

ENGLISH FARMING IN CONTEXT

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Introduction

Probably the easiest way to begin an appreciation of English farming is to consider it in the context of the United Kingdom. A summary statistical appraisal of farming structure in the UK and in its four constituent countries is provided by Tables 1-4.

There are less than 200,000 farms in the UK that are identified by their occupants as belonging to any recognisable commercial type. The most commonly occurring type of farm rears cattle and/or sheep in part of the country identified as a Less Favoured Area (LFA); which is generally to say located in the hills and uplands. Somewhat less than half of the UK's agricultural land (43.7%) and just below a third of the UK's farm holdings (29%) are in these LFA's. Of the lowland (i.e. non-LFA) agricultural area, the overwhelming majority (79.6%) is in England as are most of the lowland farm holdings (75.4%). Overall, more than half (62.3%) of the UK's farms are in England.

Two Agricultures and Four Countries

It is reasonable as well as convenient to identify two agricultures in the UK: the agriculture of the LFA's, with holdings fairly evenly spread in number across the four countries; and the agriculture of the lowlands, overwhelmingly concentrated in England. Another way of looking at this is to observe that English farming is predominantly lowland agriculture, 84.4% of England's farmland and 86.4% of the holdings are in the lowlands; whilst farmland in the other countries of the kingdom is predominantly in LFA's (78.6% in Wales; 75.8% in Scotland; 70% in Northern Ireland). In terms of farm holdings: the proportion in LFA's represents a majority of farms in Wales (67.7%) and in Northern Ireland (69.8%), but only about one-third of those in Scotland (35.3%). Considered comparatively in this way, the farming in each of the four countries is very obviously distinctively constituted. This suggests that consideration of a composite or aggregated 'UK Agriculture' is more than somewhat potentially misleading.

Size Characteristics

For example consider average size of farm, a commonly quoted descriptive statistic. The overall UK average size of holding is 56.6 ha. However, this figure is not representative of any of the individual countries, for which average farm size varies widely: from 38.7 ha in Northern Ireland, 39.8 ha in Wales and 48.4 ha in England to 110.3 ha in Scotland.

This mismatch persists when the two sub-categories already identified (LFA and lowland) are taken into account. Average LFA farm size in the UK is 85.3 ha. This is significantly greater than the average LFA holding in Northern Ireland (37.5 ha), Wales (46.2 ha) and England (55.3 ha) but considerably below the Scottish average (236.9 ha). The UK average is unrepresentative of any individual constituent country. Partly owing to English domination, the situation is less marked with regard to lowland agriculture. The UK average size is 44.9 ha, slightly under the English figure (47.3 ha), whilst higher than comparable statistics for Wales (26.4 ha), Northern Ireland (37.3 ha) and Scotland (41.3 ha).

National Divergence

The most marked divergence in agricultural character is that between England and Scotland. Together these two countries account for the vast majority of UK farmland. Whilst about half of the UK's farmland is in England (53%) and about one-third is in Scotland (32.2%), over three-quarters of the agricultural lowland is English (79.6%). More than half the UK's LFA land is in Scotland (55.9%) yet there are more LFA holdings in England than in Scotland. Although three-quarters of Scottish farmland is in LFA's (75.8%) it is occupied by only a minority of Scottish farms (35.3%). The distinctive size structure of its LFA farming sets Scotland apart from the rest of the UK, and the predominantly lowland character of English farming justifies treating England

separately too. Northern Ireland and Wales are more agriculturally similar to one another, yet they are each different from both England and Scotland. Altogether, the case for separate treatment of the four countries on the basis of their very different agricultural structures is very powerful.

Table 1: Two Agricultures in Four Countries

	ENGLAND	WALES	SCOTLAND	NIRELAND	UK
Population (n)	50,431,700	2,958,600	5,094,800	1,724,400	60,209,500
Population (%)	83.8	4.9	8.5	2.9	100
Area (K ha)	9,099.1	1,452.2	5,535.6	1,067.3	17,154.2
Area (%)	53.0	8.5	32.3	6.2	100
Holdings (n)	187.9	36.5	50.2	28.5	303.1
Holdings (%)	62.0	12.0	16.6	9.4	100
Average Size of Holding (ha)	48.4	39.8	110.3	37.4	56.6
LFA Area (K ha)	1,416.4	1,140.4	4,193.3	746.8	7,496.9
LFA Area (%)	18.9	15.2	55.9	10.0	100
LFA Holdings (n)	25.6	24.7	17.7	19.9	87.9
LFA Holdings (%)	29.1	28.1	20.1	22.6	100
Average Size of LFA Holding (ha)	55.3	46.2	236.9	37.5	85.3
Lowland Area (K ha)	7,682.7	311.8	1,342.3	320.5	9,657.3
Lowland Area (%)	79.6	3.2	13.9	3.3	100
Lowland Holdings (n)	162.3	11.8	32.5	8.6	215.2
Lowland Holdings (%)	75.4	5.5	15.1	4.0	100
Average Size of Lowland Holding (ha)	47.3	26.4	41.3	37.3	44.9
% Area in LFA	15.6	78.5	75.8	70.0	43.7
% Holdings in LFA	13.6	67.7	35.3	69.8	29.0
% Area in Lowland	84.4	21.5	24.2	30.0	56.3
% Holdings in Lowland	86.4	32.3	64.7	30.2	71.0

Farm Typology

In terms of types of holding, arable farming (particularly cereals growing and horticulture) and intensive livestock husbandry (eggs, chicken and pigmeat) are especially important for English farming. Cereals growing is also significant in Scotland. Red meat (beef and lamb) is of most significance for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Dairying is important in Wales and Northern Ireland as well as in England.

Summary

English farming is distinctive in the context of the United Kingdom by the predominantly lowland nature of its environment. Nevertheless, English farmers in LFAs are equally numerous as in the other countries. Overall, however, this lowland character and the balance in types of farm mean English farming faces particular economic circumstances that have to be considered separately from those of the other countries of the UK.

Table 2: Farming in the Four Countries
(K Holdings)

	ENGLAND	WALES	SCOTLAND	NIRELAND	UK
Cattle & Sheep (LFA)	11.8	12.8	11.2	15.6	51.4
Cattle & Sheep (Lowland)	33.8	3.6	0.9	4.7	43.0
Dairy	14.3	3.1	1.6	4.6	23.6
Pigs & Poultry	7.0	0.5	0.4	0.5	8.4
Cereals	21.3	0.3	3.3	0.5	25.4
General Cropping	9.2	0.1	2.1	0.3	11.7
Horticulture	9.5	0.5	0.4	0.3	10.7
Mixed	10.3	0.6	2.0	1.0	13.9
TOTAL*	117.2	21.5	21.9	27.5	188.1

*Total is the total for the types identified in the table (i.e. the main commercial types) it excludes 'Other' types (typically very small)

Table 3: Farming in the Four Countries
(% of the UK total for each farm type)

	ENGLAND	WALES	SCOTLAND	NIRELAND	UK
Cattle & Sheep (LFA)	23.0	24.9	21.8	30.4	100
Cattle & Sheep (Lowland)	78.6	8.4	2.1	10.9	100
Dairy	60.6	13.1	6.8	19.5	100
Pigs & Poultry	83.3	6.0	4.8	6.0	100
Cereals	83.9	1.2	13.0	2.0	100
General Cropping	78.6	0.9	17.9	2.6	100
Horticulture	88.8	4.7	3.7	2.8	100
Mixed	74.1	4.3	14.4	7.2	100
TOTAL*	62.3	11.4	11.6	23.3	100

*Total is the total for the types identified in the table (i.e. the main commercial types) it excludes 'Other' types (typically very small)

Table 4: Farming in the Four Countries
(% of farms in each type for each country)

	ENGLAND	WALES	SCOTLAND	NIRELAND	UK
Cattle & Sheep (LFA)	10.1	59.5	51.1	56.7	27.3
Cattle & Sheep (Lowland)	28.8	16.7	4.1	17.1	22.9
Dairy	12.2	14.4	7.3	16.7	12.5
Pigs & Poultry	6.0	2.3	1.8	1.8	4.5
Cereals	18.2	1.4	15.1	1.8	13.5
General Cropping	7.8	0.5	9.6	1.1	6.2
Horticulture	8.1	2.3	1.8	1.1	5.7
Mixed	8.8	2.8	9.1	3.6	7.4
TOTAL*	100	100	100	100	100

*Total is the total for the types identified in the table (i.e. the main commercial types) it excludes 'Other' types (typically very small)