



# Animal Breeding

in Estonia, Latvia and Finland

**Interreg**



Co-funded by  
the European Union

**Central Baltic Programme**

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**BreedExpo2**







# INTRODUCTION

**Estonia, Latvia and Finland** are highly adept at cattle breeding. Farmers are actively working on improving livestock quality. Entering new export markets has made a positive impact to the development of the dairy and beef cattle breeding sector, as an increasing number of exported heifers would provide additional income for dairy and beef farmers and it promotes genetic diversity among livestock.

The cross-border cooperation project «Export of breeding materials, know-how and animals to new markets – BreedExpo2» aims to support agricultural producers from Estonia, Finland, and Latvia to export breeding materials and animals to Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Türkiye. A cluster-based approach is used in establishing cooperation between existing networks of farmer organizations, project partners and national/sectoral breeding associations.

The partners of «BreedExpo2» project are:



**Põllumajanduskoda**

Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce

The Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce



The Union «Farmers Parliament» from Latvia



The Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners-Satakunta



The Union of Agricultural Producers of South-West Finland

# Estonia

Area: 45,339 km<sup>2</sup>

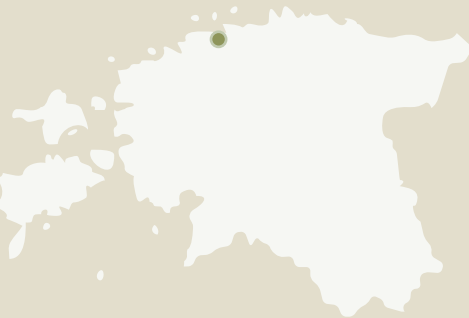
Capital city: Tallinn

Population: 1,331,824  
(Statistics Estonia, December 31, 2021)

Language: Estonian

Currency: Euro

EU member state since 2004



**A**gricultural areas in Estonia consists of approximately 1 million hectares, of which 707,319 hectares is arable land. Half is used for crops (mainly wheat and barley), 27% for grass and also for oilseed plants.

Cattle breeding has a long tradition in Estonia and dairy cattle breeding is one of the main branches of animal husbandry. Total number of dairy cattle is 172,048 and the number of beef animals is 75,293. They are located on 2,828 farms.

The main dairy breeds in Estonia are Holstein (87.3%) and Estonian Red (11.5%). Small numbered Estonian Native breed has just 1,614 animals (697 in animal recording), but its milk is high in milk solids, 4.5% fat and 3.5% protein

yielding 4,573 kg. The breed belongs to the FAO list of Endangered-Maintained Breeds.

Improvement in feeding and farm conditions has increased breeding success. Around 72% of our farms are large (300-2,700 cows). The largest farm as of 2022 was Väätsa Agro AS, with 2,761 cows (average milk production 12,341 kg of milk per cow).

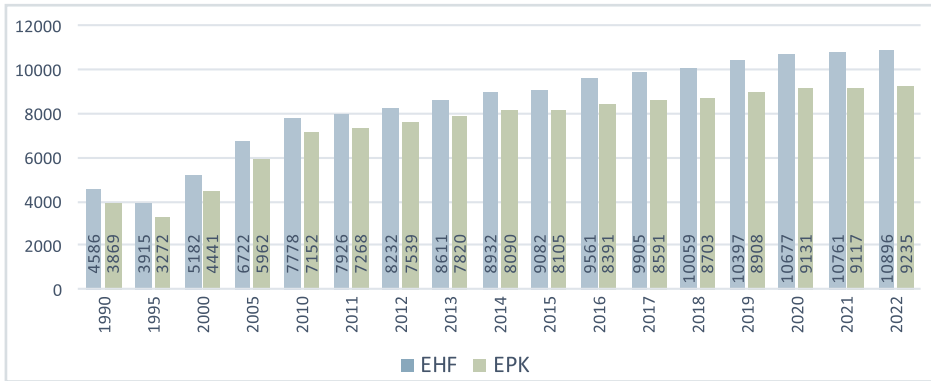
Milk production of our herds has risen consistently for 20 years and cows in our top herds produce over 14,000 kg per year.

### **Estonia ranks 1<sup>st</sup> among the EU member states in average milk production per cow.**

In 2022, the average milk production per Holstein cow was 10,896 kg, with the Estonian average of all dairy breeds being 10,628 kg.



### The milk production of Estonian Holstein (EHF) and Estonian Red (EPK) cows



Beef breeding develops rapidly, and it holds significant potential due to the favourable climate and plentiful grassland. In March 2023, there were 75,293 beef animals in Estonia and 35,505 of them are in animal recording. Half of the beef cattle are reared according to organic farming rules. The most popular beef breeds are Aberdeen-Angus (23%), Hereford (18%), Limousin (17%), Charolais (14%) and Simmental (13%). The proportion of purebred cows increases every year, and as a result of continuous breeding work, the SEUROP results of beef cattle carcasses have improved significantly. New breeding material is imported from USA, Canada, UK and Argentina.

Every year since 2006, a performance test of beef bulls is carried out. The performance test lasts from November to April and

ends with a championship to determine the best bulls, a web catalogue and a bull auction, which are evaluated by international judges. As such, the most reliable comparative data on feed intake, gain and economic efficiency based on genetic potential are obtained, as the effects of the difference due to the variety in environmental conditions are excluded. In addition, the conformation of the bulls and their suitability for breeding are also evaluated.

In addition to the genetic breeding values evaluated in Estonia, our bulls are evaluated by Interbeef (conducted by ICAR) based on the two genetic breeding characteristics “weaning weight” and “calving ease”.

Genome testing is also being carried out more actively on breeding animals, especially on the Aberdeen Angus (Neogen in Scotland) and Limousin (EvaLim in France) breeds.

## Export potential



Increased milk production and freedom from infectious diseases (leucosis, brucel-

losis, tuberculosis, spongiform encephalopathy, foot and mouth disease, bluetongue, anthrax, rinderpest etc.) have made Estonian cattle an attractive prospect for foreign farmers. Since 1991, Spain, Netherlands, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Malta, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Georgia, Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Russia have bought Estonian cattle.

In 2022, Estonia exported 60,000 live cattle for EUR 36.6 million. The Animal Breeders' Association of Estonia exported 3,000 breeding animals; 2,500 fattening bulls and 1,500 slaughtering cattle.

**The Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce** has united agricultural producers and their unions, processors of agricultural products and their unions as well as companies providing services to the agricultural sector since 1996. Today, there are around 133 members in the Chamber. Different member organizations of the chamber unite ca 7,000 farms and enterprises in Estonia.

The Chamber's activities are aimed at ensuring balanced development within the agricultural production sector, the processing industry, the sector providing services to rural life and the forest owners cooperatives. In order to achieve this, support is given to cooperation between local producers and processors and to trade in agricultural products in both internal and external markets. The members are represented within a range of structures both national and international.

Different working groups operate within

the chamber whose roles are to regulate the internal activities within their sectors and to influence their development.

Since 2002, the Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce has been coordinating the activities of the National Delegation of Estonian producers' organisations within the European Union's agricultural producers organisation COPA/COGECA and has been responsible for the work of the representation of Estonian agricultural producers in Brussels. The Estonian Chamber of Agriculture and Commerce is also a member of the European Dairy Association (EDA) and the European Association of Dairy Trade (Eucolait).

**Animal Breeders' Association of Estonia (ABAE)** is a private organization joining dairy and beef breeders. ABAE has 450 members who are active farmers and use services offered by association.

The main activities are herdbook keeping; collection, storage and marketing of semen and embryos; AI activities; issuing pedigree certificates; organization of cattle shows; cattle and semen import-export; evaluation of AI bulls and training for farmers.



TSURA BYRON  
EE23955196.  
ESTONIAN HEREFORD  
CHAMPION 2022



**VALTU MONEY MONSTER 21056765. ESTONIAN ALL BREEDS CHAMPION  
ABERDEEN-ANGUS CHAMPION 2022**

## Artificial insemination station

There are 70 bulls in the AI station of ABAE and more than 250,000 doses of high-quality dairy and beef bull semen are produced each year. In addition, the breeding suitability of 1 year old beef bulls is tested before auction each spring. Their scrotal circumference, semen motility and morphology is evaluated with the aim to reduce the risk of unsuitable bulls being used for breeding.

AI station is approved according to EEC88/407 regulation, which enables the sale of semen all over the EU. Semen has been exported to Latvia, Lithuania, Russia, Germany, Türkiye and The Netherlands.

In 2016, ABAE opened the animal collection centre in Kaunissaare village, Harju county. Approval number EE29746.

## Contacts:

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# Finland and South-West Finland

**Area:** 333,424 km<sup>2</sup>

**Capital city:** Helsinki

**Population:** 5.53 million

**Languages:** Finnish and Swedish

**Currency:** Euro

EU member state since 1995

There is ca 2.27 million hectares of agricultural land in Finland, and it is used for producing crops, grass, potatoes and oilseed plants. From that ca 450,000 hectares (ca 20%) are located in MTK South-West Finland and MTK Satakunta regions, which is predominantly used for growing crops. The total crop area in Finland is over 1 million ha and grassland (pastures and meadows included) vary between 780,000-800,000 ha. In south-

west Finland the crops are grown on nearly 310,000 ha while the land under grass production is only 60,000 ha (including meadows).

The number of livestock farms in Finland has decreased in recent years, with a total number of bovines of 828,783 (2022). The population of dairy cows is 243,200 and they are located on 4,600 farms. The number of suckler cows has been rising slightly to a current total of 63,100.

dairy cows	243,200
suckler cows	63,100
heifers	141,000
bulls (including young bulls)	105,664
calves under 1 year	269,515

In 2022, the average milk yield per cow was 9,675 kg (ProAgraria). The main breeds are Holstein and Ayshire. The 3 native breeds are called "Suomenkarja" and make up only 2% of the total population of dairy breeds. The most popular beef breeds are Hereford, Charolais, Limousin, Aberdeen Angus, Highland cattle, Simmental and a small number of other breeds.

**Itäsuomenkarja** (ISK) Eastern Finnish cattle is one of the ancient rural cattle breeds grown in Finland. Currently, the breed is under threat of extinction. When controlling milk productivity, milk fat is 4.36%, protein is 3.46%. The average yield is 4,057 kg of milk, and the lifetime yield is 11,910 kg of milk at harvest. Eastern Finnish cattle is the most graceful of the Finnish cattle breeds.



**Länsisuomenkarja** (LSK) is a West Finnish breed of cattle that once developed in western and southern Finland. It is the second most common of the three local Finnish breeds. Today, there are about a thousand West Finnish cattle in Finland, but compared to more common breeds, they are quite rare. Milk fat content is 4.53%, protein content is 3.47%. Average milk yield is 6,972 kg of milk, and lifetime milk yield is 19,630 kg when taken.

**Northern Finnish cattle** or Lapland cattle (PSK) is an original Finnish breed of cattle. It is usually white. Milk fat content is 4.35%, protein content is 3.43%. The average milk yield is 5,429 kg of milk, and at weaning during life 15,910 kg of milk.

Finland is officially free from brucellosis, tuberculosis, bluetongue (BT8) and IBR (respiratory infection disease).

**FABA** is an abbreviation of the English



version of the name “The Finnish Animal Breeding Association”, which was established in 1969, when various Finnish breeding organizations merged. During these years, FABA has focused its operations as a nationwide service and sales company whose core business is to improve livestock productivity, fertility and health.



## The services offered by FABA are the following:

- Embryo services
- Digital services
- DNA analysis
- Animal trade services
- Estimation of animal prices
- Weighing and other services for the mother herd of cows
- Planning the breeding of the mother herd of cows
- Observation of the mother cow
- Fertility services
- Calculation of the index for breeding stations
- Animal development services (breeding planning)
- Breed certificate
- Works
- Training and Consulting Services (Faba APU)
- Herd accounting - meat cattle
- Livestock - dairy cattle
- Home delivery services
- Functional planning of the barn (Faba NEXT)
- Structural assessment - dairy cattle
- Insemination services
- Production service



**VikingGenetics** provides science-based bovine genetic products and solutions for progressive dairy and beef producers around the world. In the Nordic countries, the company has recorded the health and performance of VikingHolstein, VikingRed, VikingJersey, crossbreeds, and other breeds. Joint efforts of farmers, veterinarians, hoof trimmers and other industry experts have improved the health,

reproduction, milk production, feed efficiency, and longevity for all these breeds. Today, VikingGenetics records over 800,000 cows annually in the Nordic data system (NTM), which is the most complete total merit index in the world. More than 90 percent of the cows are part of the health and milk data recording.

VikingGenetics offers sorted semen, genome testing and embryos.



**Finnish Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest Owners (MTK)** was founded in 1917. Altogether, MTK has nearly 325,000 members, from which 117,000 are members from farmers associations. The occupations and businesses of members are based on renew-

able natural resources and their utilization in a sustainable and economical way. The unions of agricultural producers of South-West Finland and Satakunta regions unite 80 local farmer's associations. All together these local associations have 23,000 members, who own 8,500 farms.

## Contacts:

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# Latvia

**Area:** 64,573 km<sup>2</sup>

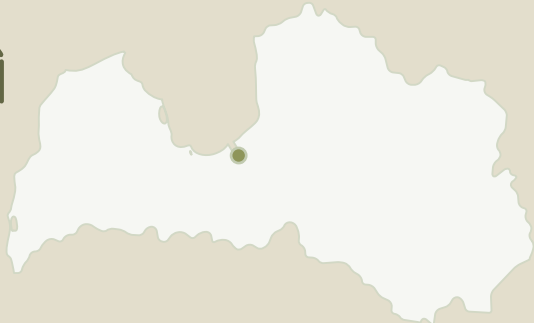
**Capital city:** Riga

**Population:** 1,893,000

**Language:** Latvian

**Currency:** Euro

EU member state since 2004



**36** % of Latvian territory is agricultural land. Total area of agricultural land is ca 1,932,000 hectares with the following structure: pastures and meadows 30%, arable land 69%, permanent crops 1%.

Since 2004, the livestock production has increased 2,1 times.

The number of dairy farms is 5,080 and the total population of dairy cows is

128,000, which is decreasing in Latvia, (except for the farms in the sector with 300 dairy cows and above). About 20% of all dairy cows are located in the farms with 300 and more animals. The average milk yield per cow is 7,500 kg per year. The most productive herds produce over 14,000 kg a year. The large farms are actively working on improving livestock quality. The most popular dairy breeds are Holstein — 57%, Latvian brown — 11%,



Red group — 2%, Latvian blue — 1% and other breeds and crosses — 29% from all population.

There are 4,170 beef farms registered in Latvia. All together they hold 62,900 beef cows. The most popular beef breeds are: Charolais — 36%, Limousin — 14%, Hereford — 5%, Angus — 3%.

In 2022, Latvia exported 76,500 cattle. The private companies have more than 7 years' experience of exporting the breeding dairy cattle (mostly pregnant heifers). Latvia also has export experience with Türkiye and Uzbekistan. From dairy breeds Holstein and from beef breeds Charolais have largest potential for export. Exporters also can offer other breeds for export, but in a smaller amount. Latvian artificial insemination stations can offer bull semen from all breeds.

Latvia is officially free from diseases such as brucellosis, tuberculosis, and leucosis.

There are 2 artificial insemination stations in Latvia - Siguldas CMAS (ENG translation: Sigulda's Stock Breeding and Artificial Insemination Station) and Kurzemes CMAS

(ENG translation: Kurzemes Stock Breeding and Artificial Insemination Station).

**Sigulda's Stock Breeding and Artificial Insemination Station** offers a high-quality breeding bull semen and a wide selection of genetics of internationally top-rated sires from the USA and Europe (conventional and sex semen).

They have established a long-term cooperation with leading breeding companies in Germany, the USA, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, France, Estonia and Lithuania.

**Kurzemes Stock Breeding and Artificial Insemination Station's** main activities are the production, import and sales of high-quality breeding bulls' semen, breeding services, laboratory services for milk analysis, marketing of tools and accessories necessary for artificial insemination. The company has partners in European Union countries, the U.S. and Canada.

These companies have proven themselves as stable partners in cattle export



for such companies as “Beef Cattle Auction House” Ltd., “Baltic Vianco Trading” Ltd. and “Baltic-Calves” Ltd.

“**Beef Cattle Auction House**” Ltd. is the largest Latvian beef cattle exporter and the only auction house in the Baltics with 10 years of experience. In Latvia each month more than 2,000 heads of young cattle are being auctioned.

“**Baltic Vianco Trading**” Ltd. is a daughter-company of Estonian Baltic Vianco OU, established in the autumn of 2015. Since then company has proved themselves as stable, trustworthy and honest business partner in

the field of livestock trade. They trade in cattle and lamb across all categories - breeding animals, animals to be slaughtered and fattening calves, selling them both locally and abroad (Europe and other countries).

“**Baltic – Calves**” Ltd. is an international livestock import-export company founded in 2005. Since 2008, the company operates in the meat industry. Baltic-Calves Ltd. is one of the leading export-import companies of the first-class pregnant pedigree heifers and milking cows.

**The Union “Farmers Parliament”** is a non-governmental organization which joins



together almost 900 members. The members are mainly family farms and agricultural companies, which cover all agricultural sectors. 33% of members are involved in the animal husbandry sector. The main activities of the organization include keeping

track on agri-political issues both in Latvia and EU, elaboration and submission of recommendations for legal acts, implementation of international and national projects, as well as educational activities for rural entrepreneurs and society in general.

## Contacts:

### Union "Farmers Parliament"

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## Insemination stations:

### Sigulda's Stock Breeding and Artificial Insemination Station

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**Website:** https://sigmas.lv/en



### Kurzemes Stock Breeding and Artificial Insemination Station's

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**Website:** http://www.kurzemescmas.lv/



## Exporters:

### "Beef Cattle Auction House" Ltd.

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**BALTIC VIANCO**

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