Hybu Cig Cymru
Meat Promotion Wales

HCC Market Bulletin

February 2026

"HMRC has recently released UK trade figures for December 2025. This month's Market Bulletin looks at the trade figures for 2025 as a whole in greater detail."

Glesni Phillips – Market Intelligence Executive

According to Defra data, UK beef production in 2025 decreased by 3%, while sheep meat production rose by 2%, and pig meat production by 3%. The fall in beef output was driven by a 5% reduction in total cattle throughput, whilst sheep and lamb slaughterings remained stable at around 12.9 million head, with heavier carcase weights supporting overall production growth. These shifts in domestic production likely influenced product availability for export and contributed to notable changes in red meat trade dynamics during 2025.

BEEF

According to HMRC data, UK beef **exports** totalled 111,500 tonnes in 2025, a marginal decline of just under 1% year-on-year. Despite the slight fall in volume, export value increased by 28% to £727 million, indicating significantly firmer average prices. This reflects continued strength in global beef markets, underpinned by tight supplies across key producing regions. Lower shipments to the Netherlands and Hong Kong weighed on overall volumes. However, Ireland strengthened its position as the UK's largest export destination, with volumes rising 9% to almost 35,500 tonnes and its market share increasing from 29% to 32%. Reduced domestic production is likely to have constrained overall exportable availability.

Imports *volumes* remained broadly stable at 241,700 tonnes (+0.4%), while the value of imports rose sharply by 28% to £1.8 billion, reflecting strong global price levels. Ireland remained the largest supplier, though its share declined from 77% in 2024 to 67% in 2025, with volumes falling 13% year-on-year. In contrast, shipments from New Zealand, Australia and Brazil increased, collectively supplying an additional 30,000 tonnes and accounting for 85% of non-EU imports (up from 70% in 2024). This shift suggests some diversification of supply, potentially reflecting tighter Irish availability and competitive pricing from southern hemisphere exporters.

SHEEP MEAT

In 2025, UK sheep meat **exports** totalled around 86,700 tonnes, up 9% year-on-year and the highest level since 2020. Export value rose by 12% to £655.2 million, supported by firm domestic and international price levels. The modest increase in production, aided by heavier carcase weights, helped underpin export availability. Growth was recorded across both EU and non-EU markets, with France and Belgium seeing notable increases.

UK **imports** increased by 3% to 69,900 tonnes - the highest level since 2018. The rise was driven primarily by a 7,000-tonne increase in shipments from Australia, taking volumes to almost 29,000 tonnes. This expansion likely reflects improved Australian production and the continued phased implementation of expanded tariff-free access under the UK–Australia Free Trade Agreement. By contrast, New Zealand volumes declined by 10% year-on-year, although the country still accounted for over half of total UK sheep meat imports. The relative reduction may reflect structural changes in New Zealand's sheep flock and limited scope for further expansion in an already well-established UK market.

PORK

UK pork **exports** rose by 5% in 2025, totalling 127,900 tonnes, whilst the value of these exports fell by 5% to £237.5 million, indicating softer average prices.

UK **imports** declined by 6% to just shy of 320,700 tonnes, whilst the value fell more sharply by 12%, again reflecting easing price levels. Germany accounted for the majority of the reduction in imports, with volumes down 40% year-on-year, partially offset by increased shipments from Belgium and Denmark.

Trade in Wales

In 2025, the total value of red meat (fresh/frozen) exports from Wales reached an estimated £326.3 million – 17% higher than in 2024. Sheep meat exports were estimated to be 9% higher reaching almost 30,000 tonnes, with the value of these shipments also rising by 13%. Beef however experienced a 1% fall in the volume shipped to just shy of 16,000 tonnes, whilst export value was some 28% higher (likely driven by stronger farmgate prices).

source: HCC estimates based on HMRC data

What does this mean for industry?

Firm global demand and elevated prices supported trade values in 2025, although tighter domestic beef supplies limited export growth. The diversification of beef imports and rising Australian sheep meat volumes highlight increasing international competition. Global market dynamics and expanding trade access continue to shape opportunities and competitive pressures for UK red meat producers. global supply dynamics and trade policy will remain key influences on UK red meat markets moving forward.

CATTLE

Prices – week ending 21st February

The average deadweight prices in England and Wales for steers stood at **635.5p/kg**. This was:

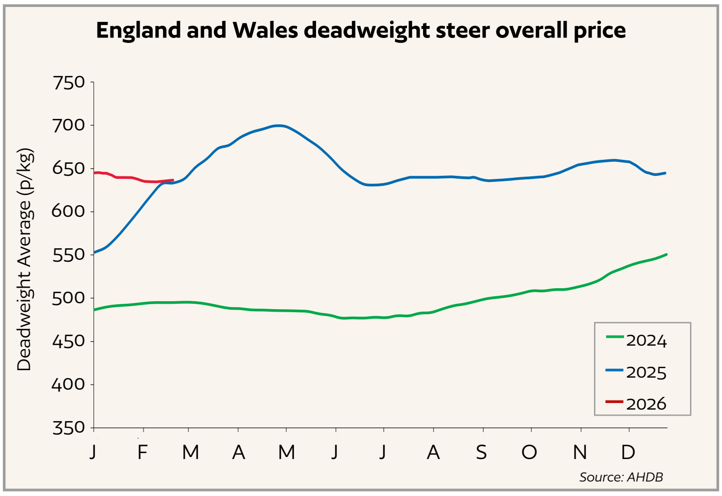
- + 0.5p on the previous week,
- 2.3p above year-earlier levels.

The deadweight prices for other cattle categories were as follows -

- Heifers: 634.4p/kg (+2.4p on the week),
- Young bulls: 617.9p/kg (+5.1p on the week), and
- Cull cows: 507.3p/kg (-2.5p on the week).

Throughput – January 2026

- Total cattle throughput at UK abattoirs = 223,300 head – down 3% on the year.
- Total prime cattle throughput = 163,300 head – down 4% on the year.
  - ➢ *steers -5%, heifers -3%, and young bulls +2%*
- Average prime cattle carcase weights = 353.5kg (+11kg on the year).
- Adult cattle throughput = 54,900 head – down 2% on the year.



UK Beef & Veal Production
January '26
75,600 tonnes
-1% y-o-y

SHEEP

Prices – week ending 21st February

The deadweight* lamb price in GB averaged **723.8p/kg**. This was:

- +10.8p on the previous week
- -5.7p compared with year-earlier levels,
- 96.8p higher than the 5-year average (2021-25 average: 627.0p/kg).

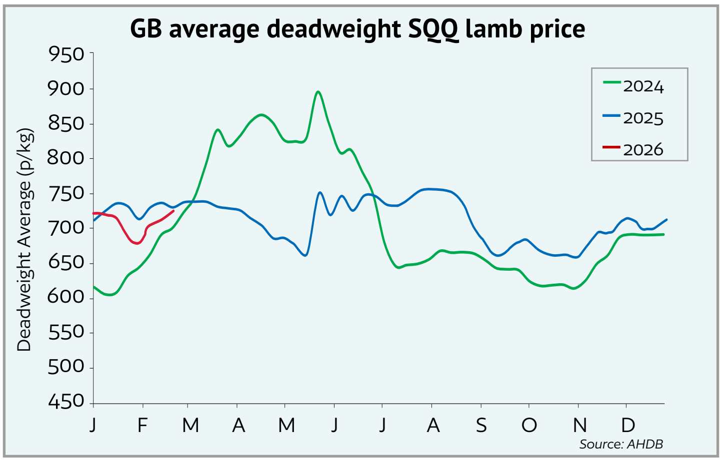
Numbers coming forward reached 28,000 head. This was:

- -11% on the previous week
- - 11% compared with year-earlier levels

**Note: Old season lambs are shown from 1 January to the third Monday in May and new season lambs thereafter.*

Throughput – January 2026

- Total sheep throughput at UK abattoirs = 977,400 head – down 4% on the year.
- Lamb throughput = 875,900 head – down 3% on the year.
- Average lamb carcase weights = 21.1kg (+ 1kg).
- Cull ewe and ram throughput = 101,500 head – down 7% on the year.



UK Sheep Meat Production
January '26
21,400 tonnes
+0.5% y-o-y

PIGS

Prices – week ending 21st February

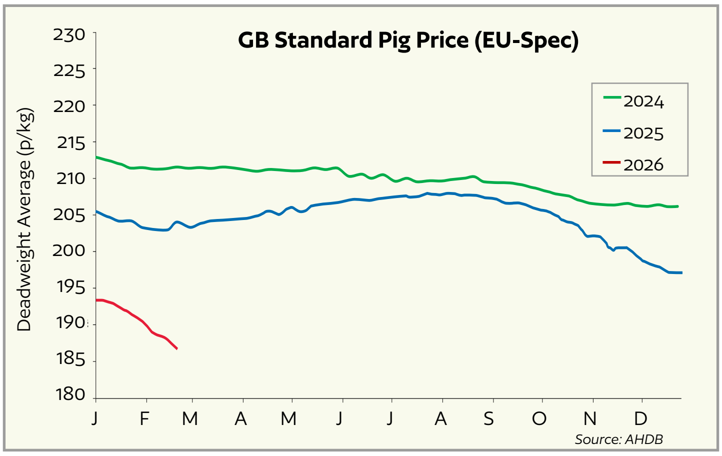
The EU-spec Standard Pig Price (SPP)* in GB stood at **186.6p/kg**. This was:

- -1.5p on the previous week,
- - 17.4p compared with year-earlier levels,
- 32.3p higher than the 5-year average (2021-25 average: 171.6p/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 – January 2026

- Total pig throughput at UK abattoirs = 889,500 head – down 3% on the year.
- Clean pig throughput = 871,800 head – down 3% on the year.
- Average clean pig carcase weights = 94.7kg (+3.1kg on the year)
- Sow and boar throughput = 17,700 head – down 2% on the year.



UK Pork Production
January '26
85,300 tonnes
+0.1% y-o-y