HCC Market Bulletin

December 2023

This month's Market Bulletin takes a look at UK June 2023 survey results which were released mid-December, and how livestock numbers may impact on supply further down the line.

Glesni Phillips – Intelligence, Analysis and Business Insight Executive

CATTLE

Data recently released by Defra has revealed the total number of cattle and calves in the UK on 01 June 2023 stood at **9.56 million head**. This is a decrease of 0.8% (or 76,500 head) on the previous year, and continues with the general downward trend seen in the UK herd during recent years. The breeding herd* (beef and dairy) accounted for over a third of total cattle, but contracted by almost 2% to 3.2 million head. The driver for this was a near 5% decrease in size of the **beef breeding herd** to 1.4 million head – the smallest on record, and down 13% compared to 2013. Looking at the **dairy breeding herd**; numbers have remained relatively stable, with numbers down just 0.3% on June 2022 to 1.8 million head. In comparison, the dairy breeding herd is 3% larger than it was back in 2013.

The total number of female cattle aged 2 years or more fell by 1.5% on the year, whilst those aged between 1 and 2 years increased by almost 2% - due to a rise in both beef and dairy females within the category. Older male cattle aged over 2 years recorded a notable increase of over 6% on the year, whilst those aged between 1-2 years remained relatively stable on the year. Males aged under 12 months decreased by 3% on the year. These results would suggest that domestic beef production is unlikely to increase markedly in the short term, however an increase in the number of younger female cattle (particularly in the 1-2year age group) may lead to improved supplies during the longer term.

Total number of cattle and calves in the UK *(June 2023)*

9.56 million head
-0.8%

**a breeding cow in the context of this release is defined as a cow that has calved.*

SHEEP

The Defra figures show that the total number of sheep and lambs in the UK as of 01 June 2023 stood at **31.8 million head**. This is a notable decrease of 4% (or 1.4 million head) on the year following two consecutive years of increases. The current flock size is the smallest on record since 2011, with the recent decline driven by decreases in all sheep categories. The overall size of the **female breeding flock** fell by 2% to 15.4 million head, with those intended for first time breeding driving this decline – down 6% on the year.

Due to high farm input costs during the last 18-months or so, it was anticipated that there would be higher culling rates, and therefore fewer ewes for breeding. Scanning rates were also reportedly low at the start of 2023 due to weather and ewe conditions, and so fewer lambs on the ground were to be expected. The UK June survey results indicates the number of **lambs on the ground** (aged under one year old) fell by almost a million head on the year to stand at 15.5 million head (a decrease of 6%) – this level is also 6% lower than levels seen in 2021. Looking at the lamb crop year (May 2023 – April 2024), around 7.2 million lambs have already been processed at UK abattoirs, which is around 1% higher than the corresponding period last year. As a result, it is expected that supply will be tighter during the remaining months, given the size of the current lamb crop.

Total number of sheep and lambs in the UK *(June 2023)*

31.8 million head
-4%

PIGS

As of 01 June 2023, the total number of pigs in the UK stood at **4.7 million head** – a 10% decrease (or 537,100 head) on the previous year. Pig numbers have therefore fallen below the 5-million mark for the first time in 5 years. The decrease in the herd was driven by a notable 11% fall in the number of **fattening pigs**, to 4.3 million head. The number of **breeding pigs** remained relatively stable in comparison, with numbers standing at 427,850 head – down just 0.2% on the year. A notable drop in fattening pig numbers will undoubtedly cause decreased production within the UK.

Total number of pigs in the UK *(June 2023)*

4.7 million head
-10%

June 2023 survey results for Wales:

- Total number of cattle & calves = 1.1 million head (down 1% on the year)
- Total number of sheep & lambs = 8.7 million head (down 7% on the year)
- Total number of pigs = 24,800 head (down 8% on the year)

Source: 'Survey of agriculture and horticulture, June 2023'

Monthly Market Round-Up

CATTLE

Prices – week ending 16th December

The prime cattle average price at auction markets in England and Wales stood at **270.2p/kg**. This was:

- - 9.5p on the previous week,
- + 16.2p compared with year-earlier levels,
- 55.5p higher than the 5-year average (2018-22 average: 214.6p/kg).

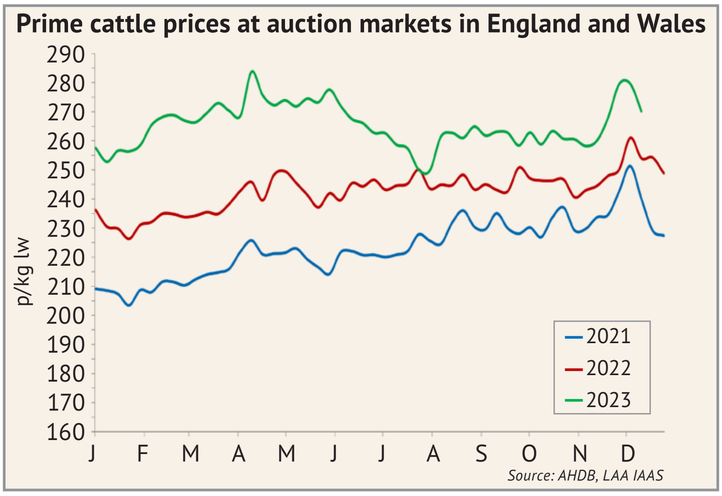
The average deadweight prices in England and Wales for steers stood at **480.4p/kg**. This was:

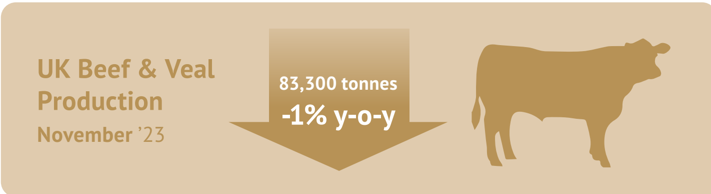
- + 1.3p on the previous week,
- 40.7p above year-earlier levels.

The deadweight prices for heifers stood at 475.7p/kg (+2.5p on the week), young bulls at 459.8p/kg (+3.8p), and cull cows at 289.6p/kg (-0.3p).

Throughput – November 2023

- Total cattle throughput at UK abattoirs = 258,800 head – down 1% on the year.
- Total prime cattle throughput = 183,900 head – similar on the year.
    - ➢ *steers -1%, heifers +1%, and young bulls -1%.*
- Average prime cattle carcase weights = 338.8kg (-1.4kg on the year).
- Adult cattle throughput = 66,300 head – down 4% on the year.





SHEEP

Prices – week ending 16th December

The prime lamb average liveweight SQQ at auction markets in Wales stood at **256.0p/kg**. This was:

- + 5.0p on the previous week,
- + 28.4p compared with year-earlier levels,
- 41.3p above the 5-year average (2018-22 average: 209.6p/kg).

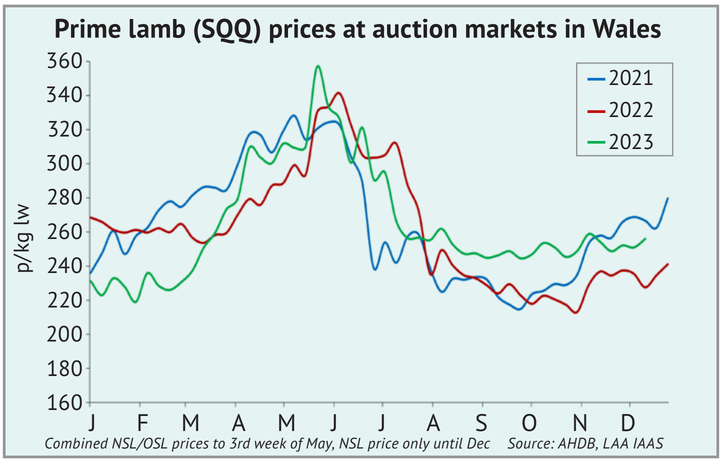
Cull ewe prices at auction markets in Wales averaged **£73.20/head**. This was:

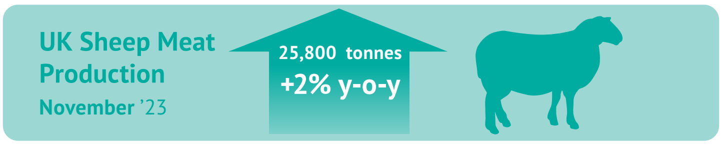
- + £2.00 on the previous week,
- £4.20 above year-earlier levels.

GB deadweight lamb prices averaged 585.3p/kg (-0.5p on the week).

Throughput – November 2023

- Total sheep throughput at UK abattoirs = 1.3 million head – up 2% on the year.
- Lamb throughput = 1.1 million head – up 3% on the year.
- Average lamb carcase weights = 19.6kg (-0.1kg on the year).
- Cull ewe and ram throughput = 129,600 head – down 4% on the year.





PIGS

Prices – week ending 9th December

The EU-spec All Pig Price (APP) in GB stood at **215.5p/kg**. This was:

- + 1.5p on the previous week,
- + 10.2p compared with year-earlier levels,
- 51.6p higher than the 5-year average (2018-22 average: 163.9p/kg).

Throughput – November 2023

- Total pig throughput at UK abattoirs = 930,800 head – down 5% on the year.
- Clean pig throughput = 910,500 head – down 5% on the year.
- Average clean pig carcase weights = 90.3kg (+0.9kg on the year)
- Sow and boar throughput = 20,200 head – up 7% on the year.