HCC Market Bulletin

January 2025

This month's Market Bulletin takes a look at slaughter and production trends for 2024 as a whole following the recently released throughput figures from Defra.

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CATTLE

According to newly released figures from Defra, **2.85 million** cattle were processed at UK abattoirs in 2024 - a 3% increase (or 83,800 head) compared to 2023, and 2% above the 2019–23 average of 2.85 million head. This marks the highest annual throughput in recent years, resembling levels last seen in 2011 (of 2.84 million head). Consequently, beef and veal production reached **933,800 tonnes**, up 4% year-on-year and 2% above the five-year average.

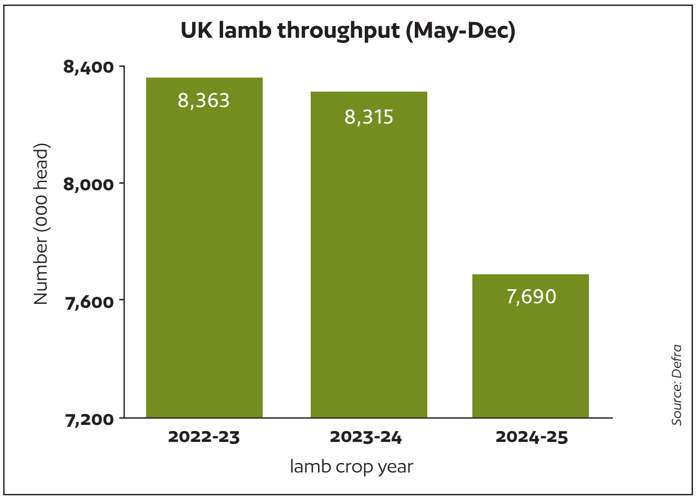
The increase aligns with BCMS population data predicting ample supply, as highlighted in the Cattle Supply report we released in April here. Most categories of cattle recorded a year-on-year increase in slaughter levels, with heifers recording the largest increase where 52,900 more were processed than in 2023, suggesting low retention rates within the UK herd. This trend may also reflect increased uptake of sexed semen in the dairy industry during recent years, which is likely contributing to an overall increase in the number of heifers in the UK. Prime cattle throughput rose by 4% to 2.1 million head, driven by a 3% rise in steers and whilst young bull numbers were stable. Alongside this, adult cattle throughput increased by 2% on the year to a total of 644,900 cattle.

Looking to 2025; the potential supply of cattle in GB may tighten somewhat, though the current strong deadweight prices may encourage more to market. Beyond 2025, the decline in the younger cattle age category (as discussed in our previous report) does suggest there may be fewer slaughter-ready animals becoming available in 2026 and beyond.

SHEEP

According to data from Defra, UK abattoirs processed **12.85 million** sheep and lambs in 2024, an 8% (1.1 million head) drop year-on-year and 9% below the 2019–2023 average of 14.1 million head. This marks the lowest sheep slaughter levels in years. The slaughter level of adult sheep was also at its lowest since 2020 at 1.4 million sheep, which is 13% lower on the year. As a result, sheep meat production fell by 7% to **266,000 tonnes** – which is also 9% below the five-year average.

Prime lamb throughput during each month of 2024 (*bar Jan & Feb*) trended below year-earlier levels. As a result, the total throughput of lambs at UK abattoirs during 2024 dropped 7% (or 876,600 head) to 11.4 million head. This is significantly lower than historical records, and is similar to lamb throughput recorded in 2001. Industry reports suggest lamb losses were higher in 2024 reflecting losses from adverse weather and increased disease during lambing, such as Schmallenberg virus. The reduced lamb crop will likely impact the breeding flock's future size. Looking at the lamb crop year (May '24 and April '25); lamb throughput between May and December was 7.7 million head – 7.5% below 2023 levels. Given the size of the current UK lamb crop, throughput levels are lower than anticipated, therefore looking at the remainder of the current lamb crop, the market will likely experience a slight increase in supply during the first few months of 2025 as the remaining lamb crop comes to market.



PIGS

In 2024, UK abattoirs processed **10.5 million** pigs, a 3% year-on-year increase but 5% below the 2019-23 average. Clean pigs accounted for 10.3 million, while 209,000 sows and boars were processed. Pigmeat production totalled **960,800 tonnes**, up 4% from 2023 but 3% below the five-year average of 988,900 tonnes.

2024 throughput data for Wales:

>Cattle & calves = 189,600 head (*+10% on the year*)

>Sheep & lambs = 1.9m head (*-20% on the year*)

>Pigs = 21,600 head (*+1% on the year*)

Source: Defra

What does this mean for industry?

While beef production saw strong growth in 2024, future supply may tighten which could result in stronger farmgate prices. Sheep meat production, on the other hand, experienced a significant decline due to weather and disease impacts, which may constrain supply in 2025 and beyond.

It must be noted that the monthly throughput figures provided by Defra are provisional, and may be revised at a later date.

CATTLE

Prices – week ending 25th January

The average deadweight prices in England and Wales for steers stood at **585.9p/kg**. This was:

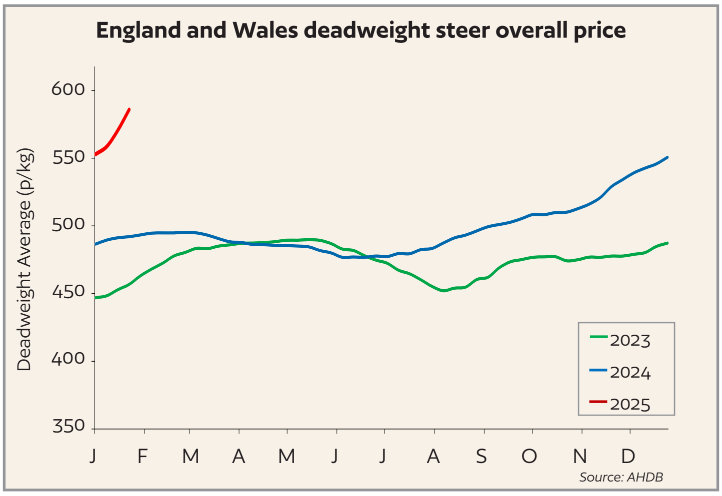
- + 15.1p on the previous week,
- 93.8p above year-earlier levels.

The deadweight prices for other cattle categories were as follows -

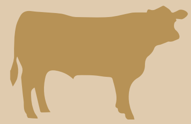
- Heifers: 581.5p/kg (+14.2p on the week),
- Young bulls: 567.9p/kg (+19.0p on the week), and
- Cull cows: 421.6p/kg (+17.9p on the week).

Throughput - December 2024

- Total cattle throughput at UK abattoirs = 212,300 head – up 3% on the year.
- Total prime cattle throughput = 156,200 head – up 4% on the year.
  - ➢ *steers +2%, heifers +6%, and young bulls -4%*
- Average prime cattle carcase weights = 339.9kg (-0.2kg on the year).
- Adult cattle throughput = 51,100 head – up 1% on the year.



UK Beef & Veal Production
December '24
69,200 tonnes
+3% y-o-y



SHEEP

Prices – week ending 25th January

The deadweight lamb price in GB averaged **731.2p/kg**. This was:

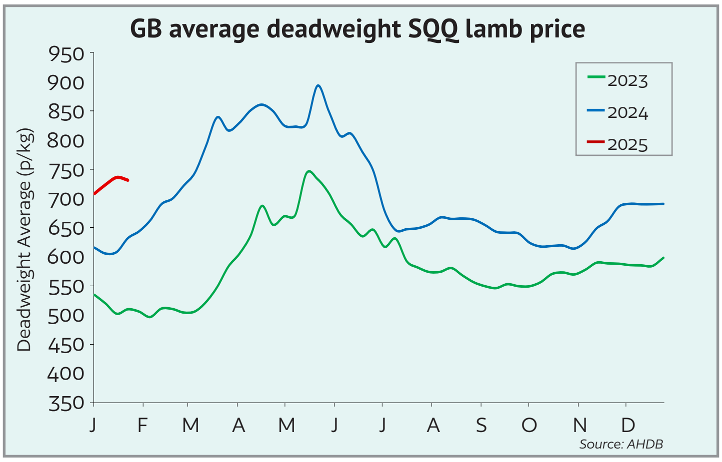
- - 4.8p on the previous week
- + 99.4p compared with year-earlier levels,
- 178.2p higher than the 5-year average (2020-24 average: 553.0p/kg).

Numbers coming forward reached 34,000 head. This was:

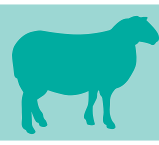
- - 4% on the previous week, and

Throughput - December 2024

- Total sheep throughput at UK abattoirs = 1.2 million head – down 5% on the year.
- Lamb throughput = 1.1 million head – down 5% on the year.
- Average lamb carcase weights = 19.6kg (+0.2kg on the year).
- Cull ewe and ram throughput = 118,300 head – down 9% on the year.



UK Sheep Meat Production
December '24
24,500 tonnes
-5% y-o-y



PIGS

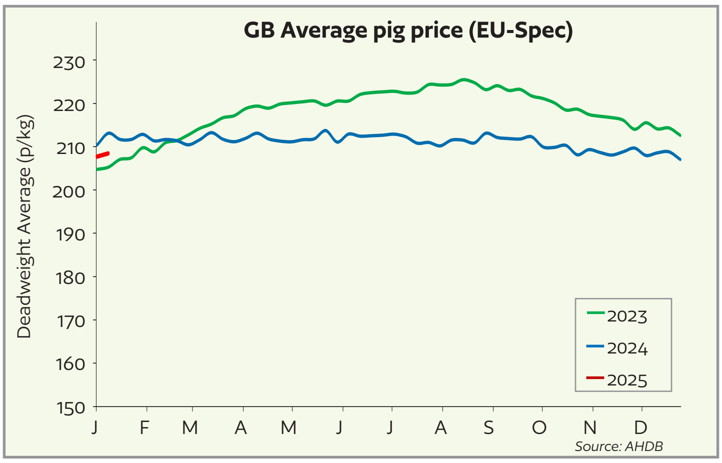
Prices – week ending 11th January

The EU-spec All Pig Price (APP) in GB stood at 208.4p/kg. This was:

- + 0.7p on the previous week,
- - 4.7p compared with year-earlier levels,
- 32.9p higher than the 5-year average (2018-22 average: 175.5p/kg).

Throughput – December 2024

- Total pig throughput at UK abattoirs = 864,400 head – up 10% on the year.
- Clean pig throughput = 851,600 head – up 10% on the year.
- Average clean pig carcase weights = 88.5kg (-0.4kg on the year)
- Sow and boar throughput = 12,800 head – down 25% on the year.



UK Pork Production
December '24
77,300 tonnes
+9% y-o-y