per cent for chemicals, 2.9 per cent for animal feedingstuffs and 0.3 per cent for buildings maintenance but increases of 3.5 per cent for energy and lubricants, 15.3 per cent for fertilizers, 9.1 per cent for veterinary services and 6 per cent for equipment maintenance. Compared to September, there were falls of 0.1 per cent for seeds, 1.8 per cent for fertilizers, 1.2 per cent for chemical and 0.4 per cent for buildings maintenance but increases of 1.7 per cent for energy and lubricants, 0.4 per cent for veterinary services and 0.7 per cent for animal feedingstuffs.

Marketing

1. According to NIQ Homescan POD, Total GB, in 2025, sales of animal-based proteins shot up with poultry up £218.7m, cheese up £216.2m and eggs up £199.8m but the meat-free category fell back by £23.2m. Sales of fruit increased by £580.4m, including a 4.3 per cent increase in volumes. Strawberry sales increased by £125m, blueberries by £101.3m and grapes up £72.8m. Beef sales also grew but purely due to inflation as volume sales fell by 700 tonnes.
2. In the 52 weeks ending 29 November, according to NIQ Homescan POD, Total GB:
 - Volumes of cow dairy fell by 1.2 per cent but spend increased by 6.7 per cent driven by an 8 per cent increase in average prices.
 - Volumes of cows' milk fell by 2.6 per cent but spend increased by 2.4 per cent due to an average price increase of 5.1 per cent. Skimmed and semi-skimmed continued to decline but volumes of whole milk grew by 2.4 per cent and other cows' milk by 23.8 per cent.
 - Volume sales of cows' cheese grew by 1.7 per cent with spend up 5.8 per cent following an average price increase of 4.1 per cent. Cheddar volumes rose 0.3 per cent, others, such as quark and cottage cheese, by 7.5 per cent, specialty and continental by 3.3 per cent and snacking by 2.8 per cent but British regionals, processed, Stilton and British blue all recorded falls.
 - Volumes of cows' butter continued to fall, down 2.2 per cent, although spend was up 9.7 per cent as average prices increased by 12.2 per cent. Block butter volumes increased by 5.5 per cent but spreads fell by the same percentage.
 - Volumes of cows' yoghurt, yoghurt drinks and fromage frais grew by 6.3 per cent with spend up 11.5 per cent and average prices up 4.9 per cent. Fat-free yoghurt continues to outperform, up 11.5 per cent, while volumes of standard plain yoghurt increased by 25 per cent.
 - Cows' cream grew volumes by 2 per cent despite a 9.9 per cent increase in average price. Sour cream volumes increased by 3.2 per cent, double by 3.2 per cent, aerosol by 2 per cent, clotted by 1.4 per cent and crème fraîche by 0.4 per cent.
3. In the 12 weeks to 30 November, according to Worldpanel by Numerator UK and with comparisons to a year ago:
 - Spend on beef increased by 10.8 per cent driven by a 19.3 per cent increase in average prices as volume sales fell by 7.1 per cent.
 - Volume sales of primary beef fell by 10.7 per cent with only stewing cuts showing an increase of 2.5 per cent.
 - Processed beef volumes fell by 7.7 per cent with burgers and grills down 5.3 per cent.
 - Added-value volumes fell by 4.6 per cent but ready-to-cook recorded a 15.9 per cent increase.

- Although average prices increased by 5.7 per cent, spend on lamb fell by 1.7 per cent with volumes down 7 per cent.
- Volume sales of primary lamb cuts fell by 7.5 per cent although steak volumes increased by 28.5 per cent. Roasting joints fell by 11.5 per cent but shoulder achieved an increase of 2.8 per cent.
- Processed lamb volumes registered an increase of 12.4 per cent with burgers and grills up 13.1 per cent.
- Added-value lamb volumes fell by 3.1 per cent although sous vide volumes grew by 0.4 per cent.
- Pig meat volumes increased by 2.8 per cent with belly up 2.2 per cent, fillet up 12.9 per cent, mince up 38.9 per cent, ribs up 3.6 per cent and roasting joints up 2.2 per cent.
- Processed pig meat volumes grew by 1.9 per cent with sausages up 2.9 per cent, sliced cooked meats up 0.8 per cent and gammon up 8.4 per cent.
- Added-value pig meat volumes were up 5.4 per cent with sous vide up 17.8 per cent.

4. Lidl has been crowned Retailer of the Year 2025 by British Berry Growers having increased its sales of British berries by 46 per cent. Lidl was also awarded Strawberry Retailer of the Year, following a 22 per cent increase in sales, and Raspberry Retailer of the Year, with sales up 46 per cent. Asda was crowned Blueberry Retailer of the Year, with sales up 239 per cent, while Aldi took the Blackberry Retailer of the Year award with sales up 66 per cent.

5. During September:

- UK pig meat imports were unchanged, compared to 2024, at 63,800 tonnes, but were down 4 per cent for the year, the lowest level since 2021.
- Exports fell to the lowest monthly level since January, at 22,316 tonnes, but were up 3 per cent for the year to date to 228,000 tonnes.

Miscellaneous

1. The Labour Rural Research Group has published Understanding Rural Britain in which, of 1,400 rural respondents, 74.4 per cent claimed they felt rural communities had been 'neglected' over the past 15 years.
2. Tesco has reported that it had supplied 10.8 million portions of fruit and vegetables during the first year of its Fruit & Veg for Schools programme supported by the British Nutrition Foundation. 94 per cent of teachers reported improved behaviour from children who took part in the scheme with an average increase in consumption of 7.4 per cent in Vitamin C, 4 per cent in Vitamin A, 3.6 per cent in fibre and 3 per cent in folate.

3. A survey conducted by food waste marketplace Too Good To Go of 2,000 adults has suggested that over 50 million brussel sprouts will have been binned at Christmas. 56 per cent of respondents admitted to overbuying elements of the Christmas dinner.
4. The Oxford Farming Conference has appointed three new directors, Vicky Robinson, Head of Sustainability at the Agricultural Industries Confederation; Dan Smith, Farm Manager and Consultant; and Corrina Urquhart, Chief Executive Officer of BASIS.
5. Amos Group (TAG) is to close its Llanllwni machinery depot in Carmarthenshire claiming a decline in the trade and manufacture of tractors.

Postscripts

Thank you to all who sent in the contents of their Christmas Cracker!!

1. Why should you never trust stairs? They're always up to something.
2. How do you measure a snake? In inches – they don't have feet.
3. Where should you go in the room if you're feeling cold? The corner – they're usually 90 degrees.
4. What do you call a belt with a watch on it? A waist of time.
5. How do you open a banana? With a mon-key.
6. What did the full glass say to the empty glass? You look drunk.
7. Why did the birthday boy wrap himself in paper? He wanted to live in the present.
8. What do you call sad coffee? Despresso.
9. What sound does a nut make when it sneezes? Ca-shew!
10. The past, present and future walked into a bar. It was tense.
11. Hear about the new restaurant called Karma? There's no menu: You get what you deserve.
12. Is Google male or female? Female, because it doesn't let you finish a sentence before making a suggestion.
13. Why can't you hear a pterodactyl go to the bathroom? Because the "P" is silent!
14. What do Alexander the Great and Winnie the Pooh have in common? Same middle name.
15. Why did the nurse need a red pen at work? In case she needed to draw blood.

- 16.** Where are average things manufactured? The satisfactory.
- 17.** What happened when the computer fell on the floor? It slipped a disk.
- 18.** What is a gust of wind's favourite colour? Blew.
- 19.** What type of flower should you not give on Valentine's Day? Cauli-flower.
- 20.** What is an insect's favourite sport? Cricket.
- 21.** When you look for something, why is it always in the last place you look? Because when you find it, you stop looking.
- 22.** What fruit do twins love? Pears!
- 23.** Who eats snails? People who don't like fast food!
- 24.** What is the strongest animal in the sea? Mussels!
- 25.** What kind of chicken is the funniest? A comedi-hen!
- 26.** How does a triceratops sit? On its tricera-bottom!
- 27.** What did the clock ask the watch? Hour you doing?
- 28.** Where do birds invest their money? The stork-market!

Batters she is – Batty most definitely not!!

The excellent Farming Profitability Review, conducted by Baroness Minette Batters, has been published. It is impossible to condense the contents of over 150 pages into just one, but what follows is a flavour of her recommendations:

- The Office for National Statistics should assess the value of agriculture and horticulture by including the value of primary and secondary processing.
- Defra to apply the 'Active Farmer Principle' to ensure funding in the Farming Budget only goes to farmers.
- A SOILSHOT+NATURE task force should develop a new funding stream to provide farmers with payments at least in line with median household's earnings.
- A consistent set of standardised metrics should be introduced instead of the existing multitude of metrics across different sectors.
- Corporate businesses should be required to report on their impact on nature.
- A Great British FARM Advisory Board to take a strategic approach to increase British ingredients in retail, catering, exports and public procurement.
- Exports of British produce to increase by 30 per cent by 2030.
- The UK to lead global standards on environment, welfare and labour rights and ensure imports meet standards applied to British produce.
- Enhance country-of-origin labelling.
- Extend the Groceries Supply Code of Practice to out-of-home and reduce the application threshold to businesses purchasing over £500 millions of produce.
- Establish Food and Drink England.
- Defra to work with AHDB, TIAH, UK Agri-Tech Centre and sector expertise to provide consolidated quality technical advice.
- Increase agricultural education from primary schools to universities.
- The Seasonal Worker Visa Scheme to be extended to cover the whole season.
- Legislate for the provision of longer-term tenancies and abolish Stamp Duty Land Tax implications.
- Extend capital allowance full expensing to all farming businesses and enhance the availability of the Annual Investment Allowance and the Structures and Buildings Allowance.
- Streamline grant application procedures.
- Develop a National Planning for Food Infrastructure Blueprint.
- Extend the Permitted Development Rights beyond 1000m² for livestock buildings for on-farm wind turbines and for on-farm reservoirs.

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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The MFU was edited from 1991 to 2006 by John Nix, Emeritus Professor of
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