

Red Meat Industry Profile 2025

Background

The Scottish Red Meat Industry Profile highlights the importance of the sector to Scotland's rural economy. It provides stakeholders with up-to-date statistics on farming, processing, consumption and trade, helping to improve transparency across the supply chain.

In 2024, Scotland's red meat sector contributed a record £2.7 billion in direct output, rising to £3.5 billion when wider economic impacts are included. This reflects growth in farmgate prices for beef and lamb, recovery in pig production, and stable processing activity. However, the profile also points to underlying challenges from declining livestock numbers, elevated input costs, and labour market pressures, which pose long-term risks to supply, competitiveness, and rural communities.



Key Findings

- £2.7bn direct output, rising to £3.5bn total economic impact in 2024 – record contribution to Scotland's economy.
- Beef cows down 3.6% in 2024, and 15% over 10 years; ewe flock also declining after two difficult lambing seasons.
- Costs remain high – farm inputs nearly 30% above pre-Covid levels, processing costs 32% higher.
- Strong market demand – UK supplies of beef, lamb and pork all increased in 2024 through higher production and imports.

Record Economic Impact

Scotland's red meat industry continues to deliver significant value for the economy. Farming and processing activity generated **£2.7 billion in direct output in 2024**, a 2% increase on the previous year. When wider supply chain effects are included, the sector's contribution rises to **£3.5 billion**.

This makes the red meat supply chain a **vital part of Scotland's rural economy**, supporting jobs and communities across farming, processing, haulage and retail.

Falling Livestock Numbers

The national beef herd has seen further contraction. **Beef cow numbers fell by 3.6% in 2024**, bringing the ten-year decline to **15%**. This trend underlines the challenges facing beef production, with implications for long-term supply and processing capacity.

The **ewe flock is also under pressure**, though the decline has been slower. Two consecutive difficult lambing seasons have compounded pressures on sheep producers, affecting output and profitability.

Costs Remain Elevated

Producers and processors continue to face a high-cost environment. While input prices eased slightly during 2024, they remain **nearly 30% higher than pre-Covid levels**.

For processors, the situation is similar. **Operating costs are around 32% above pre-Covid benchmarks**, squeezing margins and placing strain on businesses across the supply chain.

Strong Market Demand

Despite these challenges, market demand remains firm. Supplies of beef, lamb and pork to the UK market all **increased in 2024**, reflecting a combination of higher domestic production and increased imports.

This resilience of demand demonstrates the continued importance of red meat to UK consumers. However, reliance on imports to supplement UK supply highlights the importance of supporting domestic production.

Summary

Scotland's red meat industry is both resilient and under pressure. It continues to deliver record economic value, meet strong consumer demand, and sustain thousands of rural jobs. Yet the persistent challenges of falling livestock numbers and elevated costs pose risks to long-term supply and competitiveness.

The 2025 profile underscores a critical balance: while the sector's contribution to Scotland's economy and food security is stronger than ever, structural pressures must be addressed if this position is to be maintained.