

SCOTTISH DAIRY CATTLE ASSOCIATION

Representing the Dairy Cattle Industry of Scotland

Registered Charity No. SC009282

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Scottish dairy herds continue to consolidate as average herd size reaches a new high

The latest Scottish Dairy Herd Analysis, published by the Scottish Dairy Cattle Association (SDCA), highlights the continuing structural changes within Scotland's dairy industry, with the number of dairy herds declining while average herd size continues to increase.

During the first six months of 2026 the dairy herd statistics compiled by the Scottish Dairy Cattle Association, show there has been a net decrease of 10 dairy herds within Scotland making a current total of 740 dairy herds, in the same period the total number of dairy cows has slightly decreased by 276. However important to note on an annual basis the total number of dairy cows has increased slightly to 181,581, up by 1,190 cows on the previous year.

Average herd size has risen from 236 cows to 245 cows, reflecting the ongoing trend towards larger, more efficient dairy businesses. 73% of Scottish dairy herds are milk recorded. The number of milk recorded cows has also increased to 131,796, with the average recorded herd now standing at 257 cows. Scottish dairy farmers continue to monitor their herds for disease as the health and welfare of their herds is important for farm management and profitability.

These figures highlight the continued evolution of Scotland's dairy sector contributing to the food security of the nation. Although the number of dairy producers has fallen, those remaining continue to invest in their businesses, adopting new technologies and improving efficiency to build resilient, sustainable enterprises in an increasingly challenging economic environment.

The SDCA Herd Analysis continues to provide an important snapshot of the changing structure of the Scottish dairy industry and offers valuable insight into long-term trends shaping the future of milk production and herd recordings in Scotland.

Based on the figures in the Scottish Dairy Herd Analysis (1 July 2026), the key headlines are:

- Scottish dairy herds: 740 (down from 764 in 2025) – a reduction of 24 herds (-3.1%).
- Total cows: 181,581 (up from 180,391) – an increase of 1,190 cows (+0.7%).
- Average herd size: 245 cows (up from 236) – an increase of 9 cows per herd (+3.8%).
- Milk Recorded cows: 131,796 (up from 131,007) – an increase of 789 cows (+0.6%).
- Average recorded herd size: 257 cows (up from 250).

Regional analysis –

The biggest reduction was in Dumfries-shire, down 7 herds, from 139 in July 2025 to 132 in July 2026.

Other notable reductions:

- Wigtownshire: down 6 herds — 116 to 110
- Ayrshire: down 5 herds — 189 to 184
- Lanarkshire: down 2 herds — 78 to 76
- Orkney: down 2 herds — 13 to 11

There was one region showing an increase: Angus, up 1 herd, from 7 in 2025 to 8 in 2026.

For further information

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The logo for the Scottish Dairy Cattle Association (SDCA) is displayed in a bold, blue, three-dimensional font.