

Norway: Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing

Agriculture: Accounts for 0.5% of GDP. The summer with its long days allows growing of barley, wheat, rye, oats, potatoes, fruit and vegetables, but the biggest crop is grass for hay to provide winter feed for animals, including 311 000 cows, goats and about 2 million sheep. Apples, pears, cherries, plums and other fruit are cultivated in sheltered coastal areas, especially around Hardangerfjord. The Sami herd about 200 000 reindeer. Animal products include pork, beef, veal, mutton, lamb, chicken, milk, cheese, eggs and wool.

Since the war, the number of farms has declined from 213 000 to 48 000, but the average size has quadrupled with the total area remaining much the same. The labour force has declined from 20% to 2.3% and the number of cattle has halved, although milk production has trebled; sheep and pigs have increased. The fur trade has dropped by 72% with just over 1 million fur bearing animals, mostly mink. . Potato production has fallen to a third but grain has quadrupled. There is a target of 15% of farms becoming organic by 2015.

Forestry: Accounts for 0.2% of GDP (2.5% in 1950). Most houses outside cities are timber, making use of Norway's natural resources. Timber and paper are large export industries, Paper production is centred mainly in south east Norway around Halden. Operations use selective felling to prevent soil erosion and all commercial felling must be replanted; about 50 million seedlings are planted annually.

Fishing is an important part of the economy; 95% of production is exported to nearly 150 other countries, principally EEA countries, Russia, Brazil, China and Japan. Norway is the world's 11th largest fishing nation by weight but the second largest by value with salmon and trout accounting for 47%. Norwegian salmon and prawns are world-famous. Bergen has a waterfront fish market and many coastal towns sell fish on the quayside. The warm Gulf Stream encourages plankton growth, essential food for fish and many marine animals. The Lofoten islands are the main winter-fishing grounds for cod, but together with herring, halibut and hake they were overfished in the 1960s and 70s. After three decades of conservation measures, herring are now thriving and cod numbers are healthy. There is a 200-mile offshore fishing zone, including Svalbard and Jan Mayen Island, with quotas agreed by the EU, Russia, Greenland, Iceland and the F eroes, but illegal fishing still threatens some species and EU regulations force excess catches to be dumped overboard.

When wild stocks declined, fish farms were started and became highly commercialised in the 70s, mostly for Atlantic salmon and rainbow trout, salmon trout, fjord trout; they contribute 28% of the 2.3 million tonnes of exports by weight but 43% by value (2005). Farms for cod, halibut, Arctic char, turbot, seith, eel, mackerel, wolf-fish, blueshell mussels, oyster are also in development but take about 20 years to reach commercial viability. The high use of antibiotics peaked at 49 tonnes in 1987 but is now only 1 tonne. The farms are highly regulated as escaping farmed fish can potentially spread disease in the wild population. A coastal planning process reconciles the interests of traditional fishery activities, leisure activities, conservation areas, tourism and fish farms (which are all located away from possible pollution by industry, towns and smaller communities).

The fishing fleet is 7 700 vessels with 10 700 full-time and 2 600 part-time fishermen (falling from over 100 000 in 1950); about 1500 fish farms have 3800 employees and processing plants 13 500 (2005). One of the reasons that Norway has not joined the EU is to retain control of its fishing industry.

Norwegian Food Safety Authority <<http://www.mattilsynet.no>>

Sealing occurs on a small scale for fur and meat, but mainly to control populations which threaten the fishing industry. Seal hunters are required to take an annual test.

Commercial whaling of minke whales was resumed in 1993 in defiance of the international whaling ban. The government contends that the estimated 75000 North Atlantic minke can sustain a limited catch and sets its own quota each year (1052 in 2006 and 2007, but actual

catch was half this), resisted strongly by Greenpeace and less so by the international community. Norway supports the protection of other threatened whale species. Whale meat is traditionally popular throughout Norway, especially in the north.

Books: Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World, by Mark Kurlansky (Vintage; 1999 ISBN 978 009 926 870 3) £7.99

The Whaling Season, by Kieran Mulvaney (Shearwater Books 2003 ISBN 978 155 963 978 1) £21.95, account by a Greenpeace activist.