



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Information Service Briefing Note

Paper 000/00

17th November 2011

NIAR 822-11

Mark Allen

Number of Beef cattle within Northern Ireland

1 Statistics

According to data derived from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development's agricultural census, there were a **total of 1,604,356 cattle within Northern Ireland in June 2010¹**.

As illustrated within Figure one, **257,648 (16%) of these cattle were beef cows** and 281,043 (18%) were dairy cows. Of the remaining cattle, 61,920(4%) were dairy cows in calf, **38,410(2%) were beef heifers in calf** and 18,389(1%) were breeding bulls.

The 2010 Agricultural Census report covers data running from 1981 to 2010 and Figure two contains the data for 1981. Looking at this data many of the cattle breakdown proportions in percentage terms are similar with 17% of total cattle being dairy cows and 16% being beef cows.

¹ [Results for June 2010. The Agricultural Census IN Northern Ireland. Economics and Policy Division, DARD, published on 11th January 2011](#)

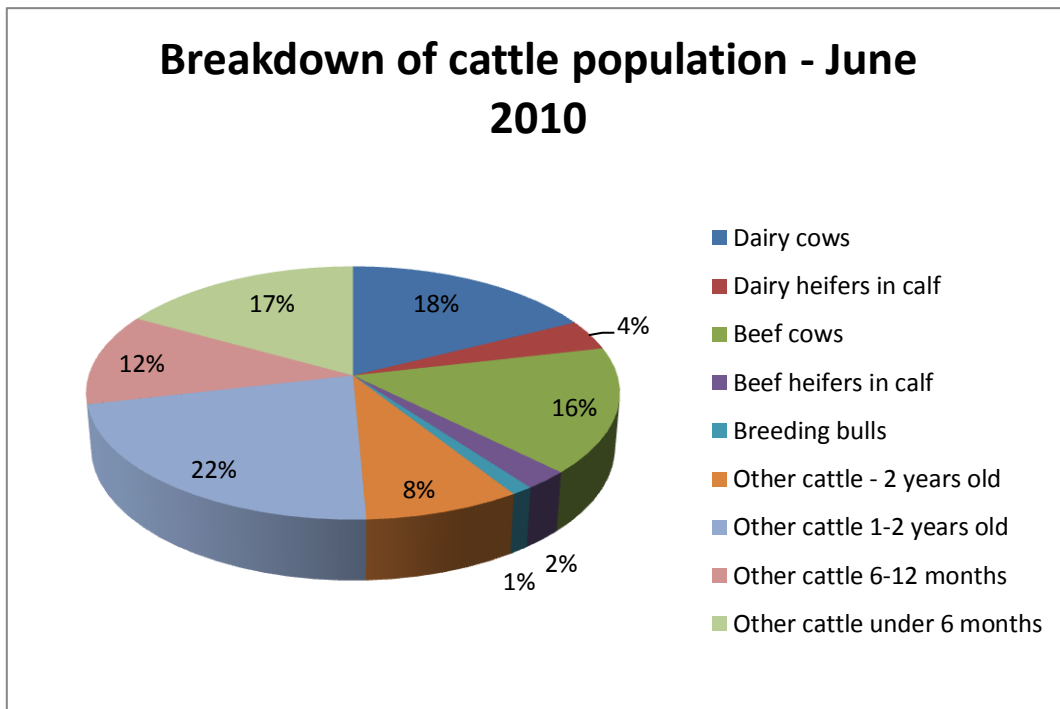


Figure 1: Breakdown of cattle population - June 2010²

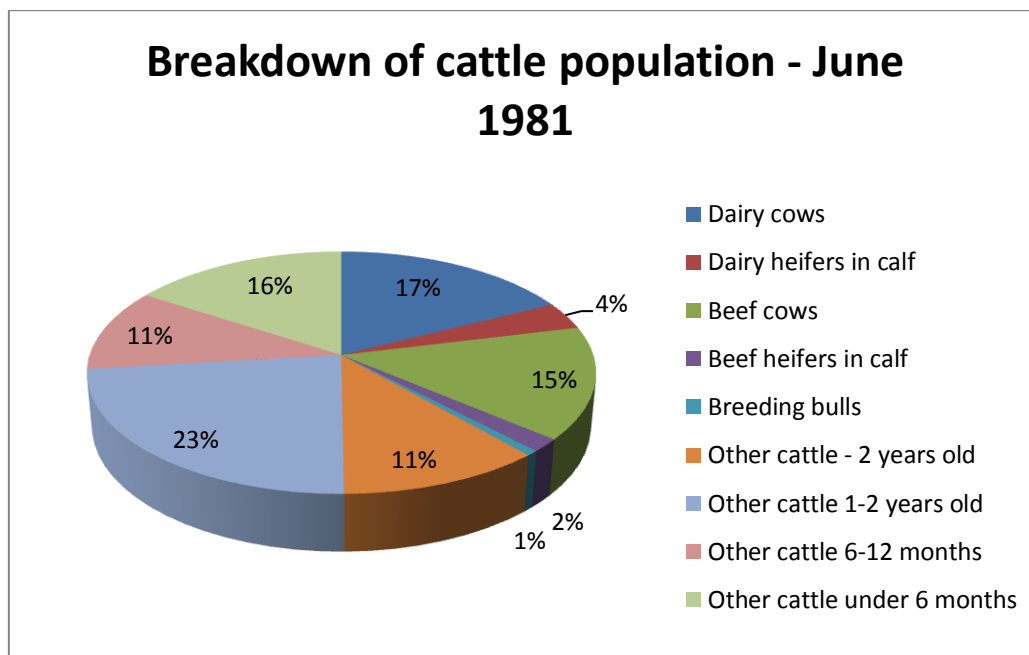


Figure 2: Breakdown of cattle population - June 1981

When comparing the 1981 and 2010 data there has been an overall increase of 3.87% in the total cattle population, rising from 1,544,553 to 1,604,356. Table one below sets out the data relating to dairy and beef cow numbers in 1981 and 2010 as well as highlighting the percentage change in the population over these 2 years.

² ibid

According to the data and in pure numerical terms the number of Beef cows in June 2010 was 11.41% higher than it was in June 1981 and the number of Beef heifers in calf was 45.67% higher.

Cattle category	June 1981 data (nos)	June 2010 data(nos)	% change
Dairy Cows	270,459	281,043	+3.91
Dairy heifers in calf	56,708	61,920	+9.19
Beef cows	231,258	257,648	+11.41
Beef heifers in calf	26,367	38,410	+45.67

Table 1: Selected cattle categories - percentage change in numbers 1981-2010

The impression given by this data that the beef cattle population has grown between 1981 and 2010 is however simplistic, as figure 3 illustrates the **beef cattle population within Northern Ireland has varied considerably between 1960 and 2010.**

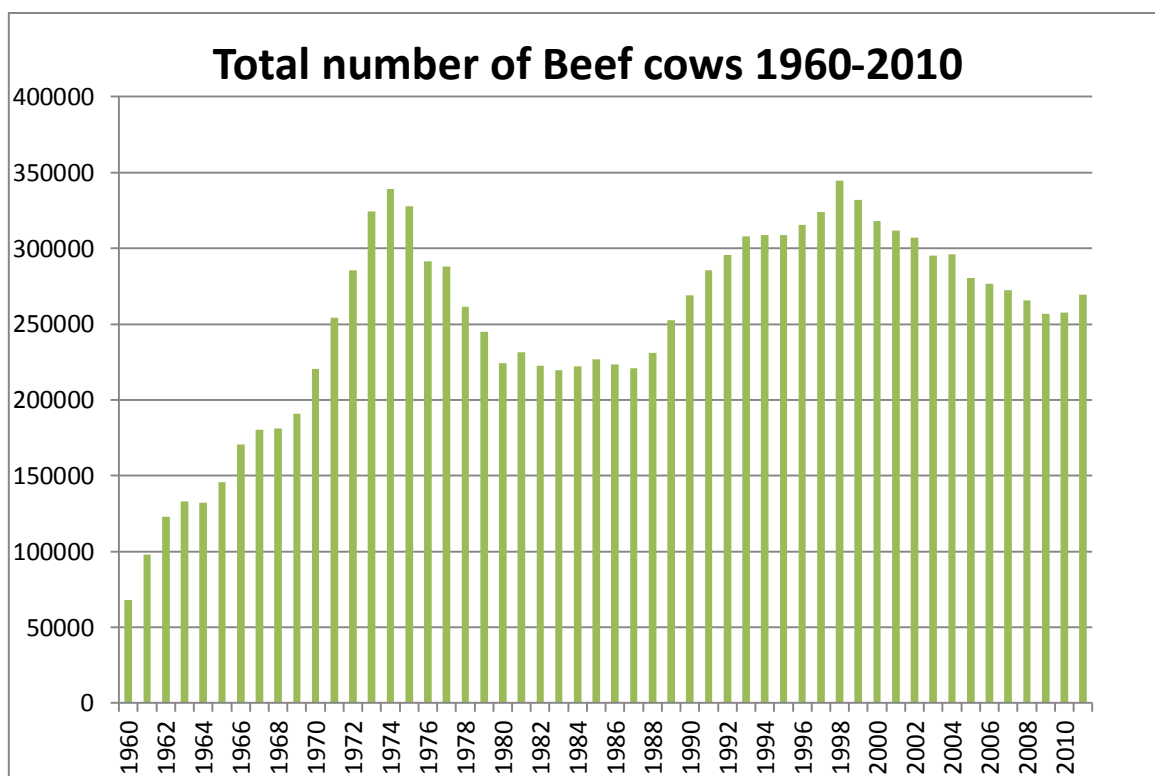


Figure 3 : Total number of Beef cows 1960-2011³

Whilst the data included in Figure three is derived from DARD’s agricultural census archive which has data from 1847, the disaggregation of cattle into dairy and beef categories only began to be used in 1960. The **number of Beef cows within Northern Ireland peaked in 1998 when there were a total of 344,704 individual cows, whilst the lowest recorded figure equated to the 68,000 cows in 1960.**

In terms of trends the **number of Beef cows here grew markedly between 1960 and 1974 before declining and remaining relatively stable during the 1980’s.** The early 1990’s bore witness to a rise in the population, but the **period from the peak of**

³ [Agricultural Census Historical Livestock data 1847 to date, DARD](#)

1998 has been marked by a steady decline in the numbers. The data for 2010 and 2011 reveals a growth in the number of Beef Cows for the first time since 2004 (see Appendix 1).

Appendix 1 – Cattle numbers within Northern Ireland 1960-2011⁴

Year	Total Cattle	Dairy Cows	Beef cows	Total number of cows
1960	998,981	212,000	68,000	280,000
1961	1,075,000	210,000	98,000	308,000
1962	1,110,000	201,000	123,000	324,000
1963	1,110,985	194,864	133,205	328,069
1964	1,112,000	195,800	132,100	327,900
1965	1,116,000	196,600	145,900	342,500
1966	1,189,000	199,100	170,800	369,900
1967	1,235,000	200,000	180,300	380,300
1968	1,207,000	201,100	181,100	382,200
1969	1,243,000	204,500	190,800	395,300
1970	1,320,000	208,400	220,600	429,000
1971	1,384,000	215,000	254,200	469,200
1972	1,444,000	224,900	285,600	510,500
1973	1,536,000	235,400	324,600	560,000
1974	1,619,739	240,701	339,051	579,752
1975	1,625,613	238,872	327,854	566,726
1976	1,547,563	241,872	291,247	533,119
1977	1,565,389	249,494	287,968	537,462
1978	1,548,370	256,903	261,511	518,414
1979	1,540,665	264,484	244,903	509,387
1980	1,507,365	269,972	224,317	494,289
1981	1,544,553	270,459	231,258	501,717
1982	1,540,759	279,620	222,595	502,215
1983	1,584,511	293,534	219,736	513,270
1984	1,624,623	298,508	222,207	520,715
1985	1,631,338	293,538	226,647	520,185
1986	1,584,886	291,900	223,467	515,367
1987	1,539,126	288,783	220,743	509,526
1988	1,550,797	278,922	231,105	510,027
1989	1,580,516	277,261	252,563	529,824
1990	1,625,906	277,628	268,883	546,511
1991	1,655,727	274,058	285,515	559,573
1992	1,681,506	269,402	295,684	565,086
1993	1,684,974	269,344	307,996	577,340
1994	1,687,525	274,246	308,745	582,991
1995	1,699,090	271,482	308,571	580,053

⁴ [Agricultural Census Historical Livestock data 1847 to date, DARD](#)

1996	1,759,370	281,077	315,440	596,517
1997	1,730,960	279,191	323,860	603,051
1998	1,767,343	287,661	344,704	632,365
1999	1,718,535	286,350	332,162	618,512
2000	1,676,479	284,385	317,959	602,344
2001	1,679,132	295,004	311,819	606,823
2002	1,684,486	297,935	307,011	604,946
2003	1,685,254	290,145	295,447	585,592
2004	1,677,583	288,296	296,169	584,465
2005	1,712,748	287,094	280,582	567,676
2006	1,689,256	284,718	276,734	561,452
2007	1,643,458	286,073	272,616	558,689
2008	1,622,541	289,247	265,663	554,910
2009	1,599,025	284,698	256,776	541,474
2010	1,604,356	281,043	257,648	538,691
2011*	1,596,600	282,500	269,500	552,000

*Figures based on June 2011 data derived from [Statistical News Release, Preliminary results of the June Agricultural Census 2011, 25th August 2011.](#)