

“ Herd performance indicators, along with estimates on cost of production are key for providing insight into the productivity and efficiency of the suckler herd in Wales. ”
This Market Bulletin takes a look at the BCMS and FBS data in greater detail.

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BEEF

According to the latest data from the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS), the **average calving interval** for beef dams in Wales was **420 days in 2024**. This is relatively stable when compared to the average interval during the previous year, and looking at historical trends, this is some 12 days shorter than in 2014. Despite the progress seen over the last decade, there remains to be room for improvement to reach the 365-day target between calvings. Insufficient growth rates or unmanaged fertility within herds may cause longer calving intervals, whereas shorter intervals would in turn improve herd profitability by maximizing the number of calves possible in a dam's lifetime.

The **average age at first calving** can also impact the suckler herd's reproductive efficiency as the calf is the enterprise's primary output. In 2024, the average age at first calving for beef dams in Wales stood at **964 days** (or 31.7 months). This is an improvement on the year, as the average dam is now calving 11 days younger than in 2023, and a notable 98 days younger than the average recorded back in 2014. Although there remains to be some room for improvement to reach the industry target of calving nearer to 24 months (or 730 days), beef herds in Wales have shown significant progress during the last decade. Managing heifers effectively so they calve at a younger age can increase profit and reduce production costs, with evidence suggesting heifers would wean more weight of calf over the course of their productive lifespan.

Average calving interval for beef dams in Wales, 2024:



Average age at first calving for beef dams in Wales, 2024:



Reproductive efficiency is fundamental for profitability, regardless of the production system, and improving efficiencies can all support a reduction in the herd GHG emission levels, whilst also improving business profits.

PROFITABILITY

Suckler Beef Production Costs in Wales 2023/24:

p/kg liveweight	Average Performers	Bottom Third	Top Third
Total Costs	227.9	332.0	140.4
Market Returns	210.5	211.0	217.6
% Total Costs Covered by Market Returns	92.4	63.5	155.0

Source: Farm Business Survey

The Farm Business Survey publishes annual **cost of production** figures, which provides insight into the financial performance of beef herds in Wales. For the 2023/24, the data highlights that the top third performing herds had an **overall cost of 140.4p/kg**, and produced more kilograms per cow than the bottom performing herds at 300kg (compared to 277kg for the bottom third). The top third performing herds recorded lower costs for both *variable* and *fixed* costs, which then led to an overall difference of 191.6p/kg between the top and bottom third performing herds in terms of *total* costs. As the market returns were similar for all three categories of performers, this does suggest that the focus should be on managing costs on farm in order to maximize profitability of suckler herds in Wales.

What does this mean for industry?

The main output from a beef suckler herd is the suckled calf, and therefore good cow management is key to optimizing herd fertility in order to produce a healthy suckler calf each year. Improving the reproductive efficiency of the suckler herd would also help to manage on farm costs and overall profitability of the business.

Monthly Market Round-Up

CATTLE

Prices – week ending 22nd March

The average deadweight prices in England and Wales for steers stood at **673.1p/kg**. This was:

- + 9.8p on the previous week,
- 182.5p above year-earlier levels.

The deadweight prices for other cattle categories were as follows -

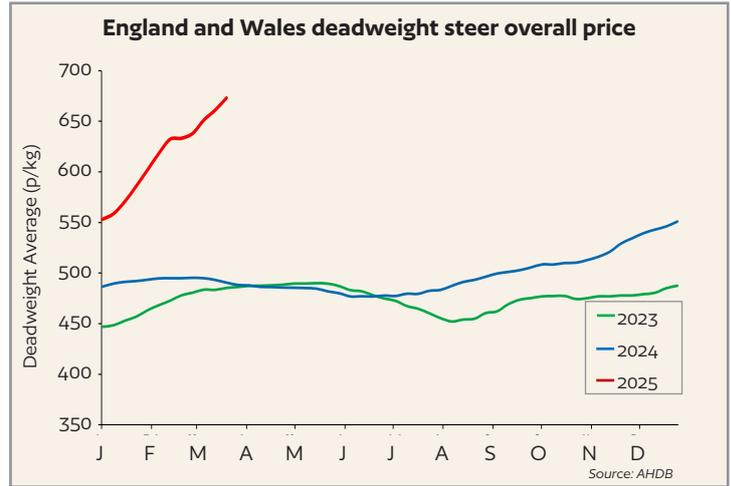
- Heifers: 668.4p/kg (+10.7p on the week),
- Young bulls: 653.5p/kg (+10.1p on the week), and
- Cull cows: 498.1p/kg (+6.5p on the week).

Throughput – February 2025

- Total cattle throughput at UK abattoirs = 222,200 head – down 5% on the year.
- Total prime cattle throughput = 165,300 head – down 5% on the year.

➤ steers -7%, heifers -2%, and young bulls -6%

- Average prime cattle carcass weights = 343.3kg (-1.9kg on the year).
- Adult cattle throughput = 51,200 head – down 4% on the year.



UK Beef & Veal Production
February '25

73,400 tonnes
-5% y-o-y



SHEEP

Prices – week ending 22nd March

The deadweight lamb price in GB averaged **730.5p/kg**. This was:

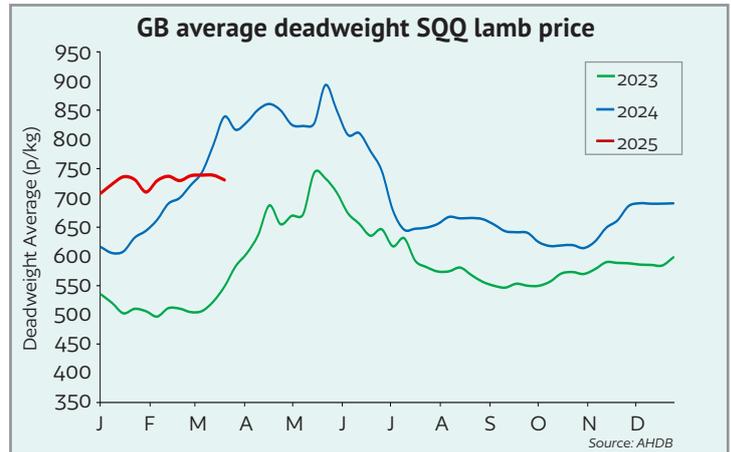
- - 8.2p on the previous week
- - 108.3p compared with year-earlier levels,
- 101.7p higher than the 5-year average (2020-24 average: 628.8p/kg).

Numbers coming forward reached 29,000 head. This was:

- + 2% on the previous week
- - 30% compared with year-earlier levels

Throughput – February 2025

- Total sheep throughput at UK abattoirs = 981,600 head – down 5% on the year.
- Lamb throughput = 875,900 head – down 4% on the year.
- Average lamb carcass weights = 20.4kg (+0.1kg on the year).
- Cull ewe and ram throughput = 105,700 head – down 12% on the year.



UK Sheep Meat Production
February '25

20,600 tonnes
-5% y-o-y



PIGS

Prices – week ending 22nd March

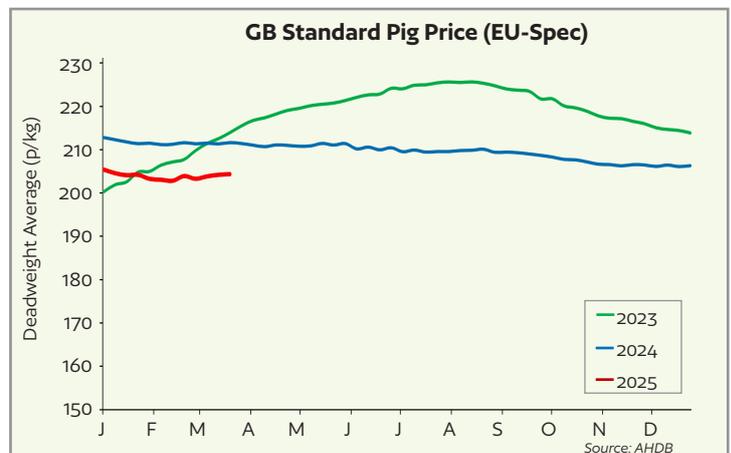
The EU-spec Standard Pig Price (SPP)* in GB stood at **204.4p/kg**. This was:

- + 0.2p on the previous week,
- - 7.2p compared with year-earlier levels,
- 30.4p higher than the 5-year average (2020-24 average: 174.0p/kg).

*Note: the APP is currently unavailable as the data does not meet validation thresholds. The SPP (which uses different data sources) is unaffected.

Throughput – February 2025

- Total pig throughput at UK abattoirs = 849,000 head – up 2% on the year.
- Clean pig throughput = 833,000 head – up 3% on the year.
- Average clean pig carcass weights = 91.9kg (+1.4kg on the year)
- Sow and boar throughput = 16,100 head – down 13% on the year.



UK Pork Production
February '25

79,100 tonnes
+4% y-o-y

