# Scotland’s livestock farms face crisis as profits plunge and animal numbers fall



A significant downturn in Scotland's livestock farming sector has prompted urgent warnings from industry leaders about the potential disappearance of cattle and sheep from the fields. Recent data reveals that the average livestock farm in Scotland generated only £2,600 in profits last year, marking a dramatic decline from the average income of £35,000 reported in 2012/13. Alarmingly, two-thirds of livestock farms recorded financial losses, heightening fears for the future of rural communities reliant on farming.

Andrew Connon, President of NFU Scotland (National Farmers' Union), expressed grave concern over the situation, describing it as a 'vicious circle' that threatens the livelihood of farmers. He stated, “Figures for falling farm income are a serious concern and highlight the deepening financial pressures facing Scotland’s food producers.” Connon emphasised the role of agriculture as the backbone of the rural economy, impacting not just farmers but a wide network of associated businesses, including feed manufacturers, veterinary services, and transport companies.

The stark economic realities of livestock farming have been detailed in a recent report from the Scottish Government. This report highlights a decrease in the overall number of cattle and sheep in Scotland, with the number of cows falling to 1.7 million, a significant drop from the 2.7 million recorded in 1974. Similarly, sheep numbers fell to a new low of 6.5 million, down from 6.7 million in 2012.

These figures follow a disturbing trend, as the census revealed an overall decline in the number of farmers in Scotland, decreasing from 40,957 in 2012 to just 34,907 in 2023. Additionally, only 45 per cent of farmers reported being able to pay their staff the minimum agricultural wage, set at £10.19 per hour in 2023.

The NFU Scotland has further noted that just 17 per cent of own-label products in major supermarkets are sourced from Scotland, despite the strong demand for local produce. Imports from abroad have also increased by 6 per cent in the past year, raising questions about the sustainability of local livestock farming.

Connon has urged both retailers and consumers to prioritise Scottish produce to help safeguard the future of the farming sector. He remarked, “Our members are proud to produce food to some of the highest standards in the world. People need to show that those standards matter - by choosing Scottish products in their shopping baskets.”

The NFU has called upon the nation's eight major supermarket chains to adopt a 'Scottish First' sourcing policy and ensure that producers receive fair prices for their goods. In a bid to bolster the future of the agriculture sector, Connon insists that a collective effort from all parts of the supply chain is essential: “The wider supply chain must play its part by delivering a fairer return to Scotland’s primary producers, many of whom face crippling cost pressures and reduced margins.”

As the challenges facing Scotland's livestock farmers intensify, the call for action from both consumers and retailers becomes increasingly critical for the sustainability of the region's agricultural landscape.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-farm-business-income-annual-estimates-2022-2023/pages/average-livestock-farm-income-fell/> - This Scottish Government report details a 10% decrease in average livestock farm income in 2022-23, with lowland livestock farms experiencing a 43% decline, corroborating the article's claim of a significant downturn in Scotland's livestock farming sector.
* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/results-scottish-agricultural-census-june-2023/pages/continuing-decline-in-cattle-numbers/> - The Scottish Agricultural Census reveals a 3% decline in cattle numbers in 2023 compared to the five-year average, supporting the article's assertion of a decrease in the overall number of cattle in Scotland.
* <https://www.gov.scot/publications/results-scottish-agricultural-census-june-2023/pages/key-points/> - This publication highlights a 2% decrease in sheep numbers in 2023 compared to the five-year average, aligning with the article's mention of a decline in sheep numbers in Scotland.
* <https://www.fwi.co.uk/business/markets-and-trends/meat-prices/falling-stock-numbers-in-scotland-raise-fears-for-farmers> - An article from Farmers Weekly discusses the decline in cattle, sheep, and pig numbers in Scotland, highlighting concerns among farmers about the future of livestock farming in the region.
* <https://www.nfus.org.uk/news/news/nfu-scotland-concerned-over-scottish-farm-income-figures> - NFU Scotland expresses concern over the sharp decline in farm incomes, particularly among livestock producers, emphasizing the financial pressures facing Scotland's food producers.
* <https://www.farminguk.com/news/improved-productivity-in-scotland-helping-to-counteract-livestock-declines_63672.html> - This article discusses how improved productivity in Scotland is helping to counteract livestock declines, providing context to the challenges and responses within the sector.
* <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14675401/Could-farms-cash-crisis-really-cattle-sheep-disappear-Scotlands-fields.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data