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ENVIRONMENT · CARBON · PUBLIC AFFAIRS
NORTHERN IRELAND

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Sheep, lamb, shearing and goats in Northern Ireland: briefing, November 2026

Robert J. Park · Environment · Carbon · Public Affairs. General information, not legal, immigration, veterinary or financial advice.

This briefing brings together three pieces of work on Northern Ireland's small ruminants: the sheep and lamb sector, the cost of shearing and the loss of overseas shearers, and the goat sector.

Summary

864,522
breeding ewes
June 2025; down 13% since 2022
DAERA census

3.7×
lambs live to GB plants
first 30 weeks of 2026 vs 2025
LMC Bulletin 2933

£34
hill-breed gross margin a ewe
vs £111 on lowland flocks, 2024/25
DAERA Farm Business Survey

£1.93
to shear a ewe
contractor guide rate, 2026/27
NAAC, reported by Farmers Weekly

16
overseas shearers in 2026
final year of the visa concession
Home Office, via Farmers Weekly

2,140
goats on NI farms
June 2025; down 71% since 1990
DAERA census

Sources and dates in the key figures table and the sources section.

Sources and dates in the key figures table

Northern Ireland's small-ruminant farming is shrinking while the prices it sells into are strong. The gap between the two is where policy, processors and councils can act.

1. **The sheep flock is falling.** Breeding ewes fell 7% in a year to 864,522 in June 2025, and 13% since 2022 (DAERA).
2. **The lamb trade is moving to Britain.** In the first 30 weeks of 2026, nearly four times as many lambs went live to GB plants as a year earlier, while live exports south fell by more than a third (LMC).
3. **Hill flocks earn least per ewe.** Hardy hill-breed flocks made a gross margin of £34 a ewe in 2024/25, against £111 on lowland flocks, before direct payments and fixed costs (DAERA).
4. **Wool may pay for shearing again.** At the 2026 forecast a NI fleece would cover the £1.93 cost of shearing a ewe for the first time in years.
5. **The overseas shearers have gone.** The Home Office concession that let up to about 75 shearers a year, mostly New Zealanders, work in the UK closed on 30 June 2026 and will not return in 2027.
6. **Goats have fallen by more than two-thirds since 1990.** DAERA counted 2,140 in June 2025, against 7,335 in 1990. A handful of herds supply the milk; NI goats' cheese has relied on one or two makers at a time; there is no NI goats' butter.
7. **Surplus animals are the hidden problem.** Cull ewes leave NI as a commodity, and most dairy billy kids have no market. Broughgammon Farm near Ballycastle shows what a market for them can look like.

Key figures

Measure	Figure	Period	Source
Breeding ewes	864,522 (down 7% on the year; 997,227 in 2022)	June 2025	DAERA census, 11 Dec 2025
Total sheep	1,819,386 (down 8%)	June 2025	DAERA census, 11 Dec 2025
Lambs live to GB for slaughter	78,338 (21,209 a year earlier)	First 30 weeks of 2026	LMC Bulletin 2933, 1 Aug 2026
Lambs live to ROI for slaughter	77,850 (123,908 a year earlier)	First 30 weeks of 2026	LMC, as above
Lambs killed in NI	226,360 (up 15.7%)	First 30 weeks of 2026	LMC, as above
R3 lamb price	NI quote 700–720p/kg; GB average 809p; ROI average 745p	Late July 2026 (NI w/e 29 Jul; GB and ROI w/e 25 Jul)	LMC, as above

Measure	Figure	Period	Source
Gross margin per ewe	Lowland £111; hardy hill breeds £34	2024/25	DAERA Farm Business Survey
Farm Business Income, LFA cattle and sheep	£24,298 a farm (dairy £118,784)	2024/25	DAERA, 20 Aug 2026
Ulster Wool average payment	68p/kg, up 70%	2025 clip	Irish Farmers Journal, 6 May 2026 (press)
Shearing a ewe	£1.93 (£1.81 the year before)	2026/27	NAAC price guide, reported by Farmers Weekly
Overseas shearers under the UK concession	up to about 75 a year; 16 in 2026	2011 to 30 Jun 2026	NSA/NAAC; Home Office via Farmers Weekly, 30 Jul 2026
Goats	2,140 (7,335 in 1990)	June 2025	DAERA census and historical livestock data
Goats that have kidded	843 (1,072 in 2021)	June 2025	DAERA census, Table 3.5
Agriculture's share of NI emissions	31.4% of net emissions (5.8 of 18.4 MtCO2e)	2024	DAERA, 9 Jun 2026

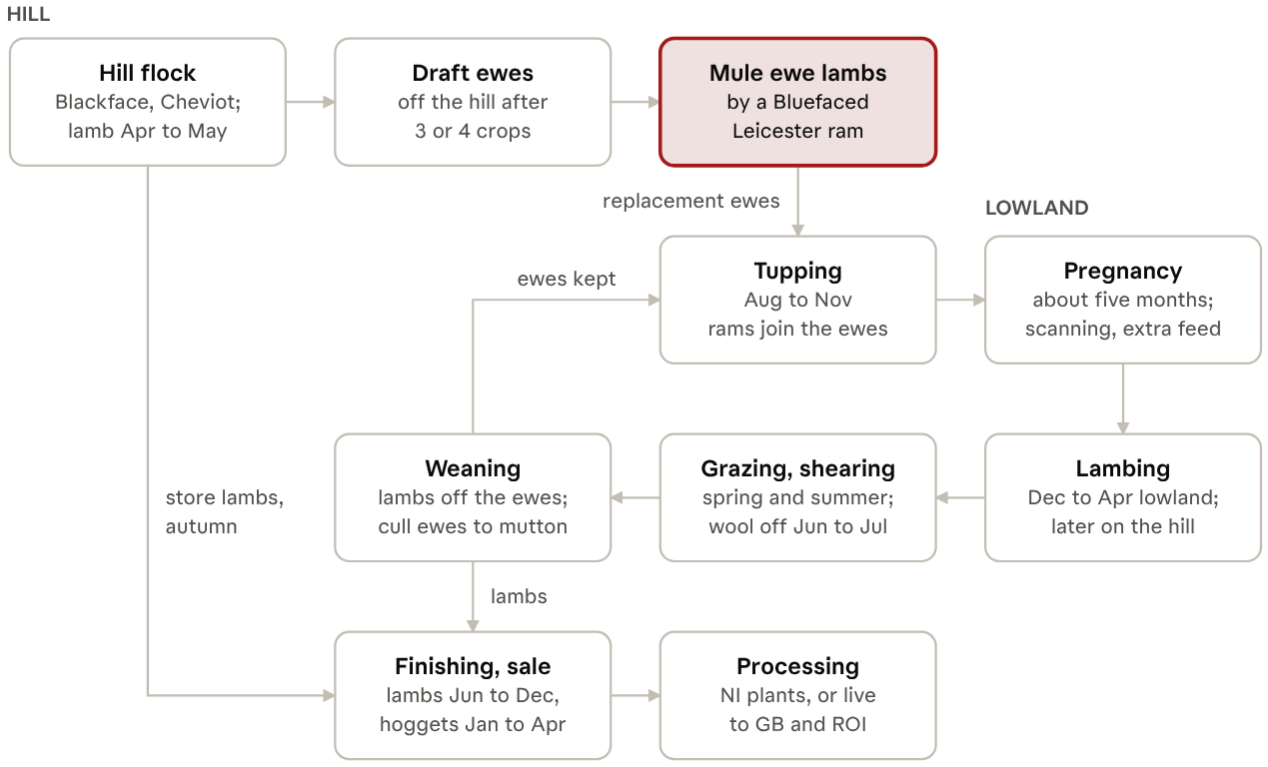
Prices are as published by LMC for late July 2026. The NI figure is a plant base quote before bonuses; the GB and ROI figures are averages paid, so the real gap is smaller than the table suggests.

Part 1: Sheep and lamb

The life cycle

Hill and lowland flocks depend on each other

A smaller hill flock means fewer replacement ewes and store lambs below. Typical NI timings.



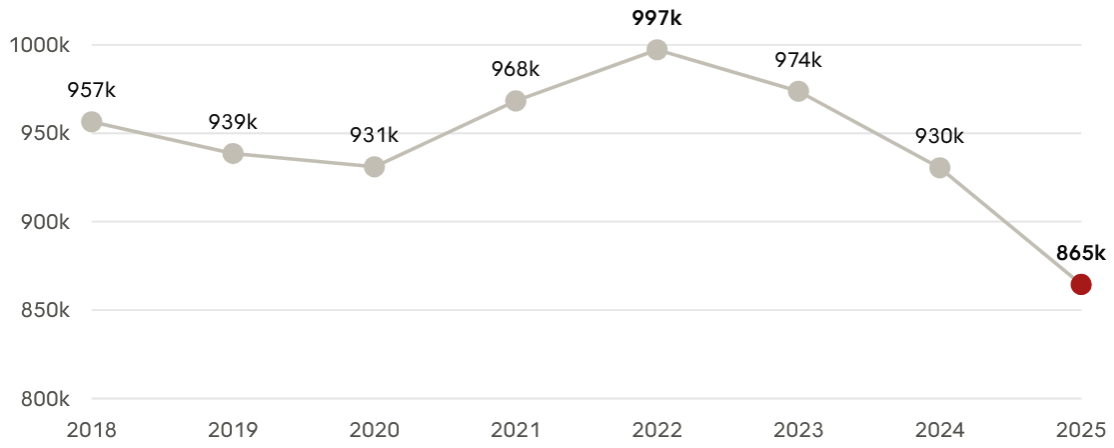
The sheep year in NI · typical timings, not DAERA data

Hill ewes breed pure on the hill. After three or four crops they go down as draft ewes and are crossed to a Bluefaced Leicester, giving the mule ewe lambs that restock lowland flocks; hill store lambs go down to be finished. Lowland ewes go to the ram in autumn, and most lambs are finished and sold within the year, with hoggets carried into spring. A smaller hill flock means fewer replacements and store lambs at every later stage. Some lowland flocks lamb from December for the spring trade.

The flock

Breeding ewes down 13% since the 2022 high

997,227 in June 2022, 864,522 in June 2025: a fall of 13.3%



June census. DAERA changed its method in 2020; 2018 to 2021 are rounded. Axis starts at 800,000.

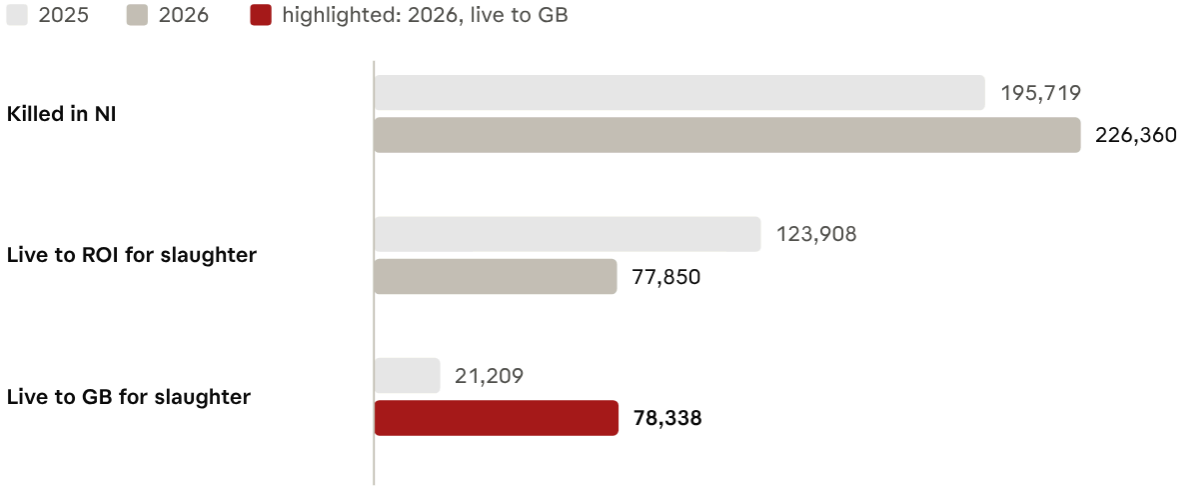
DAERA June Agricultural Census · breeding ewes, 2018 to 2025

Ewe numbers rose to 997,227 in 2022, then fell three years running to 864,522 in 2025. NI's total sheep fell 8% in 2025, while total sheep numbers in Scotland and Wales rose slightly (Scottish Government, 30 Oct 2025; Welsh Government, 10 Dec 2025). The Irish Farmers Journal puts the 1998 headage-era peak at about 1.45 million ewes (press).

Where the lambs go

Nearly four times as many NI lambs went live to GB plants in 2026

21,209 to 78,338 live to GB plants; live to ROI down 37%. First 30 weeks of each year



LMC Bulletin 2933, 1 Aug 2026 · first 30 weeks of 2025 and 2026

NI has a small number of lamb processors, and the marts handle much of the store and fat lamb trade. In 2026 the flow of lambs south fell and the flow to GB plants rose almost

fourfold. Kills in NI rose too, so the swing came out of the southbound trade. Across all three outlets the total rose 12% although the June 2025 flock was 7% smaller; LMC should say whether flock reduction or lambs from outside NI explain it.

Prices and disease

- **Prices.** UK lamb prices are high by historical standards, and NI plant quotes trail GB averages. UK sheepmeat exports rose 15% to 68,300 tonnes in January to September 2025, with France taking 37,400 tonnes (AHDB, 19 Nov 2025).
- **Bluetongue.** Serotype 3 was suspected in cattle near Bangor on 29 November 2025 and confirmed on 5 December 2025, the first case in NI; NI's EU disease-free status was suspended that day. Cross-border breeding trade resumed under derogations from 6 March 2026. Three unvaccinated sheep in Co Down tested positive on 13 November 2026. Direct movements of live ruminants from GB to NI remain suspended (DAERA, updated 17 Nov 2026).
- **Rules.** Since 9 October 2025, lower EU limits on nitrites in processed meat apply in NI but not GB (Regulation (EU) 2023/2108; DAERA/CAFRE, 14 Oct 2025). In both, the skull and spinal cord of sheep and goats over 12 months, or with a permanent incisor erupted, are removed as specified risk material (Regulation (EC) 999/2001, Annex V).

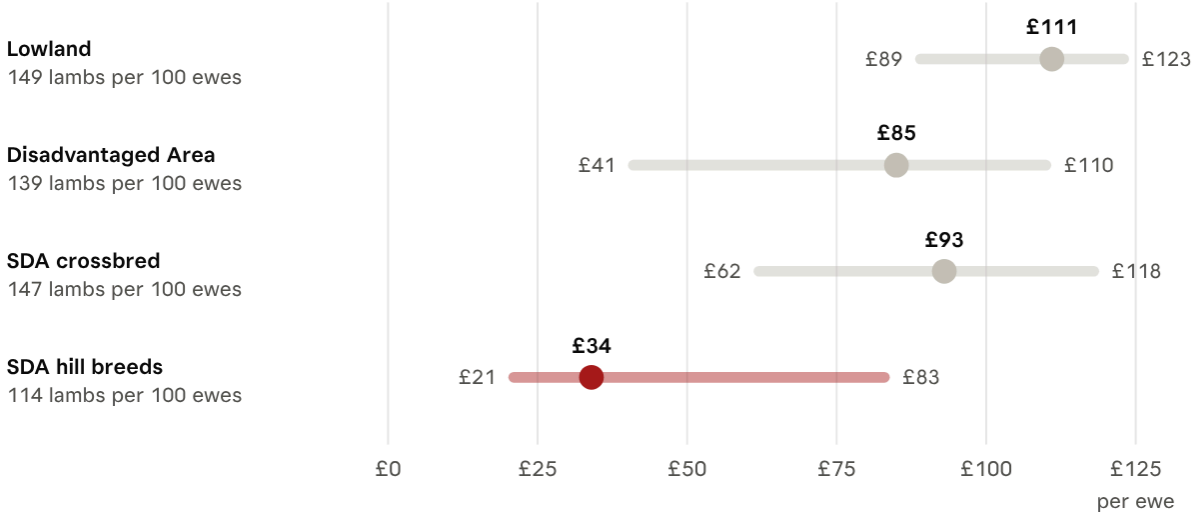
Land, feed and the whole animal

- **Land.** Grass is 79% of NI's farmed area (NISRA, census 2025), and farms classed as LFA occupy 69.7% of farmed land (DAERA Statistical Review 2024). Under the Peatland Strategy, grazing on peat will need to be set site by site.
- **Feed.** Bought concentrates per ewe in 2024/25 averaged 84 kg lowland, 50 kg in the Disadvantaged Area, 71 kg on SDA crossbred flocks and 65 kg on hardy hill-breed flocks (DAERA Farm Business Survey).
- **Quality.** Most NI lamb is sold under LMC's Farm Quality Assurance Scheme and paid on carcase grade, with R3 the reference.
- **Milk and cheese.** No established commercial sheep dairy has been found in NI; a Ballymoney couple were developing NI's first sheep's milk cheese with CAFRE support (News Letter, press).
- **Leftovers.** Skins, casings, offal, fat and bone each have a market or a legal disposal route; specified risk material must be destroyed.

Farm economics

Hill-breed flocks earn £34 a ewe, against £111 on lowland farms

Gross margin per ewe, 2024/25. Dot = average; line = DAERA's below- to above-average groups



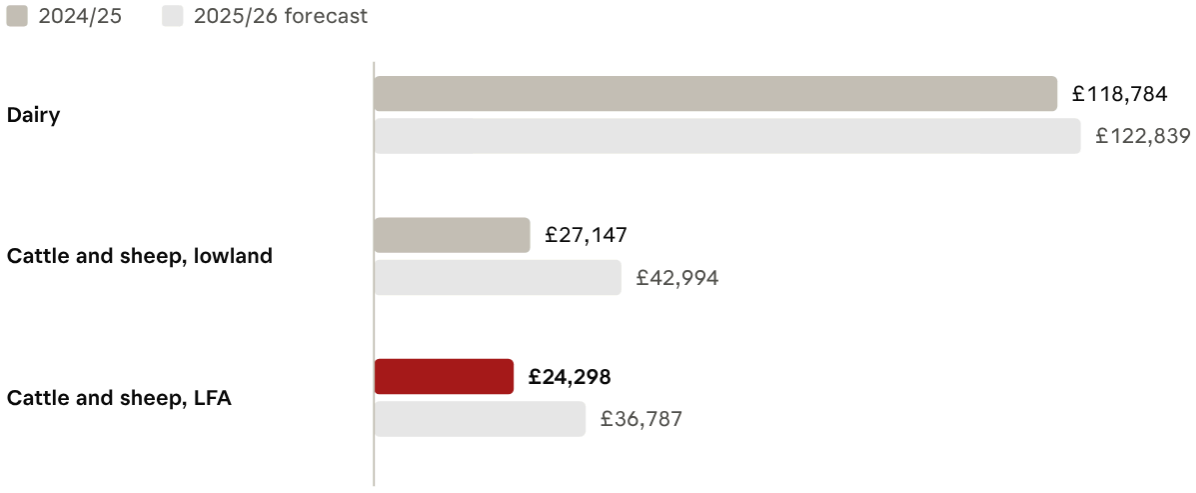
Excludes direct payments and fixed costs. Hill flocks also sell breeding ewes, not counted here.

DAERA Farm Business Survey 2024/25 · sheep enterprise gross margins

The spread within each system is as wide as the spread between them. Closing it can raise income and lower emissions per kilo of lamb. The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 sets a net zero target for 2050, and agriculture produced 31.4% of NI's net emissions in 2024 (DAERA).

LFA cattle and sheep farms earned a fifth of a dairy farm's income in 2024/25

Farm Business Income per farm, 2024/25: LFA cattle and sheep £24,298, dairy £118,784 (20%)



DAERA, Northern Ireland agricultural incomes 2025, Table 1 (20 Aug 2026)

These income figures mix cattle and sheep. DAERA does not publish a sheep-only Farm Business Income.

Part 2: Shearing

What shearing costs

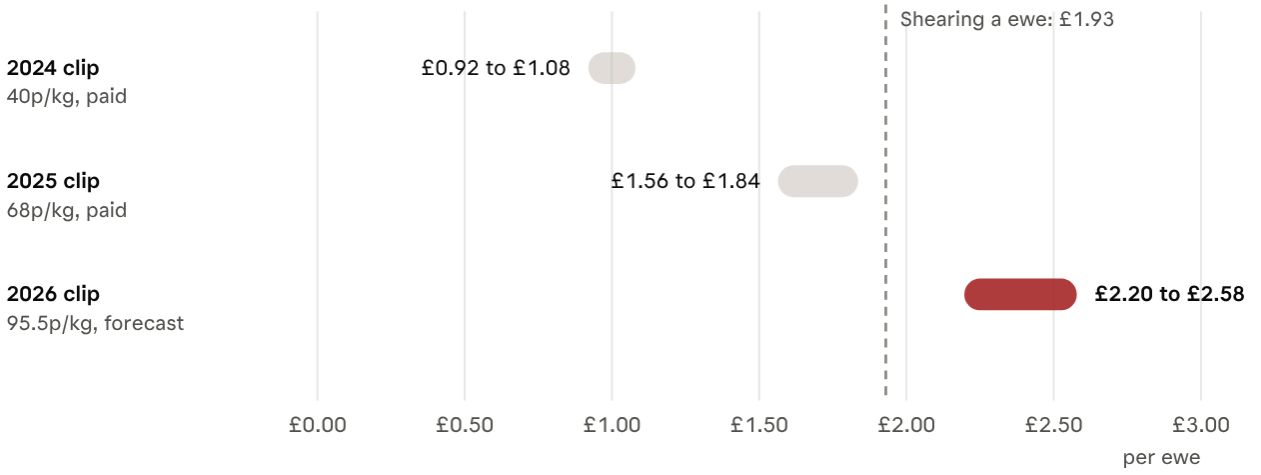
The National Association of Agricultural Contractors (NAAC) guide for 2026/27 puts shearing a ewe at £1.93, a ram at £3.87 and crutching at £0.90, up from £1.81, £3.80 and £0.85 the year before (reported by Farmers Weekly). British Wool says farmers typically pay £1.50 to £2.10 a ewe, depending on flock size and location. These are UK averages. In the short-staffed 2022 season NI farmers paid £2.00 to £2.50 a head (Irish Farmers Journal, press). *No NI survey of shearing rates has been found.*

At £1.93 a head, shearing NI's 864,522 breeding ewes costs about £1.67 million a year before rams, hoggets and crutching (our estimate).

Does the wool pay for it?

At the 2026 forecast, a fleece pays for its shearing

Wool value per ewe for a 2.3 to 2.7 kg fleece, against the contractor rate for shearing



2026 = the 2025 payment plus the 25p to 30p rise reported, at its midpoint. Wool prices are press reports of Ulster Wool payments.

Fleece weight: DAERA Farm Business Survey 2024/25 · wool prices: Irish Farmers Journal reporting Ulster Wool · shearing rate: NAAC 2026/27

A NI ewe clips 2.3 to 2.7 kg (DAERA). At the 2025 Ulster Wool average of 68p/kg that earned £1.56 to £1.84, short of the shearing bill. At the 2026 forecast it would earn £2.20 to £2.58, covering shearing with 27p to 65p to spare but not shearing plus crutching. Break-even is about 72p to 84p/kg. Hill flocks do worse: lighter fleeces, and Blackface grades usually pay below the average. DAERA's survey shows how low the base was: wool earned 22p to 39p/kg in 2024/25.

Who shears, and the New Zealanders

NI's clip is shorn by local contractors and by farmers who shear their own. Many NI shearers learned in New Zealand, working the southern season in our winter; the traffic runs both ways and is how skill passes on.

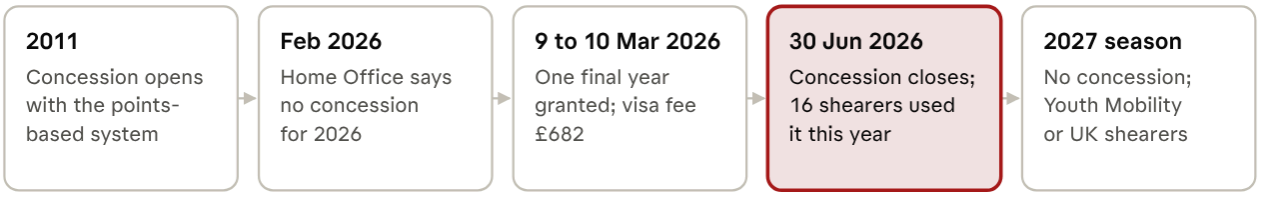
No one publishes a NI figure for overseas shearers. UK-wide, since about 2011 a Home Office concession let up to about 75 overseas shearers a year, mostly from New Zealand and Australia, work from April to June. A professional shears 200 to 400 sheep a day and 20,000 or more a season; together they sheared about 1.5 to 2 million sheep a year (NSA/NAAC). Only 16 used the concession in its final year (a government spokesperson, via Farmers Weekly, 30 Jul 2026). A share in line with NI's 6% of UK sheep would be four or five shearers a year (our estimate). In the short-staffed 2022 season some NI farmers still had half their mature sheep unshorn in early summer, with hill farms hit hardest (Irish Farmers Journal, press).

The visa route

Immigration is an excepted matter under the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Schedule 2), so UK rules apply in NI as in GB. Neither the Windsor Framework nor the Common Travel Area changes that.

The shearer concession ran from 2011 and closed on 30 June 2026

Milestones in order, not to scale



Home Office letter to the Home Affairs Committee (9 Mar 2026) and written answer (17 Mar 2026); Farmers Weekly, 11 Mar and 30 Jul 2026; NSA/NAAC briefing

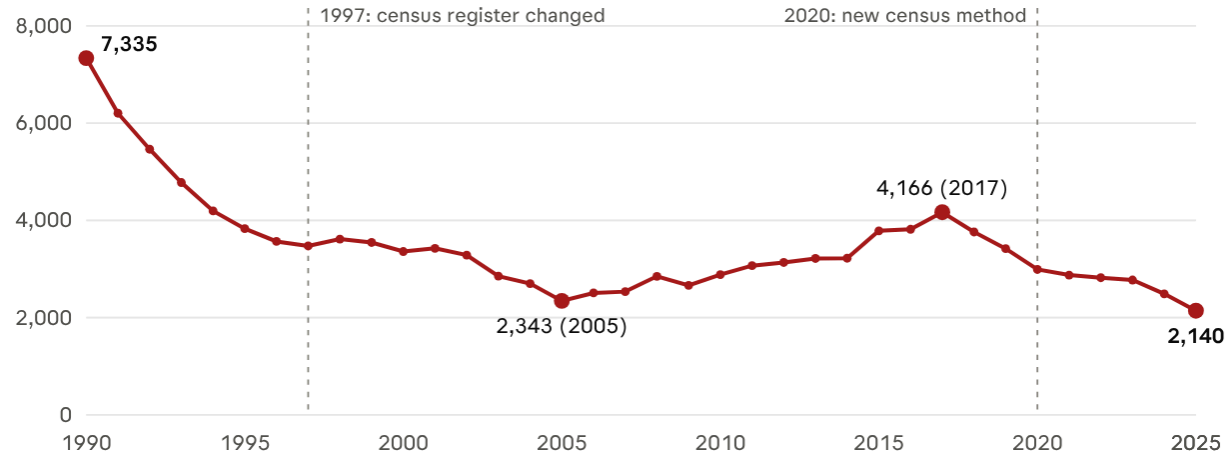
The concession "will not be renewed in 2027 and will close for a final time on 30 June 2026" (Home Office written answer, 17 Mar 2026). For 2027 the only route is the Youth Mobility Scheme: New Zealanders aged 18 to 35, a £340 fee plus the health surcharge, £776 a year, paid up front for both years of the visa, and £2,530 in savings (GOV.UK, checked 21 Nov 2026). For a three-month season that is about £1,900 before flights, and experienced shearers over 35 have no practical route. *Not immigration advice.*

Part 3: Goats

A small herd, much smaller than it was

NI goat numbers have fallen by 71% since 1990

7,335 goats in June 1990, 2,140 in June 2025: down 71%. A recovery to 4,166 in 2017 has since been lost



Goats on farms in the June census. The census basis changed in 1997 and 2020, so treat movements across those years with care. Pet goats and holdings outside the census are not counted. 2025: 843 goats had kidded.

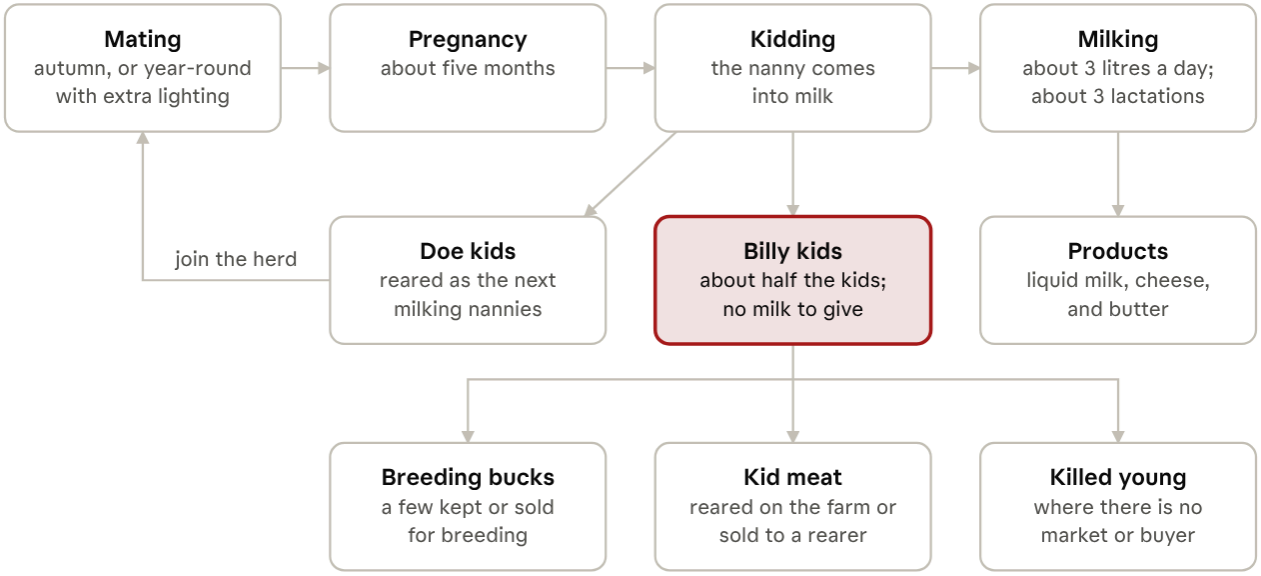
DAERA, Historical livestock data 1847–2019; DAERA/NISRA census 2024 and 2025, Table 3.5

NI had 7,335 goats in 1990. Numbers halved by the mid-1990s, bottomed out at 2,343 in 2005, recovered to 4,166 in 2017 and have fallen every year since, to 2,140 in June 2025. Only 843 had kidded. Three-quarters are on farms lying mainly in the Less Favoured Area (DAERA census 2025, Table 7.6). The census basis changed in 1997 and 2020, so the size of each step should not be pressed too hard, but the direction is clear.

The goat year

A dairy goat herd needs the nannies; most billy kids have no place in it

The year in a commercial dairy goat herd, simplified



Typical practice, not DAERA data. Milk and lactation figures: one NI herd (Agriland, 24 Oct 2022). Cull nannies also go for meat.

The dairy goat year · typical practice, not DAERA data

A dairy herd lives on its nannies. Each kidding brings her into milk and produces kids, roughly half of them male. Doe kids become the next milkers; a few billy kids are kept for breeding; the rest go for meat if someone will take them and are killed young if no one will. Herds that want milk all year run several kidding groups, using winter lighting to keep the nannies cycling.

Milk

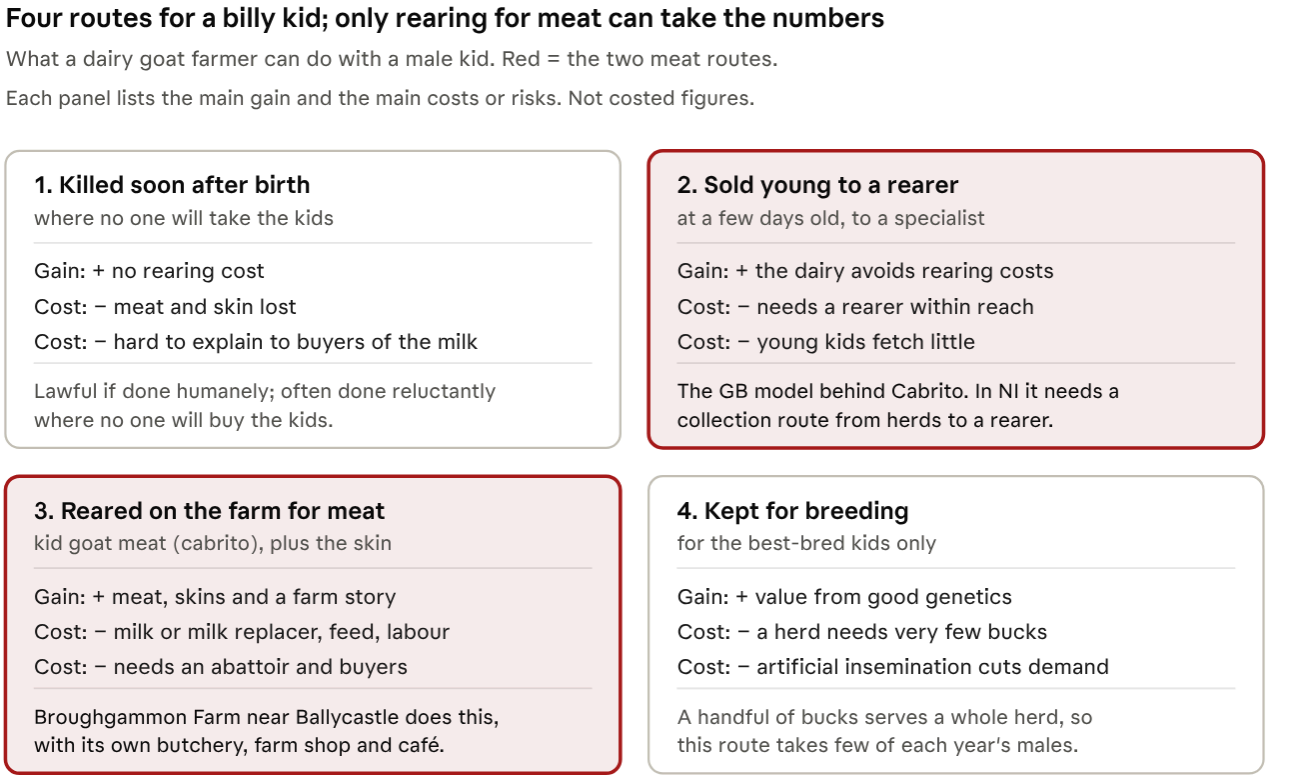
- **Producers.** Commercial goat dairying in NI is a handful of herds. The Cowan family's Owenskerry herd in Co Tyrone milked around 260 goats, mainly Saanen and Toggenburg, housed all year, averaging about 3 litres a day over about three lactations, with three kidding groups (Agriland, 24 Oct 2022, press). That was roughly 260 in 2022, against 843 goats that had kidded in the 2025 census; the figures are three years apart, but they show how few herds carry the sector. Craigbane Goat Farm in the Sperrins is another, and has run a goats' cheese experience with Dart Mountain (Visit Derry listing).
- **Buyer.** Owenskerry's milk went to Strathroy Dairy in Omagh (Agriland, 2022), which sells it as Erganagh goats' milk, labelled as sourced from local farms; Tesco listed it at £1.95 a litre, out of stock, on 21 Nov 2026. In the Republic, Teagasc describes one main processor (Glenisk), a liquid market "more or less full", and advises new entrants to secure a milk outlet before buying goats.

- **Rules.** EU food hygiene law continues to apply in NI under Annex 2 of the Windsor Framework (FSA guidance on GOV.UK, updated 30 June 2026). Raw goats' milk may be sold direct to consumers. It must come from a holding officially free of brucellosis and TB, carry the "raw milk" health warning approved by the council's environmental health officer, and come from a farm registered with DAERA's Agri-food Inspection Branch and the district council. The Agri-food Inspection Branch inspects raw drinking milk farms for the FSA, typically twice a year (FSA, *Raw Drinking Milk: a guide to the law in NI*, Nov 2025). Goats need two matching ear tags, a herd register and movement records (Sheep and Goats (Records, Identification and Movement) Order (NI) 2009). *Not legal or food-safety advice.*

Cheese and butter

- **Goats' cheese made in NI.** NI goats' cheese has relied on one or two makers at a time. Leggygowan Farm near Saintfield, set up in 2010 with almost 100 goats, developed what it called NI's first goats' blue cheese in 2012 with an Invest NI innovation voucher and help from CAFRE Loughry (4NI, 22 Mar 2012). Dart Mountain Cheese at Park, near Claudy, makes three goats' cheeses: Carraig Bán, Meeny Hill and Meeny Hill Blue (Food NI, 2025). *Current production has not been confirmed with the makers.*
- **Raw-milk cheese.** Allowed under Regulation (EC) 853/2004, which applies in NI. Milk from herds not officially brucellosis-free may be used only with authorisation and only for cheese matured for at least two months.
- **Goats' butter.** We found no goats' butter made in NI. What is sold here comes from GB, mainly St Helen's Farm (East Yorkshire) and Delamere Dairy (Cheshire), at about £3.30 to £3.50 for 250g (retailer listings, 21 Nov 2026), well above standard cows' butter. Butter needs a steady supply of cream, a separator and an approved dairy, so it suits an existing goat dairy as a side line rather than a business on its own.
- **Protected names.** DAERA's list of NI geographical indications includes no cheese or goat product (checked 21 Nov 2026).

The billy goat question



Options for a male dairy kid · typical gains and costs, not costed figures

- **How many.** Nobody counts them in NI. In 2019 the BVA, BCVA, BVPA and the Goat Veterinary Society cited a Goat Veterinary Society estimate of about 3,000 male kids a year killed in the UK, while saying the true number is unknown, and recommended promoting high-welfare UK goat meat. With 843 goats that kidded in NI in 2025, NI billy kids probably number in the hundreds a year (our estimate).
- **Fairness to farmers.** Killing a kid soon after birth is lawful when done humanely under the Welfare of Animals at the Time of Killing Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014, and many farmers do it reluctantly because no one will buy the kids. Rearing brings welfare demands of its own: artificial rearing, castration, and transport to the few abattoirs that take goats.
- **Fewer males at source.** Extended lactations, kidding nannies less often, cut the number of kids born each year (common practice; not costed here).
- **The NI answer.** Broughgammon Farm near Ballycastle, run by the Cole family, rears male kids from dairy farms that had no market for them, selling kid goat meat (cabrito) alongside free-range rose veal through its own butchery, farm shop and café; it is part of the Économusée craft-tourism network (Tourism NI). Its street-food "Billy Burgers" are well known at NI food festivals (press). In GB, Cabrito Goat Meat buys from dairy farms that rear their billies to around seven months (press).
- **Why it matters.** The same question hangs over dairy bull calves and cull ewes. A dairy product is easier to sell when the farm can say what happened to the males.

The UK–EU deal: now and later

At the second UK–EU summit on 20 November 2026, both sides said they had concluded negotiations on a sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) agreement, intended to apply from 1 March 2028 after signature, ratification and UK legislation (Cabinet Office, UK/EU Summit 2026 key documents, 20 Nov 2026; GOV.UK, SPS agreement: preparing your business, updated 20 Nov 2026). *The agreement text is not yet published; the "after" column is a reading of the announcements, not the text.*

Issue	Now (Nov 2026)	After the SPS agreement (target 1 Mar 2028)	What it means for NI (analysis)
NI lamb and goat products to ROI and EU	Meat and dairy move freely under the Windsor Framework; live breeding sheep under bluetongue derogation since 6 Mar 2026	Unchanged	No change to NI's existing access
GB lamb to the EU	Export health certificates and border checks	Most certificates and routine checks removed	GB lamb competes in France on easier terms; NI's edge narrows
Meat, dairy and inputs GB to NI	SPS controls under the Windsor Framework	Most certificates and routine checks go	Fewer checks on GB supplies, including GB goats' butter and milk; cost effect not yet known
Live ruminants GB to NI	Suspended because of bluetongue in GB (DAERA, Nov 2026)	Depends on disease status and the final text	Not yet known; depends on the final text and disease status
Food rules (nitrites, dairy hygiene)	NI follows EU law; GB follows assimilated law	GB aligns dynamically with EU rules	NI–GB differences narrow

The last column is the author's analysis, not government guidance.

Openings and risks

Ten openings, most of them about keeping value in NI

Grouped by sector. Detail in the text below.

Sheep and lamb

1. Named mutton and hogget
2. One protected hill lamb name, e.g. Mournes or Sperrins
3. Paid peat grazing (our proposal)
4. Native-breed support
5. An NI cure made to the lower EU nitrite limits

Wool and shearing

6. Wool kept at home: scouring, yarn, insulation
7. A shearing career path: beginner course to professional speed

At the 2026 forecast, wool may cover shearing, though not crutching as well.

Goats

8. A collection route for billy kids to a rearer
9. Cheese, and butter as a side line, at existing goat dairies
10. Food tourism: farm shops, tours, street food

Less realistic for now: a dedicated NI goat processor, a protected name for a goats' cheese, or NI goats' butter on its own.

Openings by sector · the author's assessment

Openings

1. **Named mutton and hogget.** Cull ewes mostly leave NI as a commodity. NI's dry-ageing specialists could build a named line that keeps more of the value here.
2. **A protected hill lamb name.** NI producers can apply to the UK and EU geographical indication schemes. A name needs a defined area and a producer group, so start with one, such as the Mournes or the Sperrins, where producers want one.
3. **Paid peat grazing (our proposal).** The Peatland Strategy Delivery Plan (22 Apr 2026, to December 2027) commits to a Farming with Nature scheme with options for managing peatland, but sets out no grazing payment. Pay hill farmers to manage grazing on peat, set site by site.
4. **Native-breed support.** A small payment for rare sheep and conservation grazing, like the Republic's ACRES measure. We have found no DAERA native-breed payment for sheep.
5. **An NI cure.** A salted and smoked lamb or mutton from an approved small processor, made to the lower EU nitrite limits.
6. **Wool kept at home.** With core grades forecast near £1/kg, test whether scouring, yarn or insulation can be done in NI.
7. **A shearing career.** Ulster Wool's two-day course costs £115 plus VAT for Young Farmers, half the standard £230 (2026). A path from Blue Seal to professional speed, with a season in New Zealand, is a real rural career.
8. **A route for billy kids.** A collection and rearing route between NI goat dairies and a rearer such as Broughgammon.

9. **Goats′ cheese and butter at existing dairies.** CAFRE Loughry′s dairy technology help and Invest NI support, where available, for small-scale cheese rooms.
10. **Food tourism.** Farm shops, farm tours and street food built on lamb, mutton, kid and goats′ cheese, with Food NI and Tourism NI.

Risks

- **Disease.** Bluetongue is now recurring, and trade rules can change at short notice.
- **Processing capacity.** A smaller flock may not keep every plant running a lamb line; few abattoirs take goats in small numbers.
- **Labour.** Without the overseas shearers, a wet year could leave hill flocks unshorn into the flystrike season; flystrike can kill up to 7.5% of an affected flock (NSA/NAAC).
- **Concentration.** NI goats′ milk rests on very few herds and one main buyer; the loss of one would show in the national figures.
- **Trade.** The SPS agreement could slip, and easier GB-to-EU trade may strengthen the pull of GB plants on NI lambs.
- **Carbon.** Pressure on ruminant emissions could squeeze support unless the peat and biodiversity role is recognised and paid for.
- **Prices.** Wool and lamb prices are cyclical; the 2026 gains may not last.

What to ask for

Of	Ask	Sector
DAERA	Set out when sheep measures under the Sustainable Agriculture Programme (formerly the Farm Support and Development Programme) will open, and how hill farms will be supported while the Areas with Natural Constraints (Payments) Bill is at Committee Stage	Sheep
DAERA	Set out how hill grazing will be measured and paid for under the Peatland Strategy Delivery Plan	Sheep
DAERA	Consider a native-breed measure for sheep, and say whether NI will seek a protected name for hill lamb	Sheep

Of	Ask	Sector
DAERA	Publish a sheep-only Farm Business Income, what NI farmers pay for shearing, and a census split of goats by sex and purpose	All
DAERA	Publish which approved abattoirs take goats and small batches of sheep	Goats, sheep
DAERA and CAFRE	Fund training that takes shearers beyond the beginner course; offer dairy technology help to small goat and sheep dairies	Shearing, goats
FSA in NI and councils	Publish a short guide for small goat dairies on approval for pasteurised milk and cheese	Goats
Home Office and Migration Advisory Committee, raised through NI MPs and the NI Affairs Committee	Publish shearer concession use by UK nation; consider a narrow seasonal route for experienced shearers over 35	Shearing
LMC and live exporters	Explain the 2026 swing of lambs to GB plants and what it means for NI kill capacity	Sheep
LMC and processors	Report by-product values (skins, casings, offal) so the fifth quarter can be costed	Sheep
Ulster Wool, NI Sheep Shearers Association, contractors	Run an NI shearer register for 2027 and area bookings so hill flocks are not left until last	Shearing
Goat dairies and rearers	Agree a collection route for billy kids	Goats
District councils (Newry, Mourne and Down; Causeway Coast and Glens; Mid Ulster; Derry and Strabane; Fermanagh and Omagh; Mid and East Antrim)	Back a hill lamb producer group, mutton, wool and goat pilots, and food tourism from rural and economic development budgets	All

Sources and caveats

- **Official and primary:** DAERA June Agricultural Census releases (2018–2020 rounded; 2022–2025) and Agricultural Census in NI 2024 and 2025, Tables 3.5 and 7.6 (published 12 Dec 2024 and 11 Dec 2025); DAERA Historical livestock data 1847–2019; DAERA Northern Ireland agricultural incomes 2025, Table 1 (20 Aug 2026); DAERA Farm Business Survey 2024/25, sheep enterprise tables; DAERA Statistical Review of NI Agriculture 2024; DAERA bluetongue timeline and situation page (updated 17 Nov 2026); DAERA/CAFRE on nitrite limits (14 Oct 2025); DAERA Peatland Strategy Delivery Plan (22 Apr 2026); DAERA list of geographical indications (checked 21 Nov 2026); DAERA guidance on sheep and goat identification; DAERA greenhouse gas inventory bulletin 1990–2024 (9 Jun 2026); Scottish Government (30 Oct 2025) and Welsh Government (10 Dec 2025) June surveys; FSA, *Raw Drinking Milk: a guide to the law in NI* (v3, Nov 2025) and raw drinking milk guidance on GOV.UK (updated 30 Jun 2026); Regulation (EC) 853/2004; Regulation (EC) 999/2001, Annex V; Regulation (EU) 2023/2108; Northern Ireland Act 1998, Schedule 2; Home Office letter to the Home Affairs Committee (9 Mar 2026) and written answer on the sheep shearing concession (17 Mar 2026) and Commons oral questions (23 Mar 2026); GOV.UK, Youth Mobility Scheme visa (checked 21 Nov 2026); Cabinet Office, UK/EU Summit 2026 key documents (20 Nov 2026); GOV.UK, SPS agreement: preparing your business (updated 20 Nov 2026); LMC Bulletin 2933 (1 Aug 2026); AHDB sheepmeat trade update (19 Nov 2025).
- **Industry and professional bodies:** NSA/NAAC briefing on shearer visas (2026); British Wool on the 2026 season and courses; Young Farmers' Clubs of Ulster on the Ulster Wool training offer (2026); BVA, BCVA, BVPA and Goat Veterinary Society position on surplus male animals (Oct 2019); Teagasc goat farming pages (modified 16 Jun 2025); Food NI producer page for Dart Mountain (2025); Tourism NI listing for Broughgammon Farm.

- **Press (named in the text):** Farmers Weekly (NAAC price guides; visa decisions, 11 Mar and 30 Jul 2026); Irish Farmers Journal (Ulster Wool payments, 6 May 2026; NI shearing shortage, 2022; the 1998 ewe peak); Agriland (Owenskerry herd, 24 Oct 2022); 4NI (Leggygowan, 22 Mar 2012); News Letter (sheep's milk cheese).
- **Retail checks (21 Nov 2026):** Tesco listing for Erganagh goats' milk; retailer listings for goats' butter.
- **Not yet verified:** NI shearing rates for 2026; Blackface wool grade prices; the shearing cost of £1.93 as it applies in NI; overseas shearers working in NI; the full SPS agreement text; whether Leggygowan and Dart Mountain are producing goats' cheese now; the cause of the 2026 swing of lambs to GB.
- **Our estimates, marked in the text:** the NI shearing bill, fleece values and break-even prices, NI's notional share of overseas shearers, and the number of NI billy kids.
- **Standing caveats:** no farm or business named here has been contacted; census figures cover goats and sheep on active farm businesses at 1 June only.

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