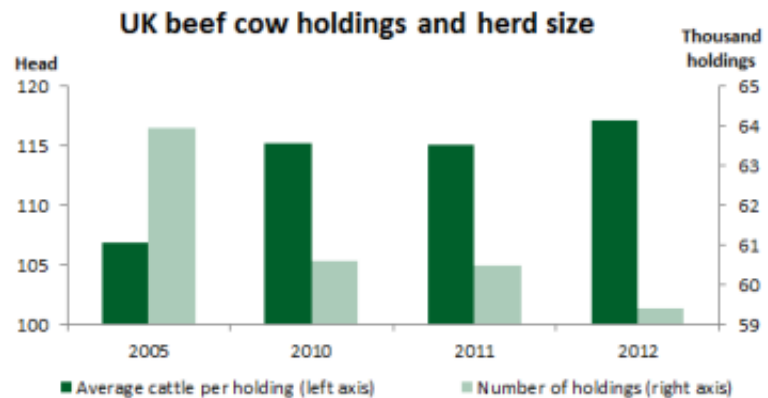


Trend towards larger cattle operations continues

In 2012 the total number of cattle and calf holdings in the UK fell two per cent year on year to 84,400, according to latest data published DEFRA.

With a fall in holding numbers of over 16 per cent since 2005, the latest result continues the long term decline. With an average of 117 cattle per holding, the trend towards larger operations was maintained – in 2005 the average herd size was 107 heads, although this is largely as a result of consolidation in the dairy herd. Almost all sizes of cattle and calf operations declined in number with those with the fewest number of animals (less than 29 heads) declining to the greatest extent.



Of significance to the production of quality beef, the number of holdings with beef breeding cows continued to fall. At 60,000 head they were back two per cent on the year and have declined seven per cent since 2005. The average number of beef cows per holding was unchanged on the year, and up just two per cent since 2005, indicating little consolidation is occurring among the remaining suckler beef enterprises.

In contrast, further consolidation was evident in the dairy herd. With little change in the number of dairy cows in the herd compared with 2011, but a four per cent decline in the number of holdings with dairy cows, the average number of dairy cows per holding increased. However, this trend was entirely the result of an increase in the number of holdings with more than 150 cows, as the number of operations of all other sizes declined year on year. Since 2005, the overall number of holdings with dairy cows has declined by over a quarter. However, those with more than 150 heads have increased a near 14 per cent. In 2012 these larger enterprises accounted for 18 per cent of all holdings with dairy cows. In 2005 it was just 12 per cent.