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Rural Affairs Committee

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4 November 2026

Dear Mark,

I attended the Committee on 7 October alongside **Jim Fairlie MSP, Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands**, to provide evidence on the **Rural Support Plan, Pre-Budget Scrutiny 2027-28 and Programme for Government**.

During that session, we undertook to provide further information on a number of points raised by Committee members. **Responses to those points are set out at Annex A.**

I hope this response is helpful.

GILLIAN MARTIN

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ANNEX A - FOLLOW-UP TO RURAL SUPPORT PLAN AND PRE-BUDGET SCRUTINY 2027-28 AND PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT SESSIONS 7 OCTOBER 2026

RURAL SUPPORT PLAN - SESSION

- **Analysis report of the 410-day calf scheme**

Jim Fairlie: As an example, we introduced a 410-day calf scheme. I do not know whether we have written to the committee about that, but we will provide it with a copy of our analysis report, which shows that the policy has reduced emissions in year 1.

Response:

"The analysis report can be found at the link below and is attached separately to this letter: - Scottish beef farmers achieve lowest calving interval in a decade, SRUC report finds | SRUC."

PRE-BUDGET SCRUTINY 2027-28 AND PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT - SESSION

- **Commencement of Section 44 of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026 and the effectiveness of penalties for breaches of sea fisheries legislation**

Gillian Martin: A number of regulations associated with the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026 are being worked on so that they can be delivered to Parliament. Mr Fairlie has responsibility for the provisions in the act that you have alluded to. I am also looking at nature restoration targets and secondary legislation that will be associated with that. All that work is happening. The act was passed only just before the end of the previous session of Parliament, so it will take time to deliver many of its elements, particularly ones that were a result of amendments. I do not have the detail on that issue. I would like to take it away and write to the committee, as that is a very specific point.

Response:

Section 44 of the Natural Environment (Scotland) Act 2026 was not included in the commencement regulations that came into force on 26 October 2026. We are taking a phased approach to commencement of the Act to ensure that provisions are brought into force only when the necessary implementation arrangements are in place and delivery partners are ready to support their effective operation.

The commencement regulations that came into force on 26 October 2026 brought into force approximately two-thirds of the Act and a significant package of measures supporting nature restoration, deer management reform and improvements to National Park powers. Officials are continuing to work closely with delivery partners and stakeholders to prepare for subsequent phases of commencement and implementation across the remaining provisions of the Act.

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In relation to penalties for breaches of sea fisheries legislation, the Scottish Government has committed to reviewing the effectiveness and appropriateness of penalties for breaches of sea fisheries legislation as part of wider work arising from the Fisheries Management Strategy, and as detailed as part of the Natural Environment Act commitment.
Initial preparatory work has already been undertaken, including the publication of research examining attitudes to fisheries compliance amongst fishers and compliance officers.
Officials are currently developing the scope of the review, with stakeholder engagement expected to commence during 2027. This scoping work will include agreeing a timescale for the work including planned commencement of the Act provisions.

The review will consider how the penalties framework supports compliance with sea fisheries legislation and contributes to the sustainable management of Scotland's fisheries. The Committee will be kept updated as this work progresses.

PRE-BUDGET SCRUTINY 2027-28 AND PROGRAMME FOR GOVERNMENT - SESSION

- **Up-to-date statistics on tree planting and woodland creation**

Jamie Langan: I would be interested to see those most up-to-date statistics. They seem to differ from what I have seen before, but it is obviously good that you feel that tree planting is now moving in a positive direction. When it has dipped previously, was that a funding issue?

Gillian Martin: It was due to certain pressures in the Government, but that money was brought back into the portfolio. The trajectory looks very positive. If the committee wants, we can give more detail on some of those numbers. I realise that I have thrown out a lot of numbers, which I do not normally do, but you asked specifically.

Response:

My officials in Scottish Forestry are currently developing a quarterly update on woodland creation, which will include anticipated outlook for 2026-27 delivery performance, and associated advice. It would not be appropriate for this to be shared with Committee members ahead of with myself and the Minister for Agriculture, Marine and the Islands. I am, however, pleased to provide the following detail from existing information.

Forestry Statistics 2026 were published on 22 October 2026. These annual, accredited Official Statistics (Chapter 1a: Woodland Area and Planting) confirm interim findings from June this year and show that, in 2025/26, a total of 54% of all woodland creation in the UK took place in Scotland – amounting to 7,220 hectares and over 70% target delivery for the year.

Woodland grant budgets and woodland creation delivery are related and influence sector confidence, but the effects of budget fluctuations on official statistics can be delayed and can extend across multiple years. Several other factors influence delivery too, including factors that we cannot influence (e.g., weather conditions from planting season to planting season).

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Table 1: Budget and Delivery

	Budget (£m)	Delivery (thousand ha)
2022-23	69.5	8.19
2023-24	77.2	15.04
2024-25	45.4	8.47
2025-26	53.00	7.22

(sources: Scottish Budget 2024 to 2025, Scottish Budget 2025 to 2026, and Forestry Statistics 2026)

I am also able to update the figures that I relayed to the Committee regarding pipeline and approvals under the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS). Every month, Scottish Forestry publishes figures online related to woodland creation submissions, claims and approvals across Scotland. The latest figures, up to August 2026 and published on 29 September 2026, show that Scottish Forestry is currently working on a pipeline of **38,996** hectares of new woodland, with **15,577** hectares already approved, of which **6,357** hectares are for planting in 2026-27. It must be noted that these figures are not static.

I can also share that native woodland accounts for 45% of all FGS supported woodland creation since 2015, with the proportion of native woodland creation rising to 50% over the last 5 years.

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Underpinning National Capacity – Support for Policy
Scottish Government Environment,
Natural Resources and Agriculture
2022-2027 Strategic Research Programme



SSBSS calving interval insights from 2025 scheme year

Calving Intervals in the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme: Insights from 2025 410-calving interval eligibility criterion

An output from SRUC's Underpinning National Capacity – Support for Policy as part of the Scottish Government Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture 2022-2027 Strategic Research Programme

Steven Thomson, Ian Archibald and Mike Coffey

Scotland's Rural College (SRUC)

June 2026

Cover picture: Hill suckler cow, Breakachy farm Laggan, Highlands (S Thomson)

Suggested Citation: Thomson, S. Archibald, I. and Coffey, M. (2026) *Calving Intervals in the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme: Insights from 2025 410-calving interval eligibility criterion*. A SRUC report to the Scottish Government. An output from the Scottish Government's Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture Strategic Research Programme.
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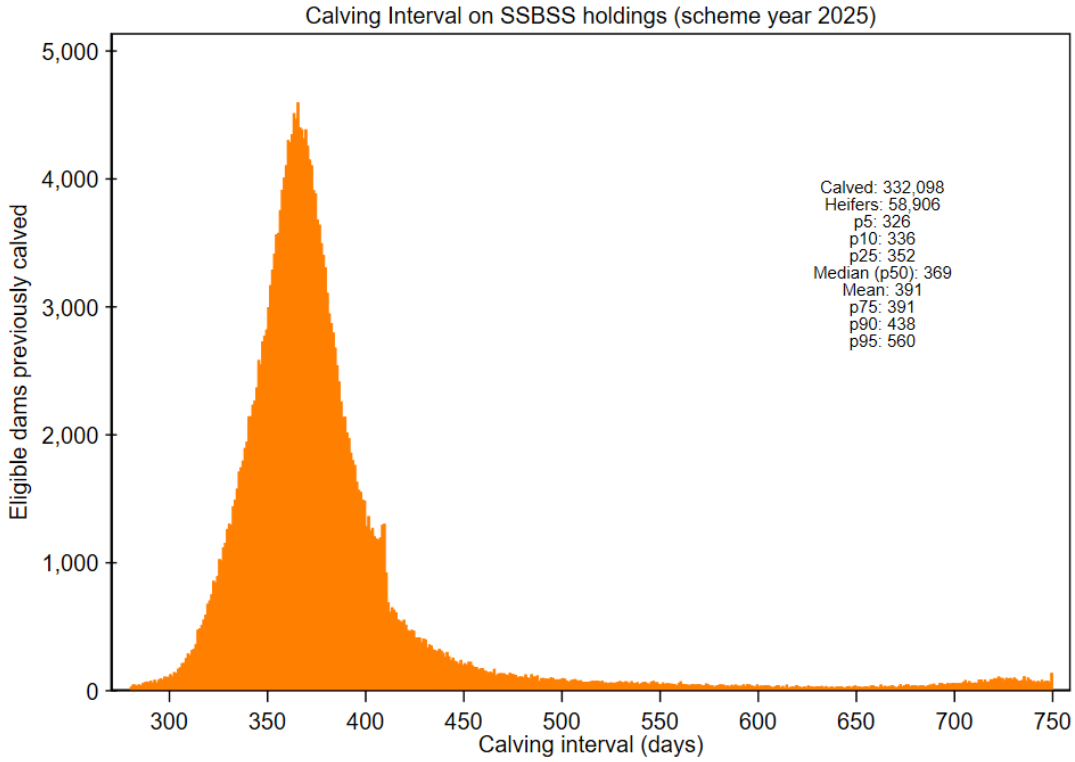
Glossary of key terms and abbreviations

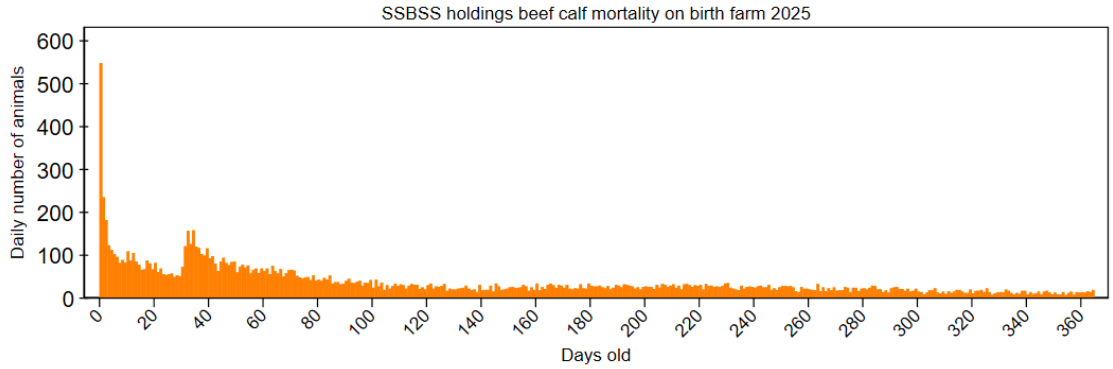
- **ARC Act:** the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024 is Scotland's legal framework to replace old European Union agricultural support schemes.
- **BCMS:** British Cattle Movement Service – part of the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), responsible for maintaining the Cattle Tracing System (CTS) for cattle in Great Britain
- **BRN:** Business Reference Number (a unique identifier for businesses claiming agricultural and associated support from the Scottish Government)
- **Calving Interval:** The time between successive calvings in a cow's reproductive cycle, identified as the time between calf registrations in Scotland's official cattle traceability and data system (ScotMoves+, managed by ScotEID).
- **CO_2e:** Carbon-dioxide equivalent is standard unit that measures the warming impact of all greenhouse gases by converting them to the amount of carbon dioxide that causes the same amount of warming over a specific time, usually 100 years
- **Coupled Support:** Financial support that is directly linked to agricultural production or specific farming practices.
- **CTS:** Cattle Tracing System (the database of all bovine animals in Great Britain, managed by BCMS that incorporates ScotEID data).
- **EGENES:** Edinburgh Genetic Evaluation Services within SRUC
- **Excess days:** in the context of this report, it refers to the number of days exceeding 410 days that a dam calving interval is (i.e. a 415-day calving interval would be 5 excess days)
- **Heifer:** is a bovine animal that has its first calf (defined here by dams with a first calf registration).
- **Interquartile range:** is a measure of statistical dispersion that describes the spread of the middle 50% of a dataset, from the 25th percentile observation to the 75th percentile observation
- **MyHerdStats:** is a Scottish Government funded initiative, hosted by ScotEID and coordinated by SAOS aimed at providing cattle keepers with data insight into their herd performance to support informed decision making.
- **Preparing for Sustainable Farming (PSF):** A Scottish Government scheme (now closed) to support farmers and crofters in preparing for changes in agricultural policies.
- **RPID:** Rural Payments and Inspectorate Division of the Scottish Government
- **ScotEID:** A livestock registration and movements service provided through the Scottish Agriculture Organisation Society (SAOS).
- **Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme (SSBSS):** Support scheme designed to provide targeted support for suckler beef calves born in Scotland. Eligible calves must have 75% beef genetics and must be retained on the holding of birth for 30 days. From 2025, the dam of eligible calves must have had a calving interval of 410-days or less to be deemed eligible. Scheme support rates per calf are higher on Scottish Islands than the mainland to reflect higher production costs. As such, the SSBSS is split into mainland (SSBSSM) and island (SSBSSI) schemes.
- **Second Calver:** Dams with a second calf registration event (excluding twins). Second calvers are the first time a dam has a calving interval between successive calves.
- **Suckler Beef Cow:** A female bovine kept primarily to produce and rear calves for beef production, where the calf remains with its mother until weaning. The principal output of a suckler cow is the calf, unlike a dairy cow, where the principle output is milk and the calf is a co-product.

Key Points

- 2025 was the first year in which the new 410-day dam calving interval eligibility condition applied to claimed calves in the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme (SSBSS) year. The reform was designed to reduce support for technically inefficient production, encourage improved herd management, and reduce public funding associated with excess greenhouse gas emissions from cows with extended calving intervals.
- In 2025, 335,566 validated eligible calves were claimed before calving interval checks, from 5,957 businesses. This represented a 3.0% fall in claimed calves and a 2.4% fall in claiming businesses compared with 2024, continuing the longer-term decline in SSBSS participation since 2015.
- The new 410-day condition had a clear impact on eligibility. The Scottish Government's claim data identified 32,636 validated claimed calves, or 9.7%, as failing the dam calving interval requirement in 2025. However, many failures were close to the threshold: 10% of failures were at 417 days or less, and 25% were at around 430-431 days or less. This suggests that while the policy removed support from some substantially less productive dams, a significant proportion of affected claims were only marginally outside the new eligibility rule.
- The analysis suggests that the policy has contributed to improved calving interval performance, although the changes cannot be attributed to the new 410-day rule alone. The mean calving interval for previously calved beef dams on SSBSS-associated holdings fell to 391 days in 2025, the lowest level in the 2015-2025 series. The poorer-performing tail improved markedly, with the 95th percentile falling from 662 days in 2015 to 560 days in 2025.
- The reform appears to have reduced support associated with excess calving interval emissions. For SSBSS-claimed dams, excess days over 410 days fell from around 9 million days in 2015 to 4.17 million days in 2025. Using emissions assumptions per beef cow, this equates to around 35,000 tonnes CO_2e lower excess emissions in 2025 compared with 2015.
- The impacts were uneven across businesses. Larger herds generally had stronger calving interval performance, while smaller herds showed much greater variation. The smallest herd-size group had around 74% of previously calved dams meeting the 410-day condition in 2025, compared with around 92% in the largest herd-size group. Payment distribution also reflected the structure of the national suckler herd, with the largest 10% of businesses receiving around 40% of total SSBSS funding.
- The analysis also highlights important behavioural and monitoring issues. The 2025 calving interval distribution shows an unnatural spike around the 410-day threshold, indicating that recording, management, or claiming behaviour may have adjusted in response to the policy. There was also a sharp increase in calves recorded as dying on the day of birth after the calving interval condition was announced, suggesting

that the new rule may have changed how some calf births and deaths were recorded.





- Overall, the 2025 reform appears to have moved SSBSS support towards more technically efficient production and reduced funding linked to long calving intervals. However, future monitoring will be important to understand whether the observed improvements represent lasting herd productivity gains, temporary claim-management responses, wider market-driven restructuring, or a combination of all three.

Summary points

- **The 410-day calving interval condition affected eligibility in its first year.** In 2025, 32,636 validated claimed calves, or 9.7%, failed the new dam calving interval rule.

- **Many failures were close to the threshold.** A sizeable share of ineligible claims were only a few weeks beyond 410 days, suggesting scope for targeted management improvements.
- **National calving interval performance improved.** The mean calving interval for previously calved beef dams on SSBSS-associated holdings fell to 391 days in 2025, the lowest point in the 2015-2025 series.
- **The performance of dams in the high calving interval tail improved most.** The largest gains were seen among dams with the longest calving intervals, which is consistent with the policy objective of reducing support linked to inefficient production.
- **Support was redirected away from some excess emissions.** Excess days over 410 days for SSBSS-claimed dams fell substantially between 2015 and 2025, with the report estimating around 35,000 tonnes CO_2e fewer excess emissions in 2025 compared with 2015.
- **Impacts varied by herd size.** Larger herds generally had a higher proportion of dams meeting the 410-day rule, while smaller herds showed much greater performance variation.
- **Second calvers remain a vulnerable group.** Second calving dams had longer average calving intervals than the wider dam population, confirming that this group may need particular management attention.
- **Regional, breed and farm-type differences remain important.** The national picture masks substantial variation across herd types, regions and breeds, meaning future advice and support may need to be targeted.
- **Behavioural responses are evident in the data.** The calving interval distribution around 410 days, and the increase in day-of-birth death registrations, suggest some farmers and crofters adjusted recording or claiming behaviour in response to the new rule.
- **Further monitoring is needed.** The 2025 results provide strong evidence of change, but continued analysis is needed to separate genuine productivity improvements from claim timing, recording changes and wider market-driven restructuring.

Table of Contents

Key Points i
Summary points iii
List of Figures vi
List of Tables vii
1 Background and Context 1
2 Methodology 2
2.1 New CTS analytical methods for 2026 2
3 SSBSS Claim data 2025 4
3.1 SSBSS claim sizes 6
3.2 410-day calving interval eligibility 11
3.3 SSBSS Payments 14
4 Cattle Tracing System data insights 17
4.1 SSBSS claimed versus unclaimed beef dam population 17
4.1.1 Claimed and unclaimed dams and excess GHG emissions 19
4.2 Calving interval performance – National Insights 22
4.2.1 Second Calvers 23
4.3 Calving Interval – individual dam breed insights 26
4.4 Calving Interval – individual dam regional insights 28
4.5 Calving interval – individual dam herd size insights 29
4.6 Calving interval – individual dam farm type insights 30
4.7 Calving Interval – business level insights 31
4.7.1 Herd level size insights 31
4.7.2 Herd region insights 33
4.7.3 Farm type insights 33
4.8 SSBSS 30-day calf retention 38
5 Conclusion 43

List of Figures

Figure 1 Total SSBSS calves claimed (pre-calving interval checks) per unique BRN (2024 and 2025) – only BRNs claiming in both years 8
Figure 2 Scatter plot of total eligible beef and dairy cross dams calving on SSBSSI holdings versus dams associated with 2025 claimed calves per business in the 2025 SSBSS scheme year 9
Figure 3 Scatter plot of total eligible beef and dairy cross dams calving on SSBSSM holdings versus dams associated with 2025 claimed calves per business in the 2025 SSBSS scheme year 10
Figure 4 Strip plot of businesses (BRNs) that entered and exited the SSBSSI and SSBSSM between 2024 and 2025 10
Figure 5 Scatter plot of total eligible beef and dairyX dams meeting the 410-day calving interval condition on holdings associated with SSBSS 2025, and the number of dams that met the condition associated with a calf claim 11
Figure 6 Frequency distribution of 410-day dam calving interval eligibility failures for SSBSSM and SSBSSI. Animals per day over 410 days (max 1,200) 12
Figure 7 SSBSS validated claimed animals (x-axis) versus proportion of animals failing the 410-day calving interval criterion per business claiming in 2025 14
Figure 8 Lorenz curve showing the distribution of SSBSS mainland and island payments (% of payments) to businesses (% of recipients), 2025 16
Figure 9 Total SSBSSI and SSBSSM payments to individual recipients in 2024 and 2025, with an equality line (only those receiving support in both years included) 17
Figure 10 Histogram of calving interval performance of beef dams on holdings associated with SSBSS claims. Each bar represents a day, and the year is the SSBSS scheme calving year (2022 to 2025) 24
Figure 11 Histogram of calving interval performance of beef second calvers on holdings associated with SSBSS claims. Each bar represents a day, and the year is the SSBSS scheme calving year (2022 to 2025) 25
Figure 12 Violin plot of the calving interval distribution of the top 20 beef breed dams on SSBSS-associated holdings, 2025 SSBSS calving year 27
Figure 13 Trends in the proportion of all previously calved beef dams within herd size category on SSBSS associated holdings meeting a 410-day calving interval criterion (2016 to 2025) 30
Figure 14 Proportion of previously calved beef dams (all) on SSBSS associated holdings, by BRN (each dot) in the 2025 SSBSS calving year 32
Figure 15 Proportion of all calved beef dams (including heifers) on SSBSS-associated holdings, by BRN (each dot) in the 2025 SSBSS calving year – reflecting proportion of eligible dams that meet the SSBSS criterion 32
Figure 16 Trends in the proportion of all previously calved beef dams per herd size category on SSBSS associated holdings meeting a 410-day calving interval criterion (2016 to 2025) 34

Figure 17 Proportion of dams within herds meeting a 410-day calving interval (y-axis). Distributions of claimant businesses (mean, median and interquartile range), by agricultural region, 2016 to 2025 SSBSS calving years. The lower grey band is P25 BRN, the upper grey band is P75 BRN, the red dotted line is the median BRN, and the blue line is the mean of all BRNs 35
Figure 18 Proportion of dams within herds meeting a 410-day calving interval (y-axis). Distributions of claimant businesses (mean, median and interquartile range), by farm type, 2016 to 2025 SSBSS calving years. The lower grey band is P25 BRN, the upper grey band is P75 BRN, the red dotted line is the median BRN, and the blue line is the mean of all BRNs 37
Figure 19 Eligible beef calf deaths recorded on the day of birth on holdings associated with SSBSS claims, 2015 to 2025 38
Figure 20 Daily beef calf deaths registered on the holding of birth, for holdings associated with SSBSS claims (2022 to 2026) 39
Figure 21 Box-plots of 30-day beef calf mortality levels (including outliers) on holding of birth per SSBSS claimant business with more than 20 beef calf registrations by farm type, 2024 and 2025 42
Figure 22 Box-plots of 30-day beef calf mortality levels (including outliers) on holding of birth per SSBSS claimant business with more than 20 beef calf registrations by farm type, 2024 and 2025 42

List of Tables

Table 1 Total businesses claiming SSBSS and total calves claimed and validated (pre-calving interval conditionality check), 2015-2025 4
Table 2 Total businesses claiming SSBSSM and SSBSSI and total calves claimed and validated (pre-calving interval conditionality check), 2015-2025 5
Table 3 The number of calves claimed and validated per SSBSS scheme year, with the year of birth of claimed animals 6
Table 4 Number of businesses claiming SSBSS support by claim size (pre-calving interval validated calves) category, 2024 and 2025 7
Table 5 Number of 2025 pre-calving interval validated calves by SSBSS claim size category, 2024 and 2025 7
Table 6 Number of pre-calving interval-validated calves by SSBSS claim size category, 2024 and 2025 8
Table 7 Distribution of 2025 calving interval failures on validated claimed animals 12
Table 8 Count and proportion of businesses (BRNs) by calving interval failure rate, 2025 13
Table 9 SSBSSI payment distribution (percentiles and mean) and count of support recipients (BRNs), 2015-2025 15
Table 10 SSBSSM payment distribution (percentiles and mean) and count of support recipients (BRNs), 2015-2025 16

Table 11 Main breeds of SSBSS claimed dams, and dams unclaimed by the SSBSS scheme calving year 2023 to 2025 18
Table 12 Beef dams of calves unclaimed in SSBSS, by breed and scheme calving year, with proportion of dams on holdings not associated with SSBSS claims in the given scheme year 19
Table 13 Number of dams and heifers calving in each SSBSS scheme year, with number meeting a 410-day calving interval, and total excess greenhouse gas emissions over 410-day calving interval, for dams mothers of calves claimed in SSBSS (noting the dams are recorded in their birthing year rather than the calf claim year here) 21
Table 14 Calving interval performance distribution (percentiles, median and mean) of previously calved dams on holdings associated with SSBSS holdings, SSBSS scheme calving years 2015 to 2025 22
Table 15 Calving interval performance distribution (percentiles, median and mean) of previously calved dams on holdings associated with SSBSS holdings, SSBSS scheme calving years 2015 to 2025 23
Table 16 Beef dam breed calving interval distribution (percentiles, median and mean of dams) on SSBSS associated holdings, 2025 26
Table 17 Regional beef dam calving interval distribution (percentiles, median and mean of dams) on SSBSS associated holdings, 2024 and 2025 28
Table 18 Calving interval performance distribution by herd size (all previously calved dams within a size grouping), by SSBSS calving year. 29
Table 19 Calving interval performance distribution by herd size (all previously calved dams within a farm type grouping), by SSBSS calving year. 31
Table 20 Agricultural region 30-day and 60-day beef calf mortality rates on the holding of birth (holdings associated with SSBSS claims), 2017-2025 40
Table 21 Number of beef calves born on holdings associated with SSBSS claims, with number of calves dead on the holding of birth within 30-days, number of calves moved off the holding of birth within 30 days of birth, and total SSBSS eligible calves on these holdings, 2024 and 2025 41

This report is an output from SRUC's Underpinning National Capacity – Support for Policy as part of the Scottish Government Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture 2022-2027 Strategic Research Programme

This report was internally reviewed by Prof Mike Coffey on 22/06/26 and externally reviewed by Dr Andrew Moxey 22/06/26

1 Background and Context

1. The Scottish Government are evolving their agricultural policies through the Agriculture Reform Programme[1] to deliver the Vision for Agriculture[2] the Rural Support Plan[3] and deliver the objectives of the Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024[4] (the ARC Act).
2. Since the initial decoupling of agricultural support in 2005 through the "Fischler" Common Agricultural Policy reform package, Scotland has opted to maintain coupled support for the suckler beef herd in the form of coupled payments on eligible calves (see Thomson 2025 for an overview[5]). Since 2015, all calves with 75% beef genetics that are retained on the holding of birth for 30 days have been eligible for support through the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme (SSBSS), with differentiated payments on the islands (SSBSSI) and the mainland (SSBSSM).
3. To support the achievement of the objectives set out in the 2024 Act, new eligibility requirements were introduced for the SSBSS[6] to limit Scottish Government support afforded to technically inefficient animals. Following stakeholder engagement, the Scottish Government introduced a new 410-day dam calving-interval eligibility criterion for all calves claimed through the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme in 2025[7], noting that all calves of first calving heifers were automatically eligible, provided they met the 30-day eligibility criteria. This new criterion was driven by policy objectives around greenhouse gas emissions arising from poor productivity but was also designed to encourage farmers and crofters to examine their herd performance and take remedial action to improve performance that may also improve herd profitability, thereby improving the long-term sustainability of Scotland's suckler beef sector -– a so-called "win-win".
4. To support farmers, the Scottish Government have invested in MyHerdStats[8] to provide farmers and crofters access to cattle performance data to support management decisions. The Scottish Government also supported bull fertility testing through the Preparing for Sustainable Farming (PSF) scheme to help farmers and crofters prepare for the introduction of the new calving-interval conditions. Analysis of Scottish Government data revealed that 911 PSF awards were made for bull fertility checks across 639 distinct businesses from 2023 to 2025.

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[1] The future of agricultural support
[2] Supporting documents - Sustainable and regenerative farming - next steps: statement - gov.scot
[3] Rural Support Plan (RSP) - gov.scot
[4] Agriculture and Rural Communities (Scotland) Act 2024
[5] Thomson, S (2025) Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme: Front loading and small herd derogation scenarios. A NISRIE project report for the Scottish Government. SRUC. DOI: https://doi.org/10.58073/SRUC.28428488
[6] The Rural Support (Improvement) (Miscellaneous Amendment) (Scotland) Regulations 2024
[7] Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme (Mainland and Islands) full guidance
[88] MyHerdStats - ScotEID Library

5. The Scottish Government requested this 2025 SSBSS scheme year analysis, noting "*Now that calving interval conditionality has been implemented, and mindful of public pronouncements that the calving interval threshold may reduce over time, the Scottish Government is seeking updated analysis looking at the impact of the new conditionality and how it has impacted claims and funding to Scottish cattle keepers*."
6. The specified objective of the analysis was to provide the Scottish Government with an analysis of how the 410-day calving interval conditionality impacted funding delivered via the SSBSS. The Scottish Government further requested that the analysis:
    - Indicate how claims/payments have shifted across suckler farms/crofts.
    - Consider herd size, geography, breed and other factors.
    - Consider the shifts to the national mean calving intervals and the impacts of that on overall greenhouse gas emissions from dams in receipt of funding in 2025 compared with previous years.
    - Illustrate whether the reform resulted in less funding directed toward excess greenhouse gas emissions from less productive cows.

2 Methodology

7. This report draws on analysis of Scottish Government data covering the period 2015 to 2025, provided to SRUC through Data Sharing Agreement No 53. The Scottish Government data used includes: SSBSS payment data, SSBSS calf ear tag numbers, SSBSS calving interval failure data for 2025, and PSF grant-award data. The payment data for the 2025 scheme year was received on 20th May 2026.
8. In addition, extracts of Scottish data from the Cattle Tracing System (CTS) maintained by the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) were provided for analysis through a data-sharing agreement between SRUC (through its EGENES service) and devolved administrations through the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA). This data (from 1st January 2015 to 31st December 2025) includes ScotEID-registered births, movements and deaths data, and also includes data from other devolved administrations for animals originating in England and Wales that are moved to Scotland for breeding. Delays in transferring BCMS data extracts to SRUC for technical reasons delayed this analysis until the full 2025 database was available.

2.1 New CTS analytical methods for 2026

9. For this specific analysis, individual calves supported through the SSBSS were marked in the dataset for their birth year, the scheme year they were born in and the scheme claim year (noting they can differ), through matching of ear tag numbers to individual animal identifications in the CTS-derived database. The CTS-derived data also identified the mothers of these claimed calves, as well as the holdings of birth. The extended CTS-derived database also identifies holdings of businesses (identified by their Business Reference Number – BRN) associated with calf claims (and therefore dams). Full matching of ear tags to CTS animal identification numbers was initially not possible as the original CTS extract used within SRUC only included

"valid" movements (animals without a valid movement have data submitted that is deemed not to match system records, such as reporting dates out of order, incorrect ear tag formats, or missing previous movements off holdings[9]). After discussions with scheme administrators, it was considered worthwhile to re-run the data extracts and analysis to include the non-valid movements. This was undertaken and improved linkages between the SSBSS administrative data and CTS extracts, which means the data used for this report has near-universal SSBSS coverage.

10. Further, for this analysis, a new dam calving record database was created that ensured animals with multiple calvings within a year (e.g. calving in January and November) were fully accounted for. This database includes binary (1/0) markers for heifer first calf date, second calvers, SSBSS-associated holdings, and dams that calved in a given calendar year. The BRN associated with the holding was also recorded, as was the holding's agricultural region. The SSBSS scheme year of birth was also recorded to account for the 1st of December birth cut-off date required by the 30-day retention period in each scheme year.
11. The updated 2015-2025 CTS-derived database also includes the dam breeds for each calf registered. Using the dam breed and calf breed, it was possible to develop a new variable indicating the dam and calf breed purpose (using SSBSS breed purpose agreed with the Rural Payments and Inspections Division - RPID - of the Scottish Government). This new metric permitted each calf to be allocated a dam and calf purpose to identify, for example, beef-beef, dairy-dairy, dairy-beef, dairyX[10]-beef, calves, etc., that better reflect the 75% beef genetics eligibility criterion within the SSBSS.
12. An improvement to the data-driven farm typology used in previous analysis was also made to better account for the increased number of dairy-beef cattle originating on dairy holdings that the increased use of sexed dairy semen and beef semen has led to. The updated classification uses weights based on dam and calf breeds, numbers of births by dam-calf purposes (e.g. dairy-beef, dairy-dairy, beef-beef), on- and off-movement volumes, and on- and off-movement types (e.g. to/from another holding or to an abattoir for slaughter).
13. The data extracted from EGENES includes animal identification, location code, holding type, last on-movement type and date, last off-movement type and date, first calving date, last calving date, second last calving date, death type and date of death. A unique row is created for each unique animal identification number–location code–year combination, meaning that every time an animal moves or enters a new year, a new database row is created. Using replicable Stata[11] code, the database is expanded based on these variables, to create the database used in this

[9] This exclusion only came to light when matching eartags to BCMS animal identification numbers. The number of missing records is relatively small and future data extracts will include all animals, including the 'invalid movements'

[10] Dairy cross (dairyX) for the purpose of the SSBSS are considered eligible dams for the SSBSS providing that the calf breed is listed for beef purpose.

[11] stata.com

analysis (including for example, lookup tables for the age of animals at the end of each year, the total number lifelong calves per dam at the end of each year, geography and farm type of birth, breed purpose, calving interval thresholds, calf mortality thresholds, etc.). Stata was also used to extract summary data and graph key variables.

3 SSBSS Claim data 2025

14. Table 1 shows that in 2025, a total of 335,566 validated eligible calves[12] were claimed through the SSBSS (pre-calving interval eligibility checks), from 5,957 businesses. There were 3% fewer eligible validated calves claimed than in 2024 (and 14.3% fewer than in 2015), and 2.4% fewer businesses claimed SSBSS support in 2025 than in 2024 (and 18.3% fewer than in 2015).

Table 1 Total businesses claiming SSBSS and total calves claimed and validated (pre-calving interval conditionality check), 2015-2025

Year	SSBSS claims		SSBSS BRNs	
	Calves	% change	BRNs	%change
2015	391,385		7,295	
2016	392,546	0.3%	7,038	-3.5%
2017	383,204	-2.4%	6,780	-3.7%
2018	386,364	0.8%	6,905	1.8%
2019	377,082	-2.4%	6,774	-1.9%
2020	381,112	1.1%	6,723	-0.8%
2021	371,369	-2.6%	6,478	-3.6%
2022	378,382	1.9%	6,490	0.2%
2023	365,114	-3.5%	6,410	-1.2%
2024	345,943	-5.3%	6,101	-4.8%
2025	335,566	-3.0%	5,957	-2.4%
2015-2025		**-14.3%**		**-18.3%**

15. Table 2 shows the number of calves claimed and the number of businesses (represented by the Business Reference Number - BRN) claiming SSBSS support on the mainland (SSBSSM) and islands (SSBSSI) from 2015 to 2025, along with the annual change. Compared to the islands, the mainland saw larger declines in both the number of businesses claiming SSBSS support and the number of calves claimed and validated (pre-calving interval condition) in both 2024 and 2025.
16. In the SSBSSM, 2024 saw a 5% reduction in businesses claiming compared to 2023, with a 4.1% reduction in the SSBSSI. Between 2024 and 2025, SSBSSM had 2.6% fewer businesses claiming, and 3.1% fewer calves claimed, with a 1.3% reduction in businesses and a 2.3% decline in claimed and validated calves in the SSBSSI. From 2015 to 2025, there were 1,098 fewer SSBSSM businesses (-18.3%) claiming support and 240 fewer SSBSSI businesses (-18.4%) claiming support. Over

[12] This includes calves marked in the RPID database (2nd April 2026 extract) as: Calving Interval Fail, Failed Requires Assessment, Submitted, Under Action, Valid. It excludes any animals marked as: Withdrawn or Failed

the 2015 to 2025 period, there were 51,581 fewer calves claimed in the SSBSSM (-14.7%) and 4,238 fewer calves claimed through the SSBSSI (-10.2%). It is unclear why the SSBSS population on the islands appears slightly more resilient, but this may relate to the dominance of cattle rearing on Orkney, Islay, and Bute farms within the island SSBSS population.

Table 2 Total businesses claiming SSBSSM and SSBSSI and total calves claimed and validated (pre-calving interval conditionality check), 2015-2025

Scheme Year	SSBSSM claims				SSBSSI claims			
	Calves	% change	BRNs	%change	Calves	% change	BRNs	%change
2015	349,918		5,957		41,467		1,338	
2016	352,651	0.8%	5,790	-2.8%	39,895	-3.8%	1,248	-6.7%
2017	342,217	-3.0%	5,565	-3.9%	40,987	2.7%	1,215	-2.6%
2018	345,460	0.9%	5,667	1.8%	40,904	-0.2%	1,238	1.9%
2019	337,210	-2.4%	5,556	-2.0%	39,872	-2.5%	1,218	-1.6%
2020	340,391	0.9%	5,516	-0.7%	40,721	2.1%	1,207	-0.9%
2021	331,143	-2.7%	5,280	-4.3%	40,226	-1.2%	1,198	-0.7%
2022	337,471	1.9%	5,290	0.2%	40,911	1.7%	1,200	0.2%
2023	326,032	-3.4%	5,250	-0.8%	39,082	-4.5%	1,160	-3.3%
2024	307,816	-5.6%	4,988	-5.0%	38,127	-2.4%	1,113	-4.1%
2025	298,337	-3.1%	4,859	-2.6%	37,229	-2.4%	1,098	-1.3%
2015-2025		**-14.7%**		**-18.4%**		**-10.2%**		**-17.9%**

17. Table 3 shows the number of calves claimed and validated (pre-calving interval conditionality check) for each scheme year that were linked to the CTS data, along with the claimed animals' birth year. While the scheme runs annually from 1st January to 31st December, the SSBSS's 30-day retention-on-holding requirement means calves born in December are generally claimed the following year. There is no restriction on the timing when calves must be claimed, meaning calves can legitimately be claimed from previous years, provided they meet the eligibility criteria and have not been claimed before.
18. Table 3 shows that the vast majority of animals are claimed in the scheme year that they were born (2nd Dec to 1st Dec), but there is a persistent c.10k-20k calves claimed in scheme years that were born in previous scheme years. For example, in 2025, of 335,566 claimed and validated calves joined to the CTS database, 96% (324,437) were born in the 2025 scheme window, 2.1% (6,968) in the 2024 scheme window, and the remainder pre-2024 (including 1,873 born pre-2015).

Table 3 The number of calves claimed and validated per SSBSS scheme year, with the year of birth of claimed animals

Scheme Birth Year	Scheme Claim Year										
	2015	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**2025**
pre-2015	11,715	6,269	5,420	5,871	4,094	3,136	4,092	4,117	3,937	3,191	1,873
2015	**379,670**	6,511	523	359	124	170	2	20	16	2	17
2016		**379,766**	8,188	1,460	218	182	56	47	64	8	36
2017			**369,073**	14,244	781	327	71	76	109	18	46
2018				**364,427**	6,910	742	95	119	194	22	104
2019				3	**364,946**	7,022	359	122	219	26	204
2020					9	**369,524**	5,614	760	373	64	168
2021						9	**361,079**	10,714	1,013	420	367
2022							1	**362,407**	9,206	626	410
2023									**349,983**	4,648	840
2024										**336,914**	6,968
2025										4	**324,437**
2026											96
Scheme Year	**391,385**	**392,546**	**383,204**	**386,364**	**377,082**	**381,112**	**371,369**	**378,382**	**365,114**	**345,943**	**335,566**

3.1 SSBSS claim sizes

19. In addition to animals being claimed from previous scheme years, some businesses appear to skip claiming calves in certain years, then double up their claims the following year. This makes it difficult to accurately reflect the true extent of business churn within the SSBSS (i.e. business entry and exit from the scheme). Table 4 shows the number of businesses by pre-calving interval-validated calf claim size for both 2024 and 2025. This shows, for example, that between 2024 and 2025, 6,575 unique businesses (BRNs) were supported through the SSBSS (6,101 in 2024 and 5,957 in 2025). Table 5 shows the number of 2025 calves claimed by both 2024 and 2025 claim size categories, whilst Table 6 shows the amount paid to businesses in each size category.
20. Table 4 shows that 474 businesses claimed SSBSS support in 2025 but not in 2024. This included 10 businesses that claimed more than 200 calves in 2025 and 218 that claimed 10 or fewer calves. In contrast, 618 businesses that claimed SSBSS support in 2024 did not claim support in 2025. This included 319 businesses that claimed 10 or fewer calves in 2024, and only three claimed more than 200.
21. The data also shows where the 2025 claim size category changed between years. For example, 175 businesses had 11 to 25 calves claimed in 2024, but only 1 to 10 in 2025. 183 businesses that had claimed 51-100 calves in 2024 claimed 26-50 in 2025, etc. Some businesses claimed more animals in 2025, with, for example, 107 businesses moved from the 11-25 size category in 2024 to the 26-50 size category in 2025, with a similar number (113) moving from the 26-50 category in 2024 to the 51-100 category in 2025

Table 4 Number of businesses claiming SSBSS support by claim size (pre-calving interval validated calves) category, 2024 and 2025

2024 Claim Size	2025 Claim Size									2024 Total
	Zero	1-10	11-25	26-50	51-100	101-150	151-200	201-400	>400	
Zero		**218**	**95**	**73**	**51**	**14**	**13**	**8**	**2**	**474**
1-10	**319**	842	105	3		1				**1,270**
11-25	**139**	175	805	107	2					**1,228**
26-50	**87**	28	197	859	113					**1,284**
51-100	**53**	5	22	183	1,001	74	2	1		**1,341**
101-150	**14**		2	3	105	368	33		1	**526**
151-200	**3**			3	3	44	146	23		**222**
201-400	**2**				2	2	30	154	3	**193**
>400	**1**							9	27	**37**
2025 Total	**618**	**1,268**	**1,226**	**1,231**	**1,277**	**503**	**224**	**195**	**33**	**6,575**

22. Table 5 shows similar data to Table 4, but with the number of calves claimed (pre-calving interval check) in 2025. Of the 335k animals claimed in the 2025 SSBSS, 15.6k were from businesses that had not claimed in 2024. Table 6 shows how the 2025 SSBSS budget was distributed by claim size category. £1.67m went to the businesses that did not claim SSBSS in the 2024 scheme year. The 33 businesses in the >400 animals claimed group in 2025 had 18k calves claimed, around 5.5% of the total calves claimed, and 5.5% of total payments (see Table 6). There were 92k calves claimed in the 51-100 group – around 27% of the animals and the payments (£10.9m). Only 6.8k animals were in claim sizes of 10 or less, accounting for just over 2% of animals and payments. The 11-25 group had 21.4k animals claimed in 2025, accounting for just over 6% of the calves claimed and payments.

Table 5 Number of 2025 pre-calving interval validated calves by SSBSS claim size category, 2024 and 2025

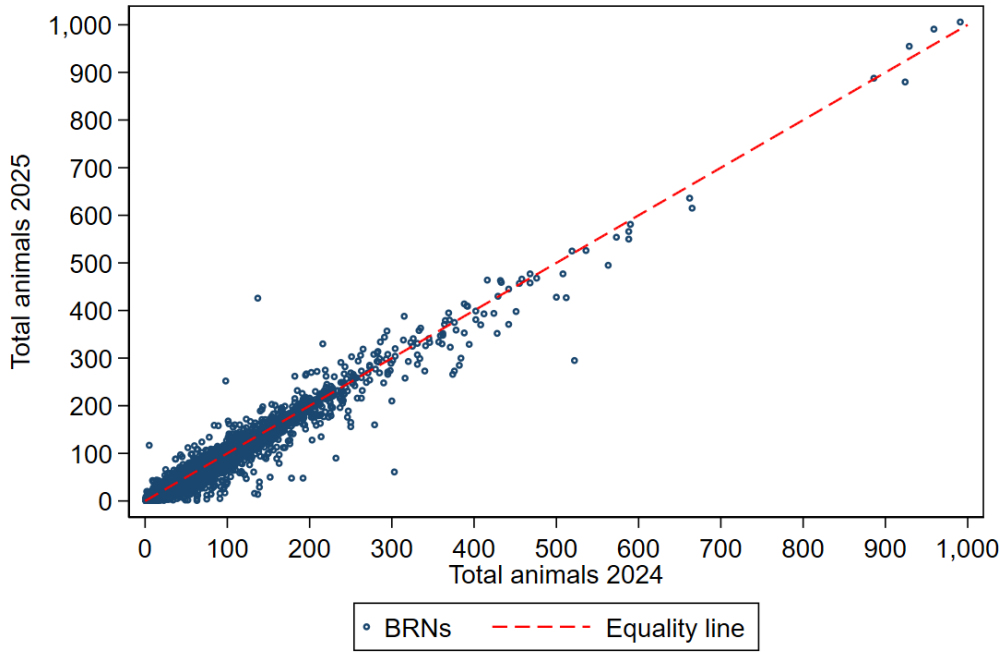
2024 Claim Size	2025 Claim Size								2024 Total
	1-10	11-25	26-50	51-100	101-150	151-200	201-400	>400	
Zero	931	1,574	2,664	3,733	1,636	2,155	2,026	856	15,575
1-10	4,376	1,406	111		117				6,010
11-25	1,271	13,902	3,230	120					18,523
26-50	193	4,118	31,847	6,522					42,680
51-100	17	403	7,717	71,793	7,943	317	252		88,442
101-150		30	116	9,325	45,142	5,371		426	60,410
151-200			146	265	5,988	25,262	5,014		36,675
201-400				151	263	5,439	41,125	1,233	48,211
>400							3,353	15,687	19,040
2025 Total	**6,788**	**21,433**	**45,831**	**91,909**	**61,089**	**38,544**	**51,770**	**18,202**	**335,566**

Table 6 Number of pre-calving interval-validated calves by SSBSS claim size category, 2024 and 2025

2024 Claim Size	2025 Claim Size								2024 Total
	1-10	11-25	26-50	51-100	101-150	151-200	201-400	>400	
Zero	£107k	£162k	£276k	£389k	£192k	£238k	£220k	£80k	£1,665k
1-10	£530k	£144k	£11k		£13k				£697k
11-25	£159k	£1,656k	£368k	£11k					£2,195k
26-50	£19k	£490k	£3,772k	£724k					£5,005k
51-100	£2k	£44k	£936k	£8,586k	£914k	£39k	£32k		£10,552k
101-150		£3k	£12k	£1,110k	£5,480k	£612k		£47k	£7,265k
151-200			£12k	£33k	£717k	£3,147k	£597k		£4,505k
201-400				£15k	£33k	£669k	£5,031k	£154k	£5,902k
>400							£389k	£1,953k	£2,342k
2025 Total	**£817k**	**£2,500k**	**£5,387k**	**£10,869k**	**£7,348k**	**£4,704k**	**£6,269k**	**£2,233k**	**£40,127k**

23. Figure 1 shows the number of calves claimed and validated in 2024 (x-axis) by the number claimed and validated (pre-calving interval check) in 2025 for businesses (BRNs) that claimed in both years. The red dotted line is the equality line (i.e. businesses on this line claimed the same number of animals in each year). A point represents each business, and any business lying above the equality line claimed more animals in 2025 than in 2024, whilst those below the equality line claimed fewer animals in 2025. These inter-year variations matter, as they affect payments received and the proportion of animals meeting the new 410-day calving interval. Although the chart suggests substantial inter-year variation, the relative density of businesses near the equality line is not apparent.

Figure 1 Total SSBSS calves claimed (pre-calving interval checks) per unique BRN (2024 and 2025) – only BRNs claiming in both years



24. In addition to changes between years affecting the SSBSS support received, the number of animals claimed also affects support. However, using the Scottish

Government's scheme data, it was unclear how many ineligible calves due to dams with calving intervals over 410 days were not submitted by claimants in the 2025 scheme year (meaning it was impossible to fully assess the impacts of the SSBSS eligibility changes from this data). Anecdotal evidence from agents, farmers and crofters suggests that some claimants, and some farm software, only submitted the 410-day eligible calves to the Scottish Government. However, analysis of CTS data, eligible calves and total beef and dairyX dams on holdings associated with businesses (BRNs) claiming SSBSS addresses this data gap in Section 4, Cattle Tracing System data.

25. Using the SSBSS calf ear-tag numbers, the number of dams that were linked to claimed calves on holdings associated with SSBSS claims was calculated (noting the claim year and the calving year can differ) and plotted against the total number of eligible dams (beef and dairyX purpose) calving on those holdings in the 2025 SSBSS scheme year.

26. Figure 2 shows the scatter plot of total eligible SSBSSI dams calving in the 2025 scheme year (36,617 total) against the number of dams associated with SSBSSI claims in 2025 (35,553), with those considerably below the equality line not claiming a high proportion of their calves (for whatever reason – claimant choice or calves not retained for 30-days through off-move or death). This suggests that 97.1% of eligible SSBSSI dams that calved in 2025 had calves claimed. Similarly, Figure 3 shows that from a total of 295,370 eligible dams on holdings associated with the SSBSSM, only 278,407 dams were associated with SSBSSM calf claims in 2025 (a 94.25% claim rate).

Figure 2 Scatter plot of total eligible beef and dairy cross dams calving on SSBSSI holdings versus dams associated with 2025 claimed calves per business in the 2025 SSBSS scheme year

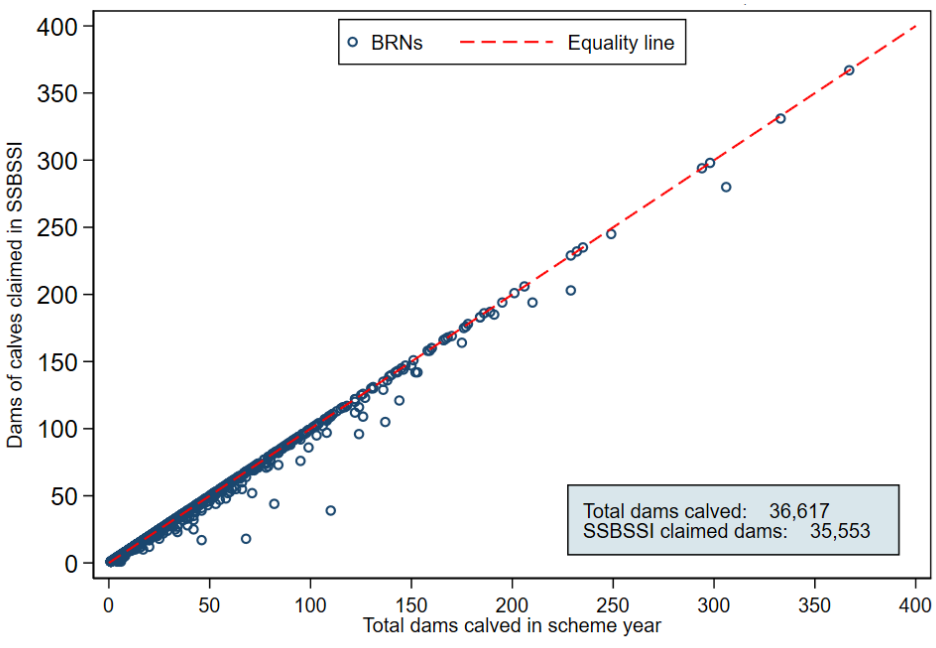
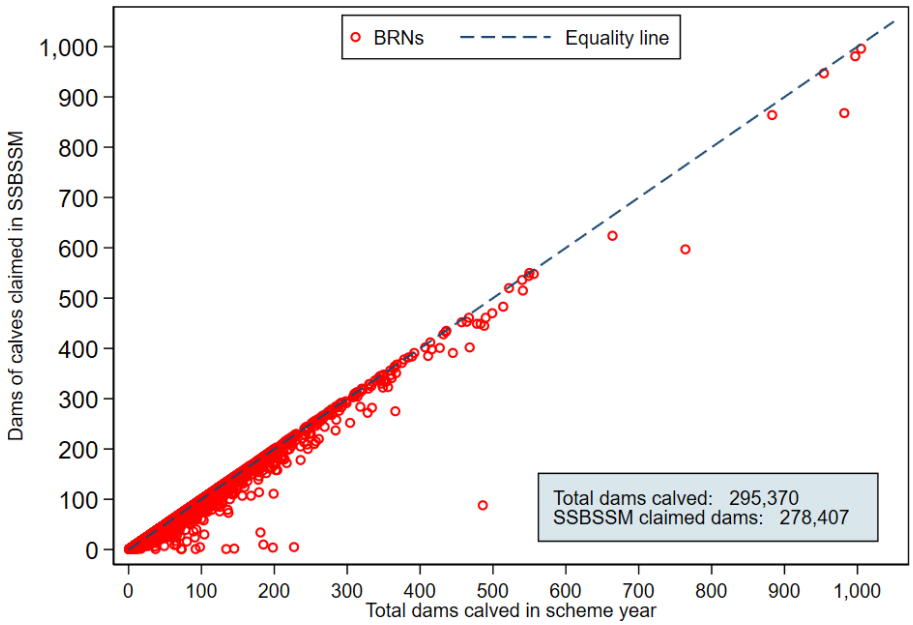
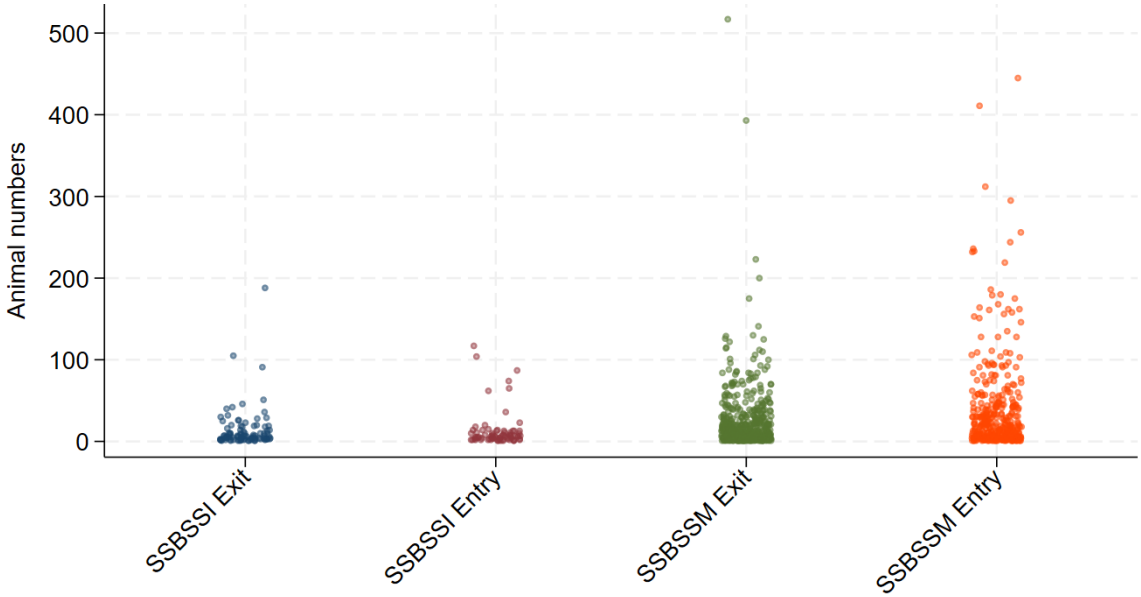


Figure 3 Scatter plot of total eligible beef and dairy cross dams calving on SSBSSM holdings versus dams associated with 2025 claimed calves per business in the 2025 SSBSS scheme year



27. Figure 4 provides a strip plot showing the relative densities of businesses that exited the SSBSS between 2024 and 2025 (noting that this may be a temporary exit) and those that entered in 2025 but did not claim in 2025. Notably, many herds entering and exiting the scheme between years are relatively small, with a few larger herds dropping out and entering SSBSS between years.

Figure 4 Strip plot[13] of businesses (BRNs) that entered and exited the SSBSSI and SSBSSM between 2024 and 2025



[13] A strip plot is a type of scatter plot used to visualize the distribution of a data grouped into categories. It plots individual data points along a single axis, making it effective for identifying data density and spotting outliers in small-to-medium datasets

3.2 410-day calving interval eligibility

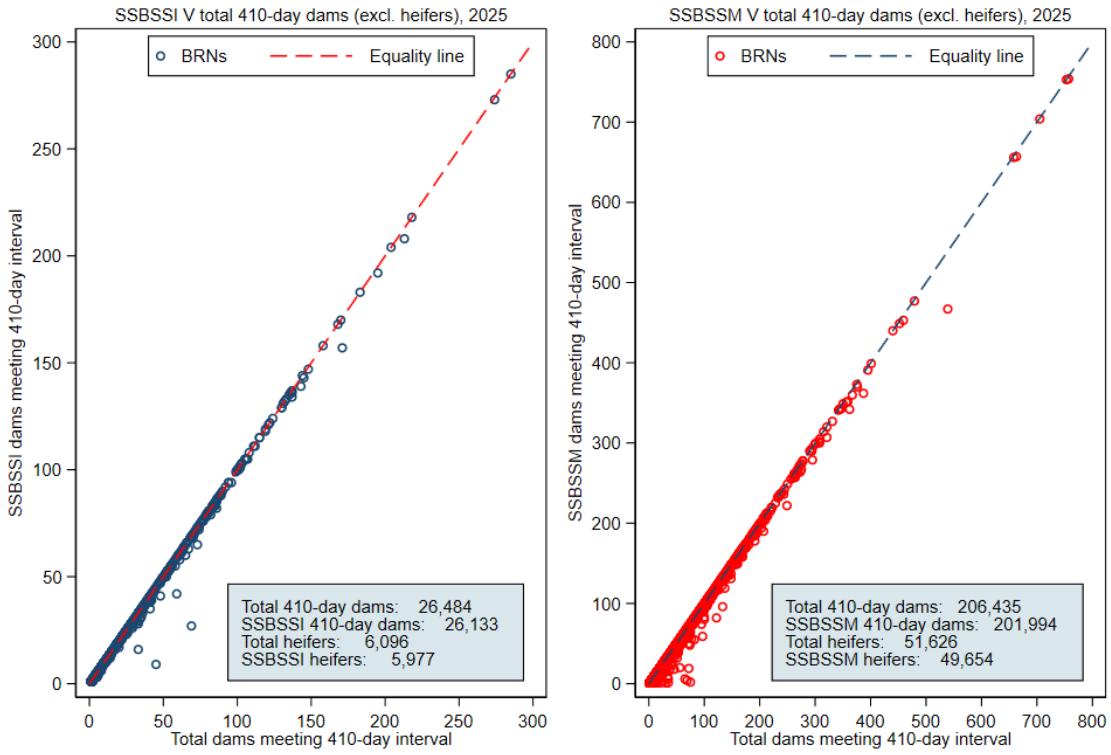
28. According to the Scottish Government's SSBSS claim data, there were 32,636 claimed and validated calves out of 335,566 that failed the dam 410-day calving interval eligibility criterion in 2025 (9.7%). In previous years, these calves would have been eligible for support, and the reduced number of calving interval-eligible calves was reflected in the higher payment rates made in 2025:

Payment 2025 rates:

- £127.20 (+14.25%) for SSBSSM
- £175.90 (+13.46%) for SSBSSI

29. Combining the SSBSS claim data with the CTS database Figure 5 shows a scatter plot of the total number of 410-day calving interval eligible dams per business for the 2025 scheme year (x-axis), alongside the number of 410-day eligible dams for which a calf was claimed. As mentioned previously, observations under the equality line may result from business decisions (e.g., they may claim calves in the 2026 scheme year) or may reflect calves not retained on the holding of birth for the 30-day retention period (i.e., through on-farm death or off moves). 98.7% of 26,484 dams that had previously calved and met the 410-day criteria for SSBSSI had a calf claimed against them, with 98% of eligible heifers also having a calf claimed. For the SSBSSM, 97.8% of the 206,435 410-day eligible dams had calves claimed against them, alongside 96.2% of 51,626 heifers. Both scatter plots show a small number of businesses with relatively lower claim rates for 410-day eligible calves.

Figure 5 Scatter plot of total eligible beef and dairyX dams meeting the 410-day calving interval condition on holdings associated with SSBSS 2025, and the number of dams that met the condition associated with a calf claim



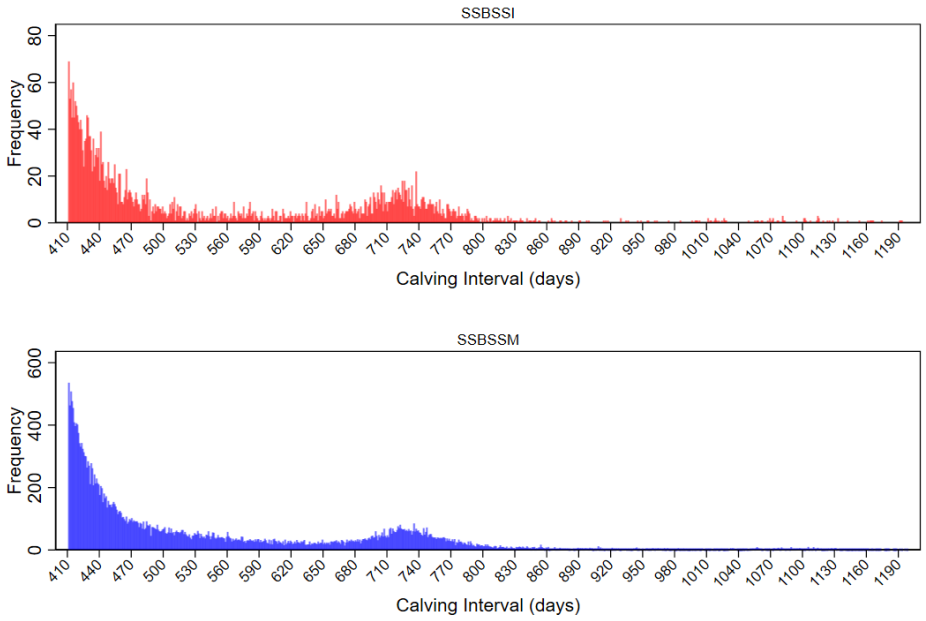
30. Table 7 shows the details of the dam calving intervals of submitted and verified SSBSS calves deemed ineligible due to the 410-day calving interval rule. 9.7% of the claimed calves (noting that not all calves may have been claimed) failed to meet the new 410-day rule in both the island and mainland schemes. The percentile figures show that 5% (p5) of island calf failures were between 410 and 414 days, 10% (p10) were 417 days or less, and 25% (p25) were 431 days or less. The mean calving interval failure on the islands (564 days) was heavily skewed by outliers (maximum 6.7 years), as the median was 483 days. On the mainland, 5% of the calves that failed the calving interval criterion only failed by 3 days (413 days), whilst 10% were 417 days or less and 25% 430 days or less. The mean (662 days) was again heavily skewed by outliers (maximum 9.5 years), with the median at 479 days.

Table 7 Distribution of 2025 calving interval failures on validated claimed animals

Scheme	Number of Calves	Percentile / mean / Max								
		p5	p10	p25	Median	Mean	p75	p90	p95	Max
SSBSSI	3,628 (9.74% fail)	414	417	431	483	564	698	751	791	2,452
SSBSSM	28,984 (9.72% fail)	413	417	430	479	554	662	755	830	3,476

31. Figure 6 shows the distribution of calving-interval failures in the Scottish Government official data for both SSBSSI and SSBSSM. The data did not include calving interval data for dams meeting the criteria, so this data cannot be used to show the distribution curve of eligible dams. However, the data for both SSBSSI and SSBSSM follow the same pattern, with a high number of failures by a few days, tapering off to 500 days before a small rise at around 2 years (710 to 770 days).

Figure 6 Frequency distribution of 410-day dam calving interval eligibility failures for SSBSSM and SSBSSI. Animals per day over 410 days (max 1,200)



32. Whilst the national-level picture is important, the herd-level position is also very revealing. Table 8 shows that 1,712 (28.7%) of businesses claiming SSBSS had zero calves failing from the dam 410-day calving interval eligibility rule in 2025. This relates to not all eligible calves being claimed (as shown for dams in Figure 2 and Figure 3). With a further 28.3% of businesses having a calving interval failure rate of less than 10% (but more than zero), 57% of businesses had failure rates under 10%. At the other extreme, 61 businesses (1% of claimants) had failure rates of 90-100%, with nearly 4% of claimants having calving interval failure rates of over 50%.
33. However, Table 8 does not show claim size by business, meaning very small claims can influence herd distributions at both ends. As the data do not necessarily include all calves within a herd, caution should be used when using and interpreting these data, rather than the data provided in Section 4 Cattle Tracing System data which provides a full herd analysis (including the calving interval distributions of all SSBSS-eligible dams). Figure 7 does, however, provide a scatter graph of the calving interval failure rate (y-axis) against the claim size per business, including all verified calves (x-axis). The data show that poorer-performing herds were often under 50 calves, although some 100-plus claim sizes also performed relatively poorly (over 20% calving interval failure).

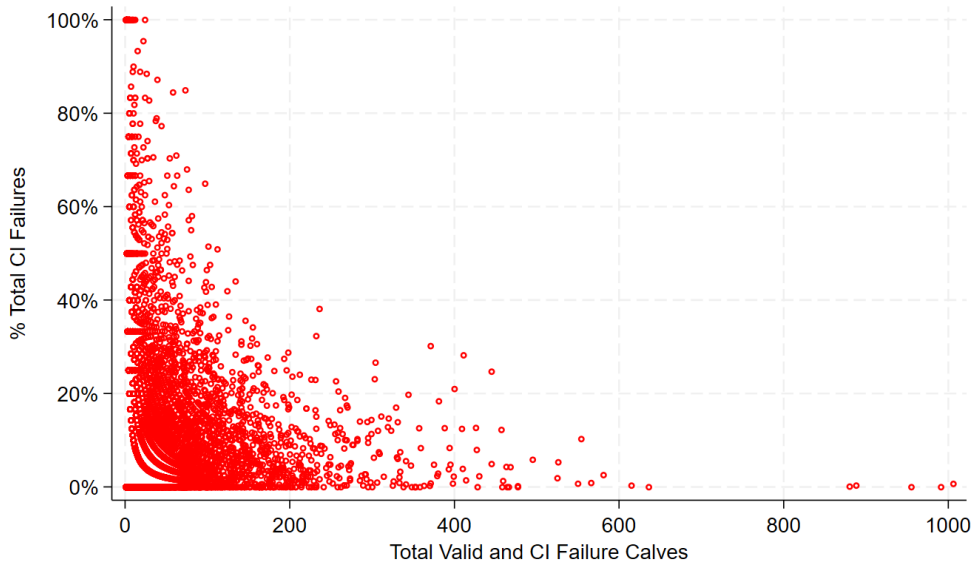
Table 8 Count and proportion of businesses (BRNs) by calving interval failure rate, 2025

CI failure rate	BRNs	Percent	Cumulative %
0%	1,712	28.74%	28.74%
>0% to 10%	1,686	28.30%	57.04%
10% to 20%	1,228	20.61%	77.66%
20% to 30%	598	10.04%	87.70%
30% to 40%	299	5.02%	92.71%
40% to 50%	198	3.32%	96.04%
50% to 60%	73	1.23%	97.26%
60% to 70%	48	0.81%	98.07%
70% to 80%	38	0.64%	98.71%
80% to 90%	16	0.27%	98.98%
90% to 100%	61	1.02%	100%
Total	**5,957**	**100%**	



Picture: Heifer at Blargie Farm, Laggan, Highlands (S Thomson)

Figure 7 SSBSS validated claimed animals (x-axis) versus proportion of animals failing the 410-day calving interval criterion per business claiming in 2025



3.3 SSBSS Payments

34. Table 9 and Table 10 show the number of businesses receiving SSBSS payments on the islands and mainland, respectively, along with the relative distribution of payments. The data shows that in 2024 and 2025 there was a decline in the number of businesses claiming / eligible for support, and whilst this is the period when the calving interval was announced and introduced, it also coincided with a period of very high cattle prices that has led to some structural change in the sector.
35. Between 2015 and 2025, the total number of recipients on both the islands and the mainland fell by 20%. The data suggest that the largest herds, as shown by the 75th, 90th, 95th, and maximum payments in Table 9 and Table 10, benefited most from recent changes to SSBSS eligibility criteria. However, as previously mentioned, this can be down to herd size increases, the proportion of eligible animals claimed, or indeed herd efficiencies (calving interval and calf mortality rates).
36. On the islands, the 5th percentile (p5) SSBSSI payment of £176 in 2025 shows that 5% of businesses only received payment for a single calf (after calving interval eligibility checks), which is down from previous years, where it would appear that the 5th percentile received payments for two calves (except for 2015). Similarly, the 10th percentile on the islands in 2025 (£352) indicates that at least 10% of businesses only received payments for two eligible calves. 25% of island claimants received less than £1,000 in each scheme year, and in 2025, half of the businesses received less than £2,625 (the median). Whilst the mean payment on the islands has increased over the years (to £5,553 in 2025), this is a reflection of an increase in payments going to bigger herds, as indicated in the changes in the 75th, 90th, 95th and maximum payments. In 2025, 5% of island claimants received more than (p95) £20,845, and 25% received more than £7,036 (p75).

Table 9 SSBSSI payment distribution (percentiles and mean) and count of support recipients (BRNs), 2015-2025

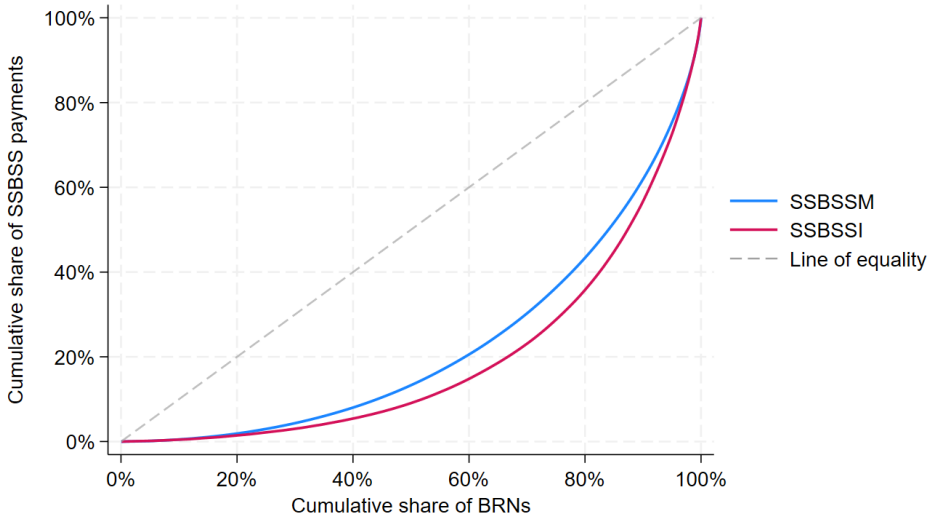
Year	BRNs	Change	p5	p10	p25	Median	Mean	p75	p90	p95	Max
2015	**1,322**		£112	£225	£511	**£1,439**	**£3,407**	£4,440	£9,491	£13,084	£32,279
2016	**1,245**	**-5.8%**	£278	£281	£694	**£1,943**	**£4,440**	£5,969	£12,354	£16,379	£44,580
2017	**1,213**	**-2.6%**	£284	£288	£711	**£2,276**	**£4,803**	£6,258	£13,085	£17,636	£47,787
2018	**1,231**	**1.5%**	£284	£289	£719	**£2,134**	**£4,710**	£5,974	£13,086	£17,496	£46,371
2019	**1,215**	**-1.3%**	£292	£438	£730	**£2,191**	**£4,784**	£6,282	£13,147	£18,114	£47,623
2020	**1,207**	**-0.7%**	£290	£290	£726	**£2,322**	**£4,893**	£6,386	£13,062	£18,141	£48,909
2021	**1,196**	**-0.9%**	£294	£294	£734	**£2,203**	**£4,930**	£6,536	£13,218	£18,652	£51,404
2022	**1,201**	**0.4%**	£289	£433	£867	**£2,312**	**£4,917**	£6,502	£13,437	£17,916	£53,024
2023	**1,160**	**-3.4%**	£302	£454	£907	**£2,420**	**£5,090**	£6,806	£13,158	£19,133	£54,750
2024	**1,113**	**-4.1%**	£310	£465	£930	**£2,480**	**£5,304**	£6,821	£14,108	£19,689	£56,431
2025	**1,060**	**-4.8%**	£176	£352	£880	**£2,625**	**£5,553**	£7,036	£15,479	£20,845	£64,732
2015-2025		**-20%**									

37. The distribution of SSBSS payments on the mainland is similar to the islands, but with larger herds, on average. The 5th percentile (p5) SSBSSM payment of £382 in 2025 shows that 5% of businesses received payment for three or fewer calves after calving interval eligibility checks (broadly similar to previous years). The 10th percentile payment on the mainland in 2025 (£636) means at least 10% of businesses received payments for only 5 eligible calves (down from recent years). 25% of mainland claimants (p25) received less than £1,654 in 2025, with the 35th percentile lower than the previous four claim years (2021-2024). In 2025, half (median) of the SSBSSM businesses received less than £4,325, and the median payment was broadly similar to previous years. Whilst the mean payment for the mainland increased over the years (to £7,032 in 2025), this was a reflection of an increase in payments going to bigger herds, as indicated by the changes in the 75th, 90th, 95th and maximum payments over the years. In 2025, 5% of mainland SSBSS claimants received more than (p95) £22,387, and 25% received more than £9,158 (p75).
38. Figure 8 shows the distribution of payments to businesses in the SSBSSI and SSBSSM by the cumulative proportion of total payments (y-axis) going to the cumulative proportion of businesses (x-axis) – a so-called Lorenz curve. The equality line illustrates a scenario where every business received an equal share of the budget. The curve reflects the national beef herd structure: the largest c.10% of businesses received 40% of the funding, and 40% of businesses received less than c.10% of support.

Table 10 SSBSSM payment distribution (percentiles and mean) and count of support recipients (BRNs), 2015-2025

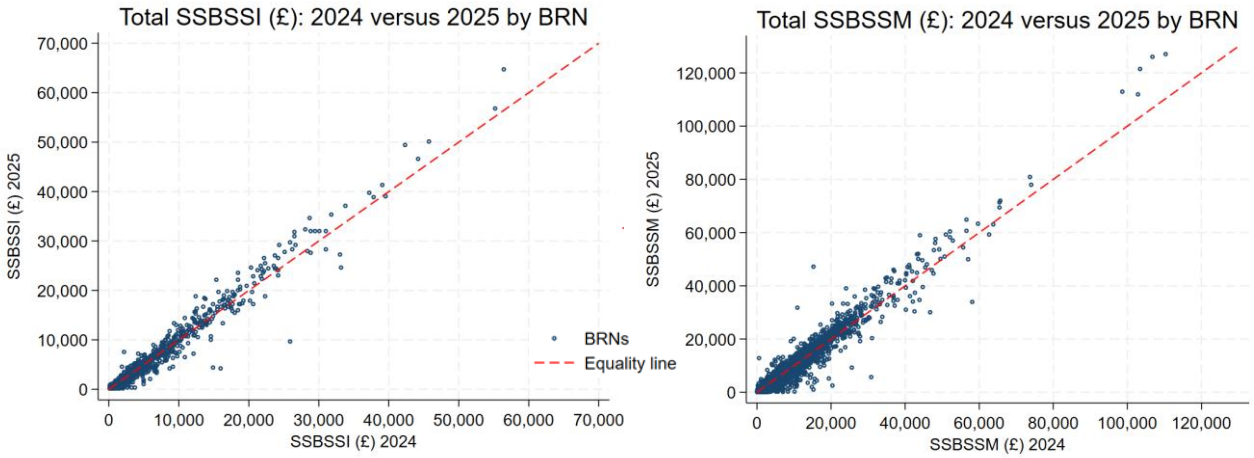
Year	BRNs	Change	p5	p10	p25	Median	Mean	p75	p90	p95	Max
2015	**5,972**		£224	£373	£1,045	**£2,761**	**£4,368**	£5,821	£9,702	£13,509	£121,599
2016	**5,785**	**-3.1%**	£276	£545	£1,453	**£3,632**	**£5,525**	£7,264	£12,167	£16,798	£156,322
2017	**5,553**	**-4.0%**	£294	£589	£1,570	**£4,022**	**£6,029**	£7,849	£13,343	£18,346	£161,096
2018	**5,649**	**1.7%**	£293	£585	£1,560	**£3,804**	**£5,949**	£7,705	£13,361	£18,433	£151,652
2019	**5,543**	**-1.9%**	£304	£601	£1,502	**£3,904**	**£6,074**	£7,909	£13,715	£18,921	£161,783
2020	**5,500**	**-0.8%**	£302	£604	£1,612	**£4,029**	**£6,218**	£8,259	£13,899	£19,086	£132,950
2021	**5,276**	**-4.1%**	£414	£621	£1,759	**£4,243**	**£6,484**	£8,485	£14,280	£19,765	£109,172
2022	**5,283**	**0.1%**	£406	£710	£1,707	**£4,158**	**£6,467**	£8,418	£14,503	£19,980	£103,045
2023	**5,243**	**-0.8%**	£315	£631	£1,682	**£4,204**	**£6,511**	£8,513	£14,504	£20,180	£109,937
2024	**4,983**	**-5.0%**	£334	£668	£1,781	**£4,453**	**£6,853**	£9,018	£15,252	£21,041	£110,327
2025	**4,788**	**-3.9%**	£382	£636	£1,654	**£4,325**	**£7,032**	£9,158	£16,027	£22,387	£127,069
2015-2025		**-20%**									

Figure 8 Lorenz curve showing the distribution of SSBSS mainland and island payments (% of payments) to businesses (% of recipients), 2025



39. To show changes in SSBSS payments received by businesses between 2024 and 2025, Figure 9 shows the scatter plot of payments made to island businesses (graph on left) and mainland businesses (graph on right) in 2024 (x-axis) and 2025 (y-axis). It should be recalled that while relative calving interval performance may be the underlying factor in the changes in the amount of support received, these receipts are also influenced by the size of the eligible claim, which can be influenced by herd size, calf retention (off moves and death), and human behaviour (forgetting to claim, etc). All businesses (BRNs) are reflected by a blue circle, and any business lying above the equality line received higher payments in 2025 than in 2024, with those lower than the equality line receiving less in 2025 compared to 2024.

Figure 9 Total SSBSSI and SSBSSM payments to individual recipients in 2024 and 2025, with an equality line (only those receiving support in both years included)



4 Cattle Tracing System data insights

40. Several previous studies for the Scottish Government have utilised the Cattle Tracing System (CTS) data held by SRUC under data sharing agreements with devolved administrations and the Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) to provide analytical insights on calving intervals and associated metrics.
41. The 2015-2025 CTS extracts were combined with data provided by the Scottish Government through Data Sharing Agreement No.53 with SRUC, which provided the business reference number (BRN) and calf ear-tag numbers of all animals claimed in SSBSS from 2015 to 2025. These data were joined to CTS dam identifications and the calf birth holding. The extended CTS database was then analysed to assess the full calving interval performance of all beef dams on holdings associated with SSBSS claims, summarise calf retention failures (off -moves and on-holdings deaths within 30 days of birth), and assess the greenhouse gas emissions associated with beef dams on SSBSS holdings with calving intervals over 410-days.

4.1 SSBSS claimed versus unclaimed beef dam population

42. The challenge in the first year of the new calving interval condition relates to the number of beef dams that calved in 2025 with a calf that was not claimed in the 2025 SSBSS scheme year. The calves from these dams may have been ineligible because of the 30-day calf-retention rule or the new calving interval rule, or they may be eligible and were not claimed in 2025 but may be claimed in future scheme years.
43. Table 11 shows that in the 2025 scheme calving year 310,117 dams had calves claimed in the SSBSS (down from 334,794 in 2023 and 345,603 in 2024), noting that some unclaimed calves from beef dams calving in 2025 may be claimed in future years (as was the case for dams calving in 2023 and 2024, etc.). Table 11 shows the main breeds of dams which SSBSS claimed calves are born to, with Aberdeen

Angus X (20%), Simmental X (19%), and Limousin X (16%) accounting for 55% of dams calving in 2025 that had calves claimed.

Table 11 Main breeds of SSBSS claimed dams, and dams unclaimed by the SSBSS scheme calving year 2023 to 2025

Claimed in SSBSS			
Beef Breeds	Scheme Calving Year		
	2023	2024	2025
Total	**345,603**	**334,794**	**310,117**
Aberdeen Angus X	67,126	66,353	63,019
Simmental X	66,652	62,941	57,380
Limousin X	61,213	56,907	50,136
Aberdeen Angus	16,250	16,218	15,833
Beef Shorthorn X	14,712	15,588	15,504
Salers X	15,677	16,073	15,300
British Blue X	12,321	11,717	10,525
Hereford X	10,292	9,955	9,486
Luing	8,967	8,727	8,978
Simmental	9,049	8,990	8,159
Limousin	7,437	6,915	5,748
Charolais X	6,473	5,928	5,306

Cont'd			
Beef Breeds	Scheme Calving Year		
	2023	2024	2025
Salers	4,762	4,817	4,625
Beef Shorthorn	4,436	4,560	4,426
Stabiliser X	3,862	4,379	4,411
Shorthorn X	6,776	5,428	3,982
Highland	4,051	3,949	3,524
Stabiliser	2,440	2,742	2,937
Whitebred S.Horn X	2,698	2,727	2,704
Galloway	2,681	2,673	2,425
Luing X	2,444	2,312	2,215
Blue Grey	2,255	2,272	2,180
Charolais	2,560	2,481	2,103
Hereford	1,585	1,653	1,596
Belted Galloway	1,240	1,340	1,203

Note there were fewer than 500 dairyX dams of calves claimed in any year & RPID assesses them.

44. In addition, there were also suckler cows and heifers whose eligible calves remained unclaimed by the end of the 2025 scheme year, noting some of these may be claimed in future scheme years. Table 12 shows that 10,565 beef dams that calved in 2023 did not have their calf claimed by the end of the 2025 scheme year, with 12,342 unclaimed from 2024 and 28,966 from 2025. The jump in number in 2025 reflects some calves with dam calving interval failures not being claimed by some businesses. The data shows that in 2023 and 2024, about 55% of these unclaimed dams were on holdings associated with businesses claiming SSBSS (recalling that some businesses can drop out and then double up claims in the next year). In contrast, only 36% (c.10k) were on non-SSBSS-associated holdings in 2025. The breeds of dams that remain unclaimed are also listed, noting that there may be a variety of reasons for these animals being unclaimed)

Table 12 Beef dams of calves unclaimed in SSBSS, by breed and scheme calving year, with proportion of dams on holdings not associated with SSBSS claims in the given scheme year

Beef Breeds	Total Dams with no calf claimed (Calving year)			% on non-SSBSS holdings in year		
	2023	2024	2025	2023	2024	2025
Total	**10,565**	**12,342**	**28,966**	**56%**	**54%**	**36%**
Aberdeen Angus X	1,832	2,210	5,162	58%	55%	39%
Limousin X	1,454	1,502	4,663	56%	44%	29%
Simmental X	1,488	1,707	4,474	50%	45%	25%
Beef Shorthorn X	544	654	1,524	45%	50%	46%
Aberdeen Angus	611	797	1,422	57%	56%	32%
British Blue X	460	552	1,225	65%	61%	37%
Salers X	206	235	1,007	23%	42%	20%
Simmental	266	303	1,001	57%	39%	21%
Highland	697	753	976	90%	83%	70%
Limousin	220	267	930	35%	39%	31%
Hereford X	351	428	804	56%	67%	43%

4.1.1 Claimed and unclaimed dams and excess greenhouse gas emissions

45. Table 13 shows the number of dams calving in each SSBSS scheme year, along with the number of heifers calving and the previously calved dams to which the 410-day calving interval rule applies. In addition, the number of dams that meet the 410-day rule is shown, as are the excess life days of beef dams that calve beyond 410 days within a scheme year. The bottom (orange) section shows the **total beef dams on the holdings** associated with businesses claiming SSBSS, the middle (purple) section summarises the **dams calving in a scheme year that have a calf claimed SSBSS**, and the top (blue) section relates to dams that are on holdings associated with SSBSS claims but whose **calf has not yet been claimed** (e.g. due to retention failures, calving interval failures, or other reasons). Some key points include:
    - There was a long-term decline in the number of businesses claiming SSBSS as the Scottish suckler herd contracted, and some producers withdrew from the sector. The number of **unclaimed beef dams** on SSBSS-associated holdings remained at c.8k to 11k over the 2015 to 2024 period, before jumping to c.18k due to calving interval failures. Each year, including in 2025, c.4k to 6k beef dams on these holdings did not have calf claims (some due to calf deaths and some due to off-moves). Of the c.18k dams unclaimed in 2025, 5k met the 410-day calving interval condition and may be claimed in future scheme years.
    - The number of cow life days exceeding the 410-day calving interval associated with **unclaimed cows** on holdings that claim SSBSS increased from 362k days (991 life years) in 2024 to 1.49 million days (4,083 life years) in 2025, mostly due to calving interval failures.

- The number of **SSBSS claimed dams** continued to decline over time based on the dam calving year, falling from 380k in 2015 to 314k in 2025 (a drop of 17%).
- Over the 2015 to 2025 period, the number of **claimed beef heifers** calving in a scheme year only fell by 9% (from 54.6k to 64.6k). The 2022 and 2023 calving years saw a 10% decline in claimed heifers, following a period of marginal increases in SSBSS heifer numbers. In 2024 and 2025, claimed heifers fell by 2.2% and 1.2%, respectively.
- On the holdings associated with the businesses claiming SSBSS, the **total number of dams calving** fell to 332k in 2025 (down 12k from 2024). There were 15% fewer dams on holdings claiming SSBSS in 2025 than in 2015, with a 23% reduction in the number of businesses claiming, suggesting some smaller producers have withdrawn from the scheme (and production).
- 2022-23 saw significant herd restructuring across the national suckler herd, as high costs of production (the war in Ukraine) and high beef prices led to many farms optimising returns by getting rid of barren, or poor performing, dams and some opting to sell heifers that may otherwise have been kept for breeding.
- Whilst the number of **SSBSS claimed dams that previously calved** fell by 18% over the 2015 to 2025 period, the total excess days beyond the 410-day calving interval from this population fell by 52% (i.e. the remaining dams are more efficient). These excess days fell from 9 million days / 24,657 years in 2015 to 4.17 million days / 11,419 years in 2025. Based on Moxey and Thomson's (2020[14]) estimates of 2.86 tonnes CO_2e emissions per suckler cow per year, this equated to 35k tonnes less CO_2e emissions associated with excess days in 2025 compared to 2015.
- It is worth noting that 2019 saw SSBSS scheme **emissions** associated with calving intervals exceeding 410 days increase by 10% (SSBSS calving dams increased by 0.4%), following the effects of the Beast from the East, and associated feed shortages in the spring of 2018. This shows how adverse weather years can affect dam technical performance. Whilst excess SSBSS-associated 410-day emissions fell by 10% in 2020 (dams increased 0.9%), followed by a 13% decline in 2023 (dams fell by 4.3%), the 35% decline in 2025 (6.3% fewer claimed dams) to 32,692t CO_2e was the largest change in efficiency associated with SSBSS claims (due to c.10k dams not being claimed).
- The 410-day excess days and emissions associated with **all calving beef dams on SSBSS holdings** fell by 37% between 2015 and 2025 to 15,502 life years and 44,383t CO_2e. Through the SSBSS, the Scottish Government is no longer supporting dams of eligible calves that produce these excess emissions.

[14] estimated_suckler_beef_climate_scheme_effects_within_national_ghg_smart_inventory.pdf

Table 13 Number of dams and heifers calving in each SSBSS scheme year, with number meeting a 410-day calving interval, and total excess greenhouse gas emissions over 410-day calving interval, for dams mothers of calves claimed in SSBSS (noting the dams are recorded in their birthing year rather than the calf claim year here)

	SSBSS scheme calving year										
Beef dams on SSBSS holdings	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**2025**
BRNs in SSBSS	**7,673**	**7,453**	**7,302**	**7,227**	**7,102**	**7,031**	**6,926**	**6,810**	**6,644**	**6,332**	**5,945**
Not claimed in SSBSS											
Dams calving	10,140	11,510	11,460	11,379	9,770	9,295	9,577	8,455	8,329	9,476	18,125
Previously calved dams	7,499	8,470	8,400	8,358	7,198	6,805	7,036	6,226	6,155	7,085	15,810
Dams meeting 410 days CI	2,641	3,040	3,060	3,021	2,572	2,490	2,541	2,229	2,174	2,391	2,315
Heifers calving	4,940	5,721	5,514	5,689	4,741	4,549	4,631	4,030	4,043	4,773	5,007
Excess 410 CI days	**362,412**	**408,251**	**443,471**	**417,471**	**387,374**	**360,903**	**404,334**	**336,737**	**324,925**	**362,596**	**1,490,492**
Excess 410-day tones CO_2e	**2,843t**	**3,202t**	**3,479t**	**3,275t**	**3,038t**	**2,831t**	**3,172t**	**2,641t**	**2,549t**	**2,844t**	**11,691t**
SSBSS Claimed											
Dams calving	380,037	379,443	376,039	365,130	363,782	367,215	365,176	363,157	346,658	334,948	313,960
Previously calved dams	315,351	314,623	310,152	300,762	299,197	301,938	299,181	297,766	288,063	277,653	257,380
Dams meeting 410 days CI	249,580	250,805	248,379	242,163	237,670	247,068	243,578	244,695	240,827	228,889	228,127
Heifers calving	64,686	64,820	65,887	64,368	64,585	65,277	65,995	65,391	58,595	57,295	56,580
Excess 410 CI days	**8,676,378**	**8,456,793**	**8,528,915**	**8,091,386**	**8,917,240**	**8,061,346**	**7,525,481**	**7,235,267**	**6,328,821**	**6,450,367**	**4,167,886**
Excess 410-day CO_2e emissions	**68,056t**	**66,334t**	**66,899t**	**63,468t**	**69,945t**	**63,232t**	**59,029t**	**56,752t**	**49,642t**	**50,596t**	**32,692t**
Total on SSBSS holdings											
Dams calving	390,177	390,953	387,499	376,509	373,552	376,510	374,753	371,612	354,987	344,424	332,085
Previously calved dams	322,850	323,093	318,552	309,120	306,395	308,743	306,217	303,992	294,218	284,738	273,190
Dams meeting 410 days CI	67,327	67,860	68,947	67,389	67,157	67,767	68,536	67,620	60,769	59,686	58,895
Heifers calving	254,520	256,526	253,893	247,852	242,411	251,617	248,209	248,725	244,870	233,662	233,134
Excess 410 CI days	**9,038,790**	**8,865,044**	**8,972,386**	**8,508,857**	**9,304,614**	**8,422,249**	**7,929,815**	**7,572,004**	**6,653,746**	**6,812,963**	**5,658,378**
Excess 410-day CO_2e emissions	**70,899t**	**69,536t**	**70,378t**	**66,742t**	**72,984t**	**66,063t**	**62,200t**	**59,394t**	**52,191t**	**53,440t**	**44,383t**

4.2 Calving interval performance – National Insights

46. The new 410-day dam calving interval criterion for claimed SSBSS calves was announced in 2023 and introduced for the 2025 scheme year. Table 14 shows the trend in calving performance of dams calving on holdings where calves were claimed in the SSBSS. The data do not include dams on holdings where no SSBSS calves were claimed (i.e. claimant did not claim, for whatever reason), and the calving interval is reflective of the scheme calving year (i.e. 2nd Dec to 1st Dec to account for calf retention rules).

47. The data show a 13.2% (c.42k) reduction in previously calved beef dams (excluding heifers) on holdings associated with SSBSS claims between 2015 and 2025, falling from c.315k to c.273k. The 5th, 10th and 25th percentiles, along with the median, showed little variation over the 11 years, with 5% of dams calving at 326 days or better in 2025, 10% calving at 336 days or better, 25% calving at 352 days or better and half (the median) calving at 369 days or better. However, because the calving interval of poorer-performing beef dams on SSBSS holdings decreased, the mean (average) fell by 8 days (-1.9%) between 2015 and 2025. The mean calving interval of 391 days in 2025 was the lowest across the 11 years of data, with the highest average of 403 days in 2019, likely due to poor weather and a lack of feed in 2108 during the 'Beast from the East'. There was a noticeable decline in 2023 (from 396 days in 2022 to 393 days in 2023), reflecting structural change driven by rising input costs and high beef prices. The 95th percentile shows how the calving interval performance of the 5% of poorest dams on SSBSS holdings fell by 102 days (-15.4%) over the period, from 662 days to 560 days. Similarly, the poorest-performing 10% of dams (90th percentile) improved calving intervals by 39 days between 2015 and 2025.

Table 14 Calving interval performance distribution (percentiles, median and mean) of previously calved dams on holdings associated with SSBSS holdings, SSBSS scheme calving years 2015 to 2025

SSBSS calving year	Dams	Dams excl Heifers	Calving Interval performance (days) percentiles and mean							
			p5	p10	p25	Median	Mean	p75	p90	p95
2015	390,179	314,872	323	333	349	**368**	**398**	396	477	662
2016	390,956	320,707	325	335	353	**371**	**400**	399	475	641
2017	387,499	317,242	325	335	353	**371**	**401**	399	477	647
2018	376,510	308,140	326	336	353	**371**	**400**	398	473	647
2019	373,555	305,638	326	336	354	**372**	**403**	400	494	670
2020	376,511	307,272	324	334	350	**368**	**397**	394	469	652
2021	374,756	305,369	326	336	353	**371**	**398**	396	465	619
2022	371,616	303,410	325	336	353	**370**	**396**	395	459	611
2023	354,989	293,299	324	335	351	**369**	**393**	392	447	581
2024	344,427	284,120	327	337	354	**371**	**396**	395	455	592
2025	332,098	273,164	326	336	352	**369**	**391**	391	438	560
2015-2025	**-58,081** **-14.9%**	**-41,708** **-13.2%**	**+3** **+0.9%**	**+3** **+0.9%**	**+3** **+0.9%**	**+1** **+0.3%**	**-8** **-1.9%**	**-5** **-1.3%**	**-39** **-8.2%**	**-102** **-15.4%**

48. Figure 10 shows histograms of the calving interval distributions for SSBSS calving years 2022 to 2025, where each bar is a calving interval day (x-axis) and the height of the bar represents the number of dams with that calving interval (y-axis). While there was general improvement in 2025, the most noticeable feature of these histograms is the new, unnatural kink around 410 days in the 2025 calving-interval histogram. The number of dams recorded with a calving interval unnaturally rises before 410 days, then unnaturally falls at 411 days.

4.2.1 Second Calvers

49. The SSBSS Stakeholder Group had previously expressed concerns over the increased challenge of getting second calving dams to meet the 410-day calving interval criterion, as heifers were often calved a month earlier from the main herd. Previous analysis for the group (Thomson, 2023[15]) showed that, on average, second calvers did indeed have higher average calving intervals, particularly if they had been bought onto holdings as a heifer with calf at foot.
50. Table 15 shows that the median calving interval for second calvers was 376 days in 2025, compared to 369 days for all dams, with the mean at 408 days, compared to 391 for all dams. Thus, in 2025, the average calving interval for second calvers was 17 days longer than for the total dam population (although it did fall 4 days over the period). The significant drop in the 95th percentile seen in the dam population did not occur for second calvers, and like dams, the best-performing second calvers showed no improvement (p5, p10, p25). Similarly to the dam population, the unnatural kink in the calving interval histogram around 410 days that only occurred in 2025 is evident in Figure 11.

Table 15 Calving interval performance distribution (percentiles, median and mean) of previously calved dams on holdings associated with SSBSS holdings, SSBSS scheme calving years 2015 to 2025

SSBSS calving year	Second Calvers	Calving Interval performance (days) percentiles and mean							
		p5	p10	p25	Median	Mean	p75	p90	p95
2017	57,570	328	340	358	379	411	415	530	686
2018	57,479	330	341	359	380	416	415	541	709
2019	58,538	330	342	360	381	423	421	577	722
2020	58,573	327	337	356	376	414	409	544	715
2021	58,414	330	341	359	379	415	412	530	702
2022	58,714	329	340	358	378	413	410	525	706
2023	56,939	328	338	357	376	409	407	506	688
2024	52,058	329	341	359	378	414	411	530	704
2025	50,104	329	340	358	376	408	404	490	683
2015-2025	**-7,466 +13.0%**	**+1 +0.3%**	**0 0%**	**0 0%**	**-3 -0.8%**	**-4 -0.9%**	**-11 -2.7%**	**-40 -7.5%**	**-3 -0.4%**

15 https://sruc.figshare.com/articles/presentation/_b_Breeds_and_2nd_Calvers_Some_Data_Insights_b_SSBSS_Reform_Stakeholder_Group_12th_October_2023/24756441?file=43494291

Figure 10 Histogram of calving interval performance of beef dams on holdings associated with SSBSS claims. Each bar represents a day, and the year is the SSBSS scheme calving year (2022 to 2025)

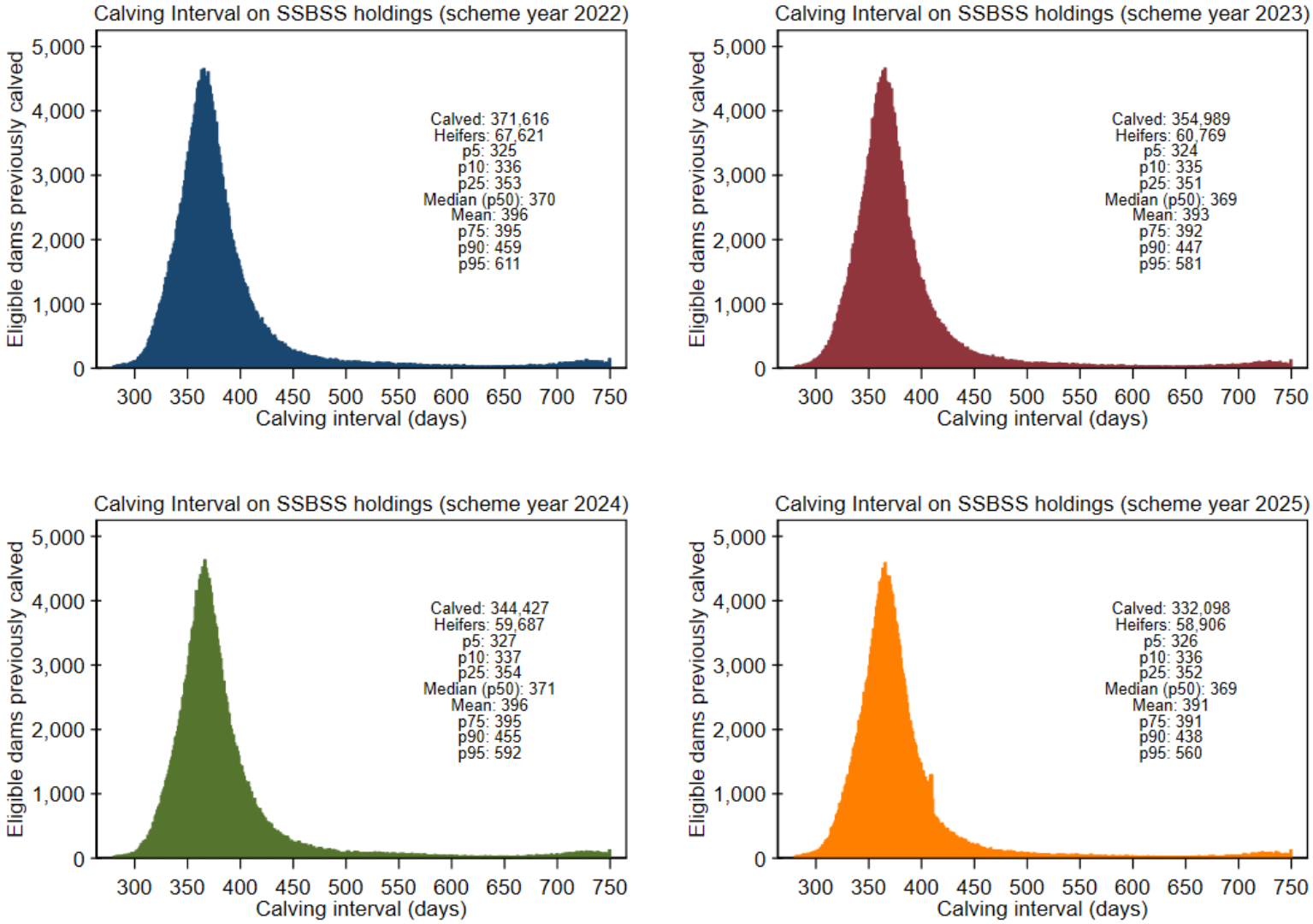
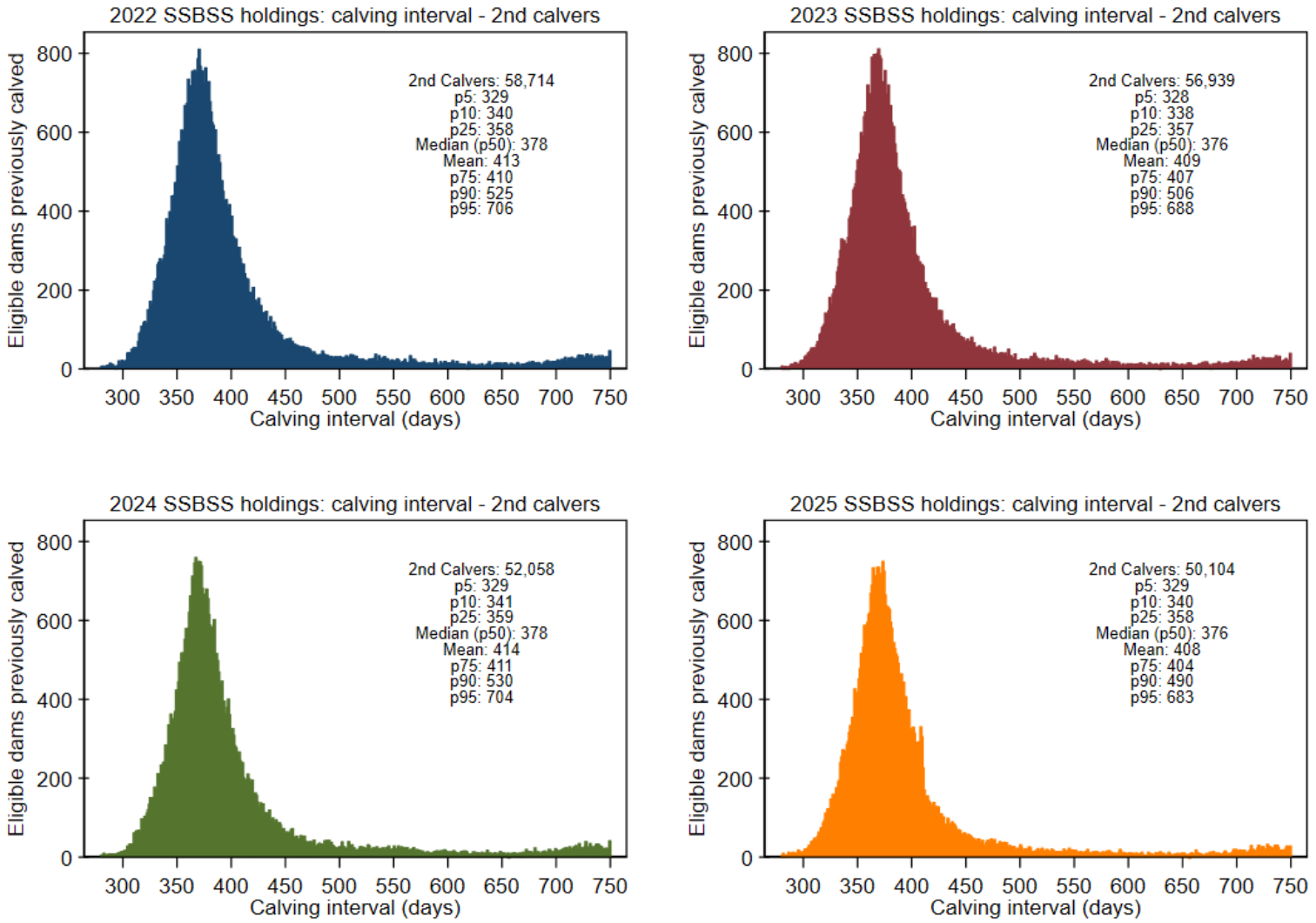


Figure 11 Histogram of calving interval performance of beef second calvers on holdings associated with SSBSS claims. Each bar represents a day, and the year is the SSBSS scheme calving year (2022 to 2025)



4.3 Calving Interval – individual dam breed insights

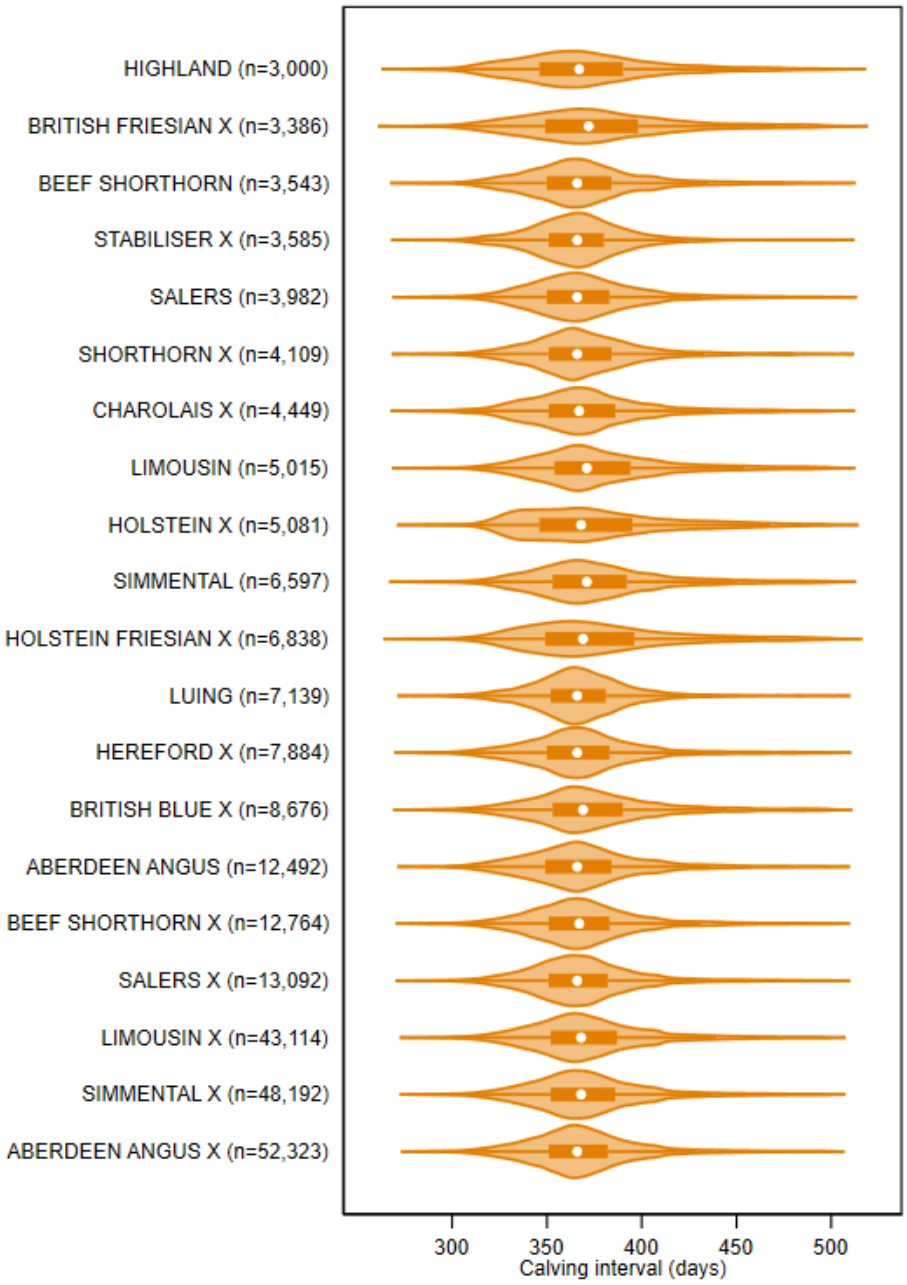
51. Whilst trend data of calving intervals per breed were extracted, it is too complex to detail in tabular form in this report. However, Table 16 shows the calving interval distributions of dam breeds that had over 1,000 previously calved dams that calved on SSBSS-associated holdings in the 2025 SSBSS calving year. The darker green colours reflect better calving interval performance, with yellow showing poorer performance for each percentile group.
52. By these breeds, for the 5th, 10th, 25th percentile and median dam, there were only 8 to 13 days of variance between the breeds for the better-performing dams within breeds. Highlanders and Belted Galloways had the lowest calving intervals for the top 10% to 25% of dams but were the worst two-performing breeds for the mean and the 75th, 90th, and 95th percentiles. Stabilisers, Salers and SalerX had the best overall calving interval performance in 2025.

Table 16 Beef dam breed calving interval distribution (percentiles, median and mean of dams) on SSBSS associated holdings, 2025

Breed	Dams Calving	Calving Interval Dams	p5	p10	p25	Median	Mean	p75	p90	p95
Aberdeen Angus X	66,144	53,624	325	335	352	367	384	386	416	487
Simmental X	60,765	50,741	327	337	353	370	391	392	437	553
Limousin X	53,429	45,592	326	336	353	370	393	394	447	569
Salers X	16,114	13,527	326	336	351	367	381	385	412	465
Beef Shorthorn X	16,323	13,083	326	336	352	368	387	388	428	539
Aberdeen Angus	16,806	12,994	324	333	351	368	388	389	430	541
British Blue X	11,322	9,221	326	336	354	372	399	399	477	618
Hereford X	9,967	8,192	322	333	351	368	387	387	430	538
Luing	9,246	7,415	326	337	353	367	385	384	410	515
Simmental	8,908	7,136	328	338	355	374	400	403	479	593
Limousin	6,371	5,356	329	339	356	374	406	406	491	619
Charolais X	5,626	4,700	326	335	352	370	395	393	452	613
Shorthorn X	4,197	4,196	325	335	352	368	391	388	430	600
Salers	4,846	4,083	327	336	351	367	379	386	412	451
Beef Shorthorn	4,685	3,679	324	334	352	368	391	390	445	580
Stabiliser X	4,611	3,518	324	335	351	366	376	381	402	427
Highland	3,824	3,176	319	329	350	374	436	422	696	766
Whitebred S/Horn X	2,817	2,403	325	334	351	367	395	387	446	668
Stabiliser	3,038	2,249	329	339	354	369	381	383	406	460
Galloway	2,660	2,150	326	336	353	371	412	403	557	725
Luing X	2,314	1,893	326	336	354	369	392	387	437	617
Blue Grey	2,249	1,883	322	334	351	367	389	388	429	615
Charolais	2,369	1,829	332	342	358	379	416	418	523	694
Hereford	1,702	1,299	329	338	356	372	401	397	482	634
Belted Galloway	1,296	1,064	320	331	353	374	411	404	557	700

53. Figure 12 shows the violin plots[16] for the top 20 beef breed dams on SSBSS-associated holdings for 2025. The white dot in the box represents the median, the box represents the 25th and 75th percentile calving interval, and the height of the shape reflects the relative proportion of each breed's dams with those calving intervals. Breeds like Highland have longer, narrower shapes, indicating a wider spread in calving intervals, whereas ShorthornX (for example) has a much tighter calving-interval performance, with a more normalised distribution.

Figure 12 Violin plot of the calving interval distribution of the top 20 beef breed dams on SSBSS-associated holdings, 2025 SSBSS calving year



[16] A violin plot is a data visualisation that shows the distribution of numerical data and its probability density. It acts as a hybrid of a box plot and a smoothed histogram, visually summarising both summary statistics and the shape of the data.

4.4 Calving Interval – individual dam regional insights

54. Previous calving interval analysis for the Scottish Government also assessed regional variations in calving intervals. Table 20 shows how beef dams on SSBSS-associated holdings performed in 2024 and 2025 SSBSS calving years. The better-performing regions are coloured green for each metric, with poorer-performing regions yellow. Although Orkney, the Borders, Shetland, and Lothians had slightly higher 5th- and 10th-percentile dams' calving intervals, they each had relatively good overall calving-interval performance. NE Scotland (-8 days), Dumfries and Galloway (-7 days), Orkney (-6 days), and Ayrshire (-6 days) had the largest improvements in mean calving interval between 2024 and 2025.

Table 17 Regional beef dam calving interval distribution (percentiles, median and mean of dams) on SSBSS associated holdings, 2024 and 2025

Agricultural Region	SSBSS calving year	Dams excl Heifers	Calving Interval performance (days) percentiles and mean							
			p5	p10	p25	Median	Mean	p75	p90	p95
Argyll & Bute	2024	12,861	325	336	354	373	407	403	516	693
	2025	12,234	324	334	352	369	403	396	508	702
Ayrshire	2024	19,816	325	335	353	372	401	401	481	634
	2025	18,806	324	335	352	369	395	394	459	600
Clyde Valley	2024	19,215	324	335	353	371	398	399	472	629
	2025	18,389	324	335	352	370	395	395	457	587
Dumfries & Galloway	2024	50,045	326	337	354	371	396	395	454	580
	2025	47,675	325	335	352	368	389	388	433	544
East Central	2024	7,728	327	337	354	371	400	398	477	635
	2025	7,444	326	335	353	371	401	398	481	669
Eileanan an Iar	2024	1,642	327	337	353	370	403	397	489	704
	2025	1,616	327	336	353	369	405	396	570	715
Fife	2024	8,979	327	337	353	369	389	393	436	538
	2025	8,137	325	335	353	369	389	392	431	538
Highland	2024	30,161	326	336	353	370	399	395	463	643
	2025	28,646	325	335	352	369	394	392	449	620
Lothian	2024	9,019	329	338	353	369	390	388	427	538
	2025	8,353	330	340	355	370	388	389	425	518
NE Scotland	2024	52,721	326	336	354	372	400	400	471	609
	2025	51,201	325	335	352	370	392	394	445	550
Orkney	2024	19,046	329	338	352	368	388	389	428	511
	2025	18,329	328	337	351	366	382	385	414	462
Scottish Borders	2024	30,275	329	339	355	369	385	387	420	500
	2025	30,282	327	338	354	368	382	385	410	465
Shetland	2024	1,141	330	339	355	369	385	385	412	449
	2025	1,111	329	338	351	367	382	383	409	480
Tayside	2024	21,471	328	338	354	370	394	393	447	565
	2025	20,941	327	337	354	370	392	391	437	568

4.5 Calving interval – individual dam herd size insights

55. Table 18 shows the calving interval distribution of all previously calved dams within herd size classifications (based on the number of total dams – including heifers) for 2024 and 2025. Darker green indicates better performance for each metric, while yellow indicates poorer performance. The smaller herds had a marginally better 5th percentile and 10th percentile calving interval – that is, 5% or 10% of the dams in small herds had lower calving intervals than larger herds. Of the 5,566 dams that had previously calved that were in the 1-10 size group in 2025, 5% had a calving interval of 324 days or less, whilst 10% were 334 days or less. This compares with 328 days (p5) and 338 days (p10) for herds with over 400 calving dams. However, the data shows that there was significant variance in calving interval performance in the smallest herds (median of 374 days and mean of 425 days for the 1-10 size group in 2025). This contrasts with larger herd sizes, where overall performance is better (median of 366 days, mean of 375 days, p90 of 400 days, and p95 of 424 days in the >400 group in 2025). Overall, calving interval performance improved between 2024 and 2025 SSBS calving years within these herds.

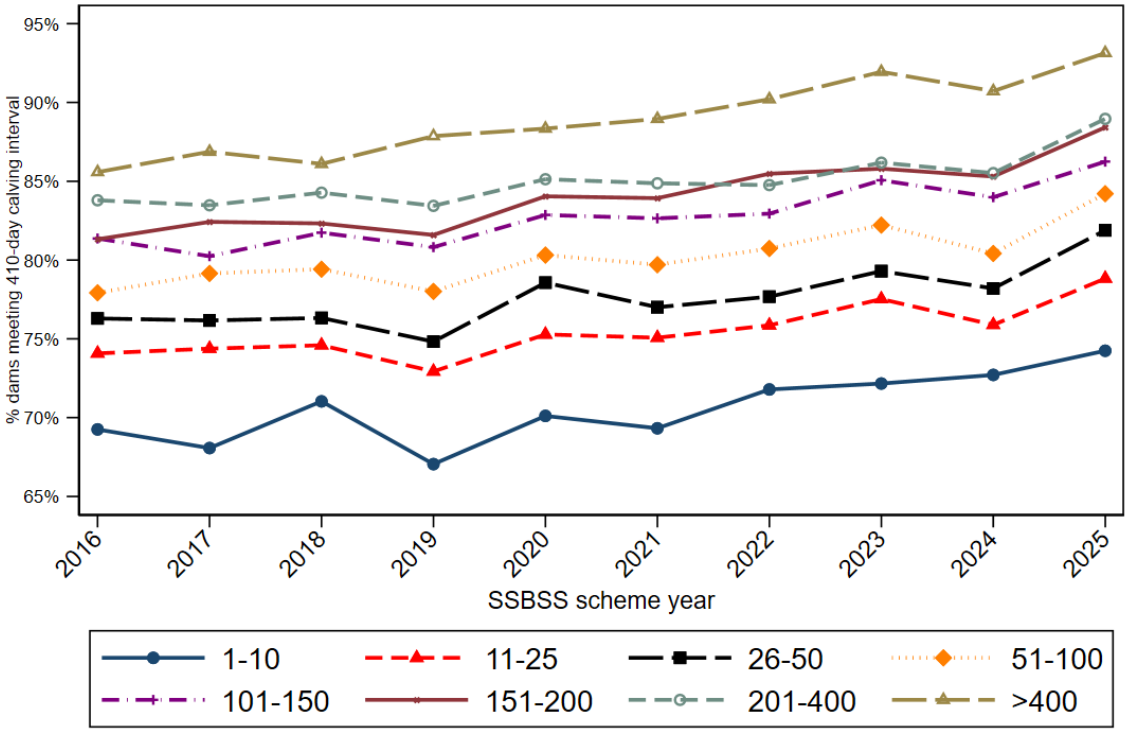
Table 18 Calving interval performance distribution by herd size (all previously calved dams within a size grouping), by SSBSS calving year.

Dam Herd Size	SSBSS calving year	Dams excl Heifers	Calving Interval performance (days) percentiles and mean							
			p5	p10	p25	Median	Mean	p75	p90	p95
1-10	2024	5,867	325	336	355	375	425	416	612	732
	2025	5,566	324	334	353	374	425	412	640	738
11-25	2024	19,227	322	333	353	373	413	407	539	708
	2025	17,550	323	334	352	371	410	401	530	711
26-50	2024	40,876	324	335	353	372	406	403	502	691
	2025	38,312	324	334	352	370	399	396	472	653
51-100	2024	82,376	326	337	354	371	398	398	462	602
	2025	77,130	325	335	352	369	392	393	445	577
101-150	2024	50,615	327	337	353	370	390	392	440	538
	2025	51,244	327	337	353	369	387	390	429	520
151-200	2024	29,185	328	338	354	370	390	391	431	538
	2025	29,356	327	337	353	369	384	387	418	481
201-400	2024	40,280	328	338	354	370	388	390	429	522
	2025	39,249	328	338	353	368	383	387	415	477
>400	2024	15,694	332	342	356	369	380	385	408	437
	2025	14,757	328	338	353	366	375	381	400	424

56. Figure 13 shows the long-term trends of the proportion of individual beef dams that had previously calved on holdings associated with SSBSS claims that met a 410-day calving interval criterion. The data is split by the total calving beef dam size (including heifers). The data shows that all beef herd sizes had improved calving interval performance over the long-term, particularly from 2020, with all size groups

having an upturn in the proportion of dams meeting the condition in 2025. It is noticeable that the proportion of dams meeting the 410-day criterion is heavily correlated with herd size, with the smallest herd sizes having the lowest proportion meeting the criterion (c.74% in 2025) and the largest herd sizes the highest proportion (c.92% in 2025).

Figure 13 Trends in the proportion of all previously calved beef dams within herd size category on SSBSS associated holdings meeting a 410-day calving interval criterion (2016 to 2025)



4.6 Calving interval – individual dam farm type insights

57. Table 19 shows the calving interval performance of all previously calved dams with farm types, in 2024 and 2025. Very few beef dams calving in the SSBSS year were on dairy holdings, traders/growers or finishers (6% combined in 2025), with the majority on beef store-rearers (72%) and beef-rearer finishers (21,5%). Beef rearer-finishers and beef store-rearers had very similar 5th, 10th, 25th percentiles and medians (369 days in 2025). However, the mean calving interval on beef rearer-finishers was 7 days lower in 2026, because of better performance in the tail (e.g. 90th percentile of 420 days compared to 442 days, and 95th percentile of 493 days compared to 582 days).

Table 19 Calving interval performance distribution by herd size (all previously calved dams within a farm type grouping), by SSBSS calving year.

Farm type	SSBSS calving Year	Dams excl Heifers	Calving Interval performance (days) percentiles and mean							
			p5	p10	p25	Median	Mean	p75	p90	p95
Beef rearer finisher	2024	61,689	327	338	354	**370**	**389**	392	435	535
	2025	58,023	326	336	353	**369**	**385**	388	420	493
Beef store rearer	2024	204,731	327	337	354	**371**	**397**	395	459	609
	2025	198,980	326	336	352	**369**	**392**	391	442	582
Dairy	2024	2,916	321	333	354	**382**	**423**	436	556	712
	2025	2,714	318	329	352	**379**	**414**	430	531	652
Dairy finishing	2024	1,471	328	335	352	**378**	**413**	421	515	631
	2025	1,294	323	333	353	**375**	**400**	411	485	543
Finisher	2024	9,799	326	336	354	**371**	**394**	395	442	554
	2025	8,539	322	332	349	**368**	**386**	388	431	511
Trader OR grower	2024	3,456	321	332	351	**373**	**407**	409	508	659
	2025	3,559	324	335	353	**372**	**398**	399	474	599

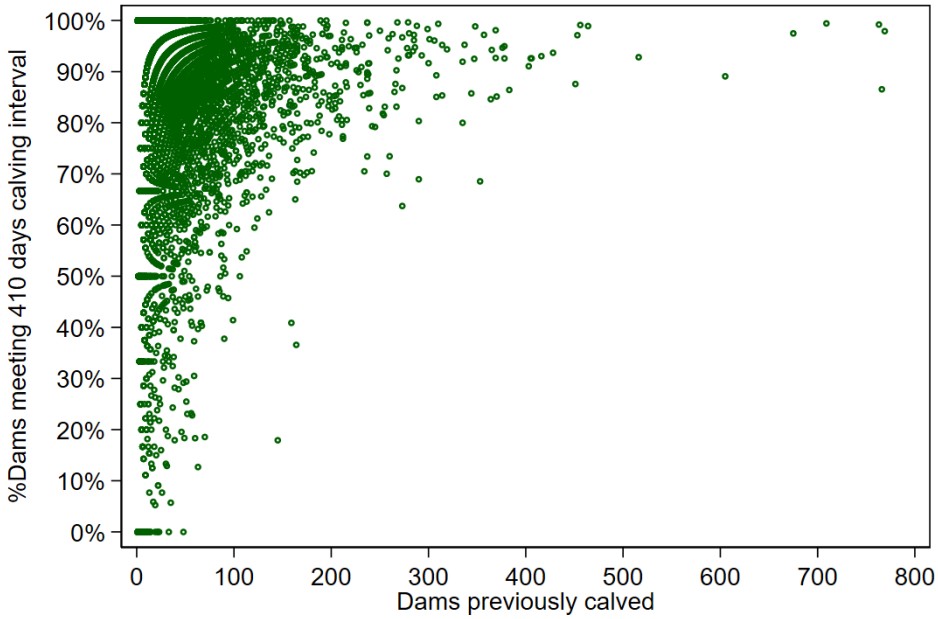
4.7 Calving Interval – business level insights

58. Whilst the aggregated data provides useful insights into performance changes of the national herd over time, those changes are driven by individual animal performance within claimant herds. As such, herd-level calving interval performance is important, particularly as it affected the amount of SSBSS support received in 2025 compared to previous years when the 410-day calving interval criterion did not exist.

4.7.1 Herd-level size insights

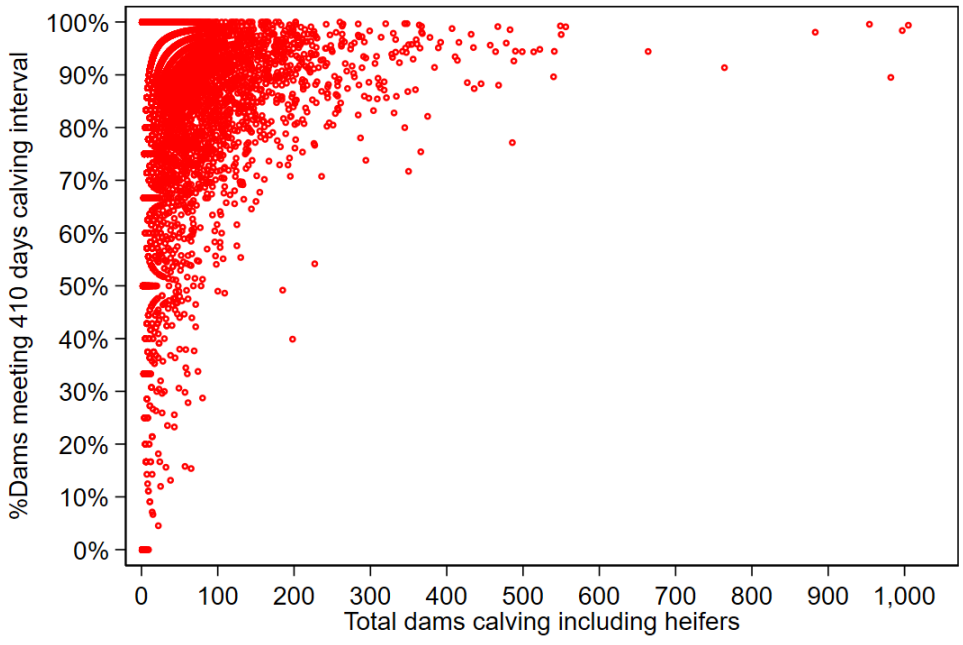
59. Figure 14 shows the proportion of previously calved beef dams on an SSBSS holding that met the 410-day calving interval (y-axis) in 2025, by the number of dams that had previously calved (x-axis). The scatter plot shows large variation in herd performance, particularly in smaller herds (fewer than 50 dams). It is notable that the largest herds generally had very good performance (over 85% of dams meeting the criterion), although some herds with over 100 calving dams performed surprisingly poorly (e.g. instances of fewer than half the dams in a business meeting the calving interval criterion).

Figure 14 Proportion of previously calved beef dams (all) on SSBSS associated holdings, by BRN (each dot) in the 2025 SSBSS calving year



60. Similar to Figure 14, Figure 15 shows the proportion of all dams in each herd calving in the 2025 SSBSS scheme year that met the 410-day calving interval. This includes all first-time calving heifers (that automatically qualify for the SSBSS calving interval criterion) and reflects the proportion of all calving dams in a herd whose calves could be supported through the SSBSS provided the calf retention period was met. This follows a similar pattern to Figure 13, with the x-axis extending further due to the addition of heifers, and a general upward movement for each herd (represented by a red dot).

Figure 15 Proportion of all calved beef dams (including heifers) on SSBSS-associated holdings, by BRN (each dot) in the 2025 SSBSS calving year – reflecting proportion of eligible dams that meet the SSBSS criterion



61. Figure 16 shows the trends in herd-level calving interval performance on holdings associated with SSBSS calf claims from 2016 to 2025. This shows the mean, median, 25th percentile and 75th percentile performance of individual claimants' (BRN) herds. For small herds, those with only one or two cows lead the upper quartile, being at 100% (i.e. at least 25% of the smallest herds had 100% of dams meeting 410 days). The graphs show that, across all size groupings, all metrics improved over time, and that as the size grouping increases, the interquartile range (i.e. the difference between the 25th percentile herd and the 75th percentile herd) narrows. This re-emphasises the greater performance variation in small and medium-sized herds than in the largest herds.

4.7.2 Herd region insights

62. Figure 17 shows the herd-level trend in calving interval performance of beef dams on SSBSS-associated holdings between 2016 and 2025 for individual agricultural regions. For most regions, the mean, median, 25th, and 75th percentiles trended upward. This shows that, overall, a greater proportion of businesses (BRN) have a higher proportion of dams meeting the 410-day calving interval criterion over time. Where there are many small herds (e.g. Shetland and Eileanan an Iar), the upper quartile (75th percentile) is 100% of dams meeting the 410-day criterion, as they may only have 1 or 2 cows calving each year. Mean herd performance rose notably in 2025 in Dumfries and Galloway, Orkney, Ayrshire, and Argyll and Bute.

4.7.3 Farm type insights

63. Similarly, Figure 18 shows the trend in herd-level performance by farm type between 2016 and 2025. The 25th percentile (lower grey bound) and 75th percentile show the proportion of dams meeting 410-day calving intervals for these businesses (i.e. 25% of businesses were below the 25th percentile, and 25% of businesses performed better than the 75th percentile. The interquartile range in beef rearer-finishers was tighter than in beef store-rearers, perhaps reflecting larger average herd sizes and different management regimes. The upward trend in most of these graphs shows that more herds have a higher proportion of dams meeting a 410-day calving interval over time, partly driven by policy changes in 2025 but mostly by the economics of beef production in the last few years.

Figure 16 Trends in the proportion of all previously calved beef dams per herd size category on SSBSS associated holdings meeting a 410-day calving interval criterion (2016 to 2025)

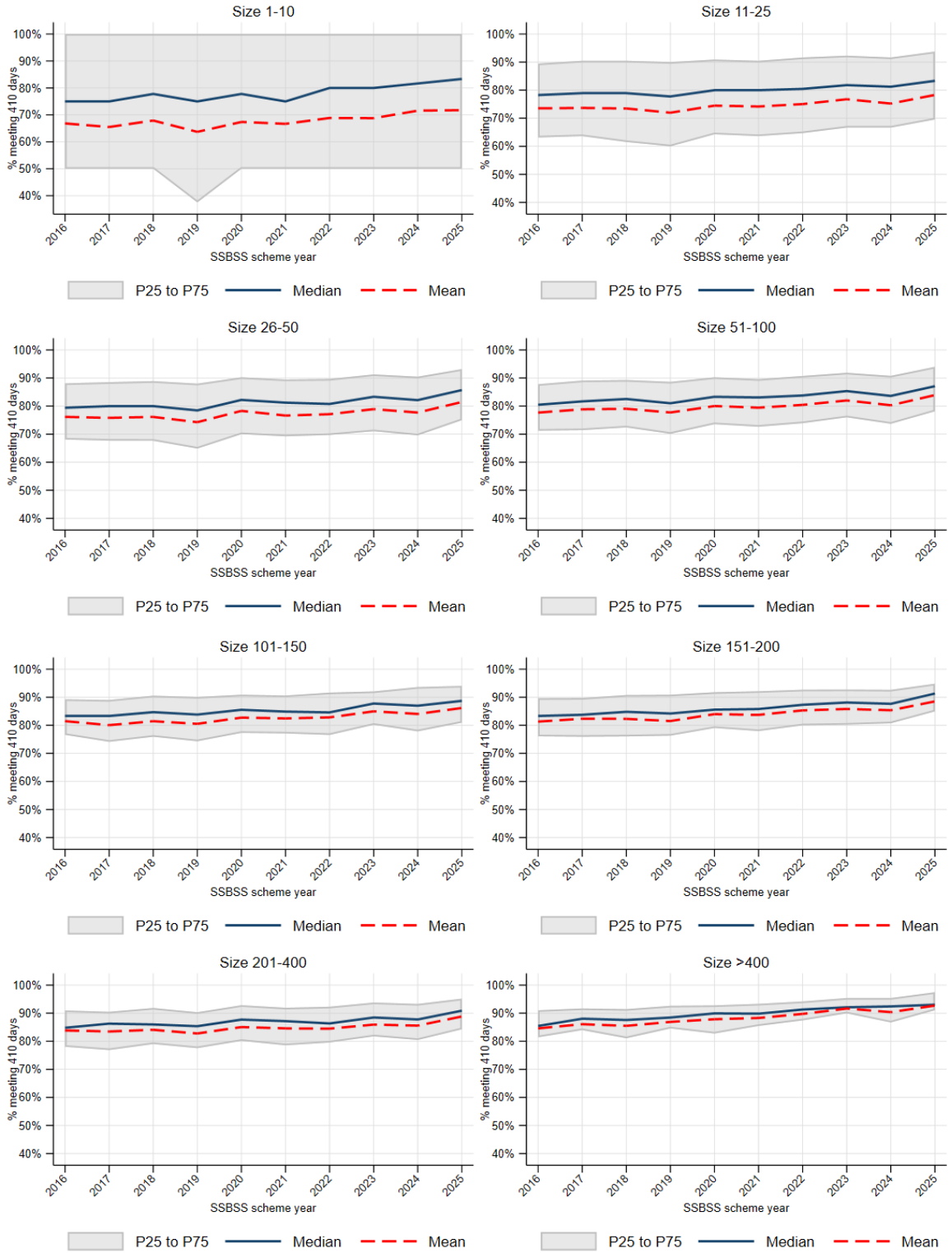


Figure 17 Proportion of dams within herds meeting a 410-day calving interval (y-axis). Distributions of claimant businesses (mean, median and interquartile range), by agricultural region, 2016 to 2025 SSBSS calving years. The lower grey band is P25 BRN, the upper grey band is P75 BRN, the red dotted line is the median BRN, and the blue line is the mean of all BRNs

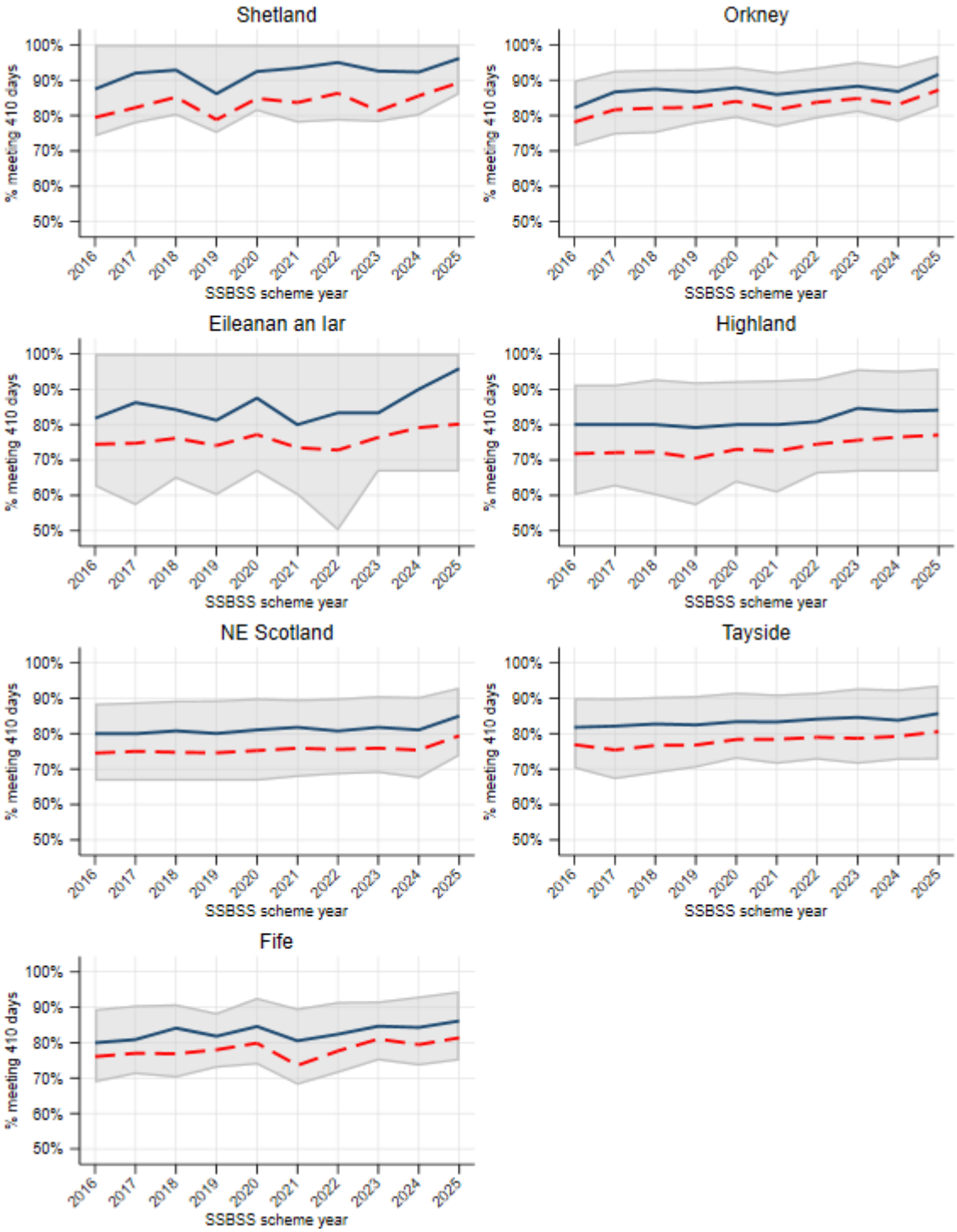


Figure 17 continued

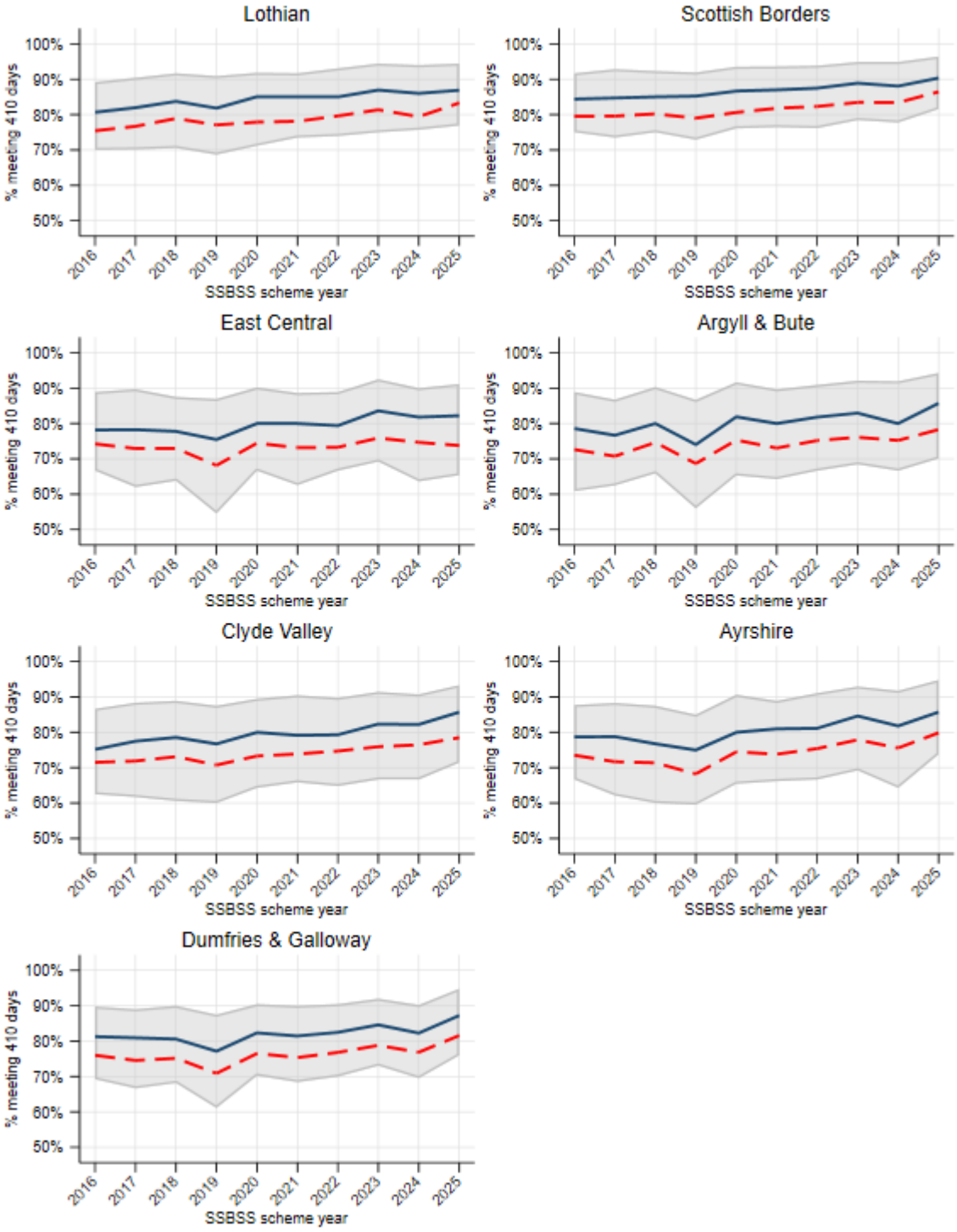
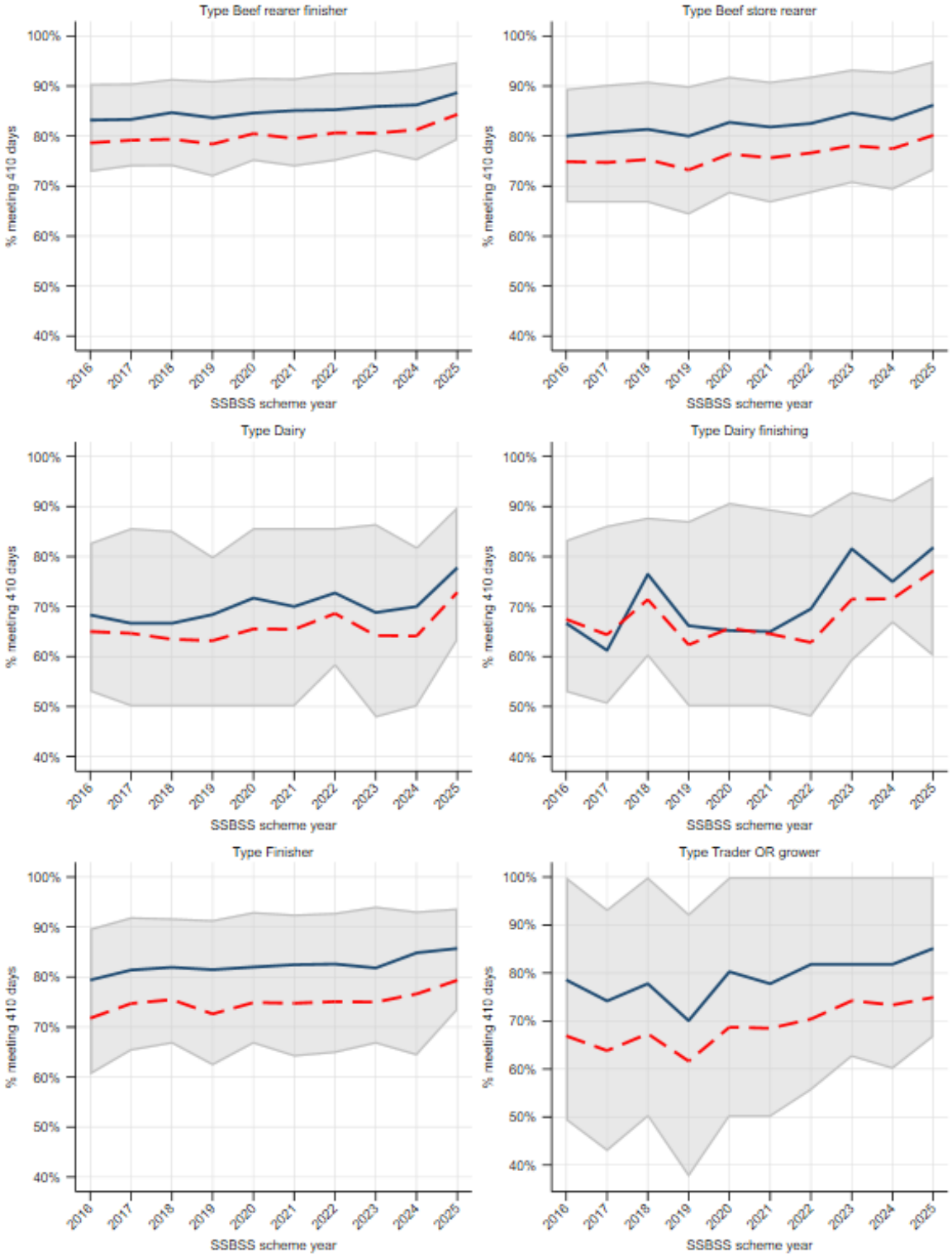


Figure 18 Proportion of dams within herds meeting a 410-day calving interval (y-axis). Distributions of claimant businesses (mean, median and interquartile range), by farm type, 2016 to 2025 SSBSS calving years. The lower grey band is P25 BRN, the upper grey band is P75 BRN, the red dotted line is the median BRN, and the blue line is the mean of all BRNs

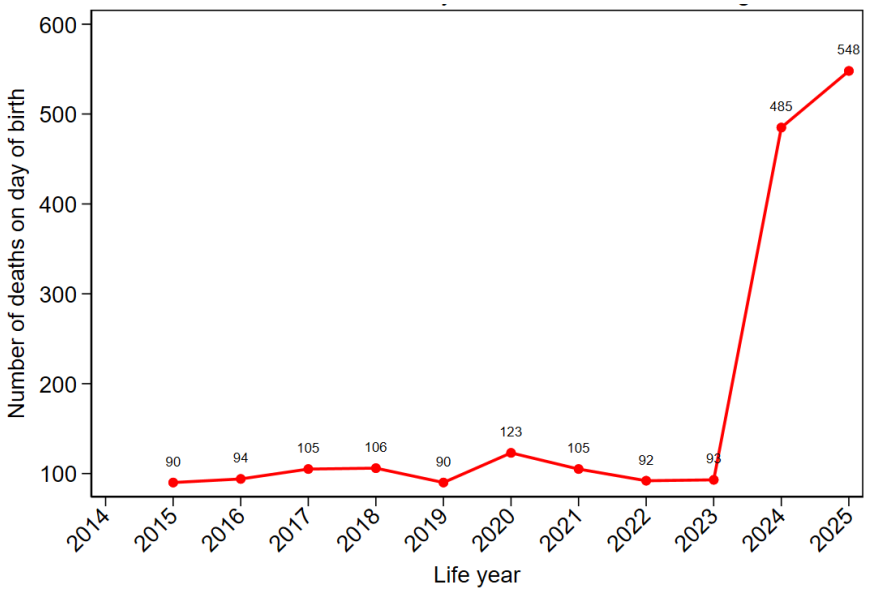


4.8 SSBSS 30-day calf retention

64. Previous research (Thomson et al. 2024[17]) has shown that the 30-day retention requirement within the SSBSS appears to affect the calf mortality curve, with an unnatural dip in registered deaths from 20 days to 30 days. Further, evidence has also shown that after the announcement of the SSBSS calving interval condition, there was a spike in deaths registered on the day of birth, or within a couple of days of birth. This spike likely reflects calves being registered as born that previously were not, as the calf registration to the cow now resets the dam's calving interval clock.

65. Using the dam:calf breed purpose (e.g. beef:beef) on holdings associated with SSBSS claims, each calf death registered on the holding of birth under 1-year of age was recorded. Figure 19 shows that the number of beef calves recorded as dying on the day of their birth remains relatively stable at c.100 over the 2015 to 2023 period, before jumping to 485 in 2024, after the SSBSS calving interval condition was announced in June 2023[18] and hitting 548 in 2025. This was undoubtedly a behavioural change by some businesses and is more than likely related to resetting the calving interval clock for some dams. A similar spike in day 1 and day 2 deaths is evident and can be seen in Figure 20along with the continued unnatural dip in calf death registrations between 20 and 30 days.

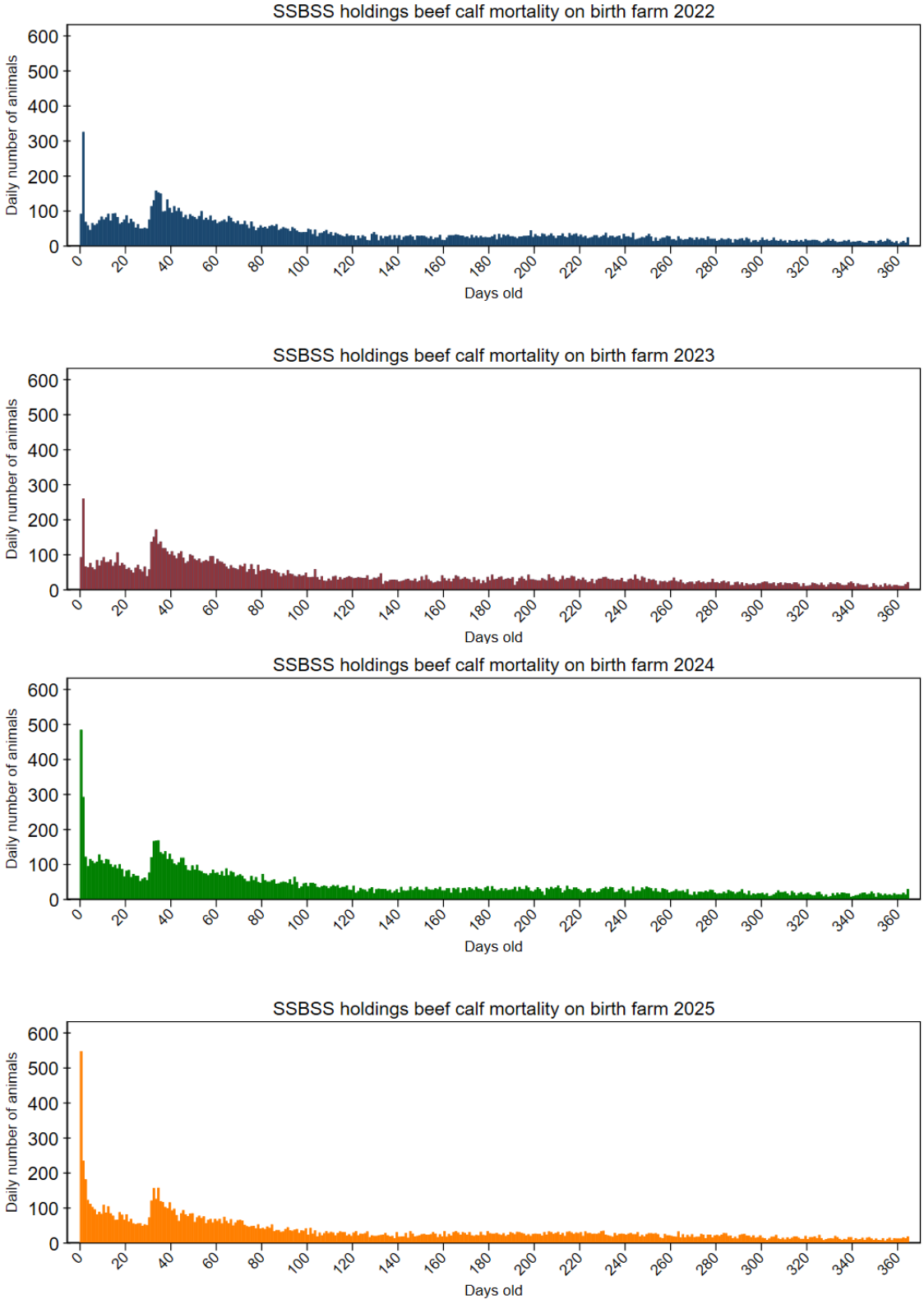
Figure 19 Eligible beef calf deaths recorded on the day of birth on holdings associated with SSBSS claims, 2015 to 2025



[17] Thomson, S. Archibald, I. and Coffey, M. (2024) Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme holdings – calf mortality and seasonality of 410-day calving interval condition. DOI: https://doi.org/10.58073/SRUC.26314927

[18] Royal Highland Show: Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands Secretary's speech - 22 June 2023 - gov.scot

Figure 20 Daily beef calf deaths registered on the holding of birth, for holdings associated with SSBSS claims (2022 to 2026)



66. Table 20 shows the proportion of beef calves registered on holdings associated with SSBSS claims that were registered dead on the holding of birth within 30-days (top section) and 60-days of birth (bottom section). The increase in registered calf deaths

around, or on, the day of birth, as described above, increased 30-day and 60-day calf mortality rates across Scotland. The 30-day calf mortality rate rose from 0.6% in 2022 to 0.9% in 2025, whilst the 60-day calf mortality rate increased from 1.4% in 2023 to 1.7% in 2025. There were regional variations with low 2025 30-day calf mortality rates observed in Eileanan an Iar (0.4%), Orkney (0.5%), Shetland (0.5%), Argyll and Bute (0.6%), Highland (0.7%), and the Scottish Borders (0.8%) compared to Tayside (1.3%), Fife (1.3%), and East Central (1.3%).

Table 20 Agricultural region 30-day and 60-day beef calf mortality rates on the holding of birth (holdings associated with SSBSS claims), 2017-2025

Dead 30 days	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**2025**
Argyll & Bute	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%	0.6%	0.6%
Ayrshire	1.2%	1.0%	1.1%	1.0%	0.7%	0.7%	0.7%	1.1%	1.0%
Clyde Valley	0.8%	1.0%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.7%	0.9%	1.1%	0.9%
Dumfries & Galloway	1.1%	1.3%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.7%	0.8%	1.1%	1.0%
East Central	1.1%	0.9%	0.8%	0.7%	0.8%	0.5%	0.7%	1.2%	1.3%
Eileanan an Iar	0.3%	0.8%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%	0.2%	0.0%	0.5%	0.4%
Fife	1.0%	1.0%	0.8%	1.0%	0.8%	0.7%	0.8%	1.3%	1.3%
Highland	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.2%	0.6%	0.7%
Lothian	0.9%	1.0%	1.1%	1.0%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	1.2%	1.1%
NE Scotland	0.9%	0.8%	0.8%	0.8%	0.6%	0.8%	0.7%	1.0%	0.9%
Orkney	0.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.5%
Scottish Borders	0.6%	0.7%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	0.5%	0.6%	0.8%	0.8%
Shetland	0.5%	0.2%	0.5%	0.1%	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%	0.4%	0.5%
Tayside	0.8%	1.0%	1.0%	0.7%	0.7%	0.8%	0.8%	1.3%	1.3%
Scotland	**0.8%**	**0.9%**	**0.7%**	**0.7%**	**0.6%**	**0.6%**	**0.7%**	**1.0%**	**0.9%**
Dead 60 days	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**	**2022**	**2023**	**2024**	**2025**
Argyll & Bute	1.2%	1.3%	1.1%	1.0%	0.9%	1.1%	1.1%	1.2%	1.2%
Ayrshire	2.2%	2.1%	1.9%	1.8%	1.5%	1.5%	1.6%	2.0%	1.8%
Clyde Valley	1.7%	1.9%	1.6%	1.8%	1.7%	1.5%	1.8%	2.1%	1.7%
Dumfries & Galloway	2.0%	2.4%	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	1.5%	1.6%	2.0%	1.7%
East Central	1.7%	1.7%	1.4%	1.4%	1.4%	1.0%	1.4%	2.1%	1.9%
Eileanan an Iar	0.9%	1.4%	0.6%	1.0%	0.5%	0.4%	0.9%	1.0%	1.1%
Fife	1.8%	1.9%	1.7%	1.8%	1.8%	1.5%	1.7%	2.4%	2.3%
Highland	1.3%	1.2%	1.0%	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	1.0%	1.4%	1.4%
Lothian	2.0%	2.0%	2.0%	1.7%	1.6%	1.5%	1.7%	2.0%	2.0%
NE Scotland	1.9%	1.9%	1.8%	1.8%	1.7%	1.8%	1.9%	2.1%	1.9%
Orkney	1.7%	1.6%	1.5%	1.4%	1.2%	1.2%	1.3%	1.6%	1.6%
Scottish Borders	1.2%	1.5%	1.2%	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	1.1%	1.4%	1.4%
Shetland	1.2%	1.1%	1.2%	0.8%	0.7%	1.0%	0.8%	1.5%	1.3%
Tayside	1.4%	1.7%	1.7%	1.4%	1.6%	1.5%	1.6%	2.1%	2.1%
Scotland	**1.7%**	**1.8%**	**1.5%**	**1.5%**	**1.5%**	**1.4%**	**1.5%**	**1.9%**	**1.7%**

67. Table 21 shows the number of registered beef calves (based on dam:calf purpose, for 2024 SSBSS scheme years (2nd Dec to 1st Dec), along with the number of calf

deaths and off-moves within 30-days of birth on holdings associated with SSBSS claims each year (i.e. replicating the retention period). The data are split by farm type and agricultural region. In 2024, there were 353,054 beef calf registrations on these holdings, with 349,254 meeting the calf retention criterion. In 2025, from 343,064 beef calf registrations, 339,524 met the calf retention criterion. In 2025, most calves meeting the retention criterion on SSBSS holdings were on beef store-rearers (72%) and beef rearer-finishers (22%). North East Scotland accounted for 18.8% of eligible calves on SSBSS-associated holdings, followed by Dumfries and Galloway (17.5%), the Scottish Borders (11.1%) and Highland (10.3%).

Table 21 Number of beef calves born on holdings associated with SSBSS claims, with number of calves dead on the holding of birth within 30-days, number of calves moved off the holding of birth within 30 days of birth, and total SSBSS eligible calves on these holdings, 2024 and 2025

	2024 Scheme year				2025 Scheme Year			
	Calves born	Death 30	Off 30	Eligible Calves	Calves born	Death 30	Off 30	Eligible Calves
Farm Type								
Beef rearer-finisher	78,135	668	14	**77,453**	73,882	627	4	**73,251**
Beef store-rearer	251,657	2,430	233	**248,994**	247,429	2,339	201	**244,889**
Dairy	3,967	67	139	**3,761**	3,767	37	154	**3,576**
Dairy finishing	2,206	50	3	**2,153**	1,868	29	13	**1,826**
Finisher	12,531	120	8	**12,403**	11,522	70	10	**11,442**
Trader / grower	4,558	54	14	**4,490**	4,596	45	11	**4,540**
Agricultural Region								
Argyll & Bute	15,422	97	56	**15,269**	15,042	91	56	**14,895**
Ayrshire	25,170	272	6	**24,892**	23,762	231	21	**23,510**
Clyde Valley	23,575	250	95	**23,230**	22,951	199	119	**22,633**
Dumfries & Galloway	63,080	719	34	**62,327**	60,166	607	18	**59,541**
East Central	9,559	119	14	**9,426**	9,411	123	9	**9,279**
Eileanan an Iar	1,912	10	0	**1,902**	1,904	8	2	**1,894**
Fife	11,287	146	14	**11,127**	10,211	133	15	**10,063**
Highland	36,389	229	60	**36,100**	35,309	263	37	**35,009**
Lothian	11,121	134	10	**10,977**	10,674	119	9	**10,546**
NE Scotland	66,141	664	39	**65,438**	64,470	579	32	**63,859**
Orkney	23,259	99	19	**23,141**	22,781	110	15	**22,656**
Scottish Borders	37,588	283	41	**37,264**	38,122	320	37	**37,765**
Shetland	1,424	6	0	**1,418**	1,361	7	0	**1,354**
Tayside	27,127	361	23	**26,743**	26,900	357	23	**26,520**
Scotland	**353,054**	**3,389**	**411**	**349,254**	**343,064**	**3,147**	**393**	**339,524**

68. To show the inter-holding variations in 30-day calf mortality levels, Figure 21 and Figure 22 show boxplots for beef-calf mortality levels on the holding of birth on holdings associated with SSBSS claims for farm types and regions, respectively. The data show that, generally across regions and farm types, median and upper-quartile mortality levels are relatively low, but there are outliers with high 30-day calf mortality in both 2024 and 2025. The reasons for such high calf mortality levels on these outlier businesses are unknown.

Figure 21 Box-plots of 30-day beef calf mortality levels (including outliers) on holding of birth per SSBSS claimant business with more than 20 beef calf registrations by farm type, 2024 and 2025

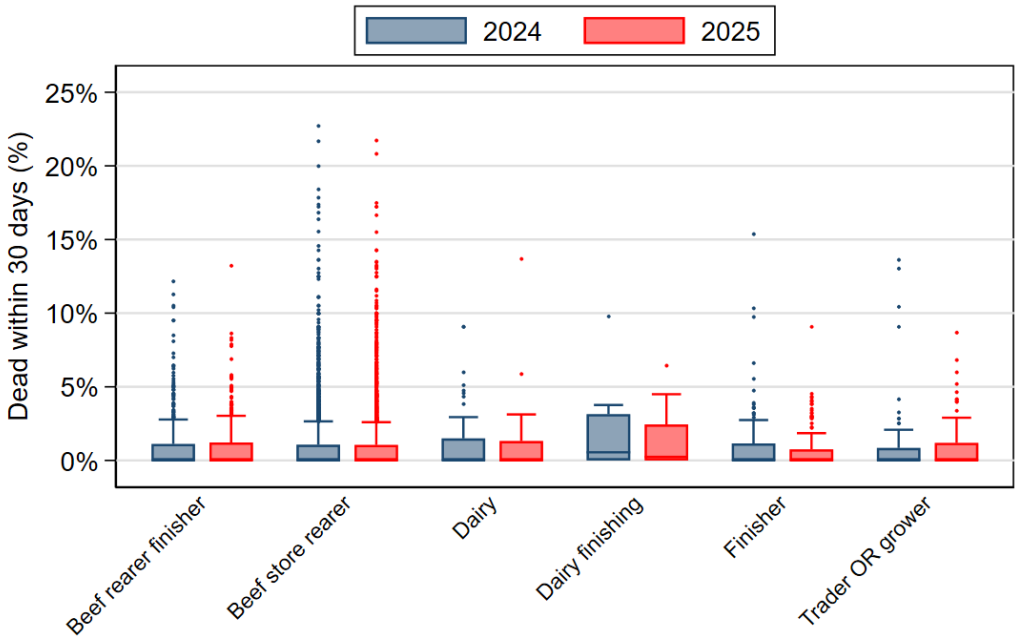
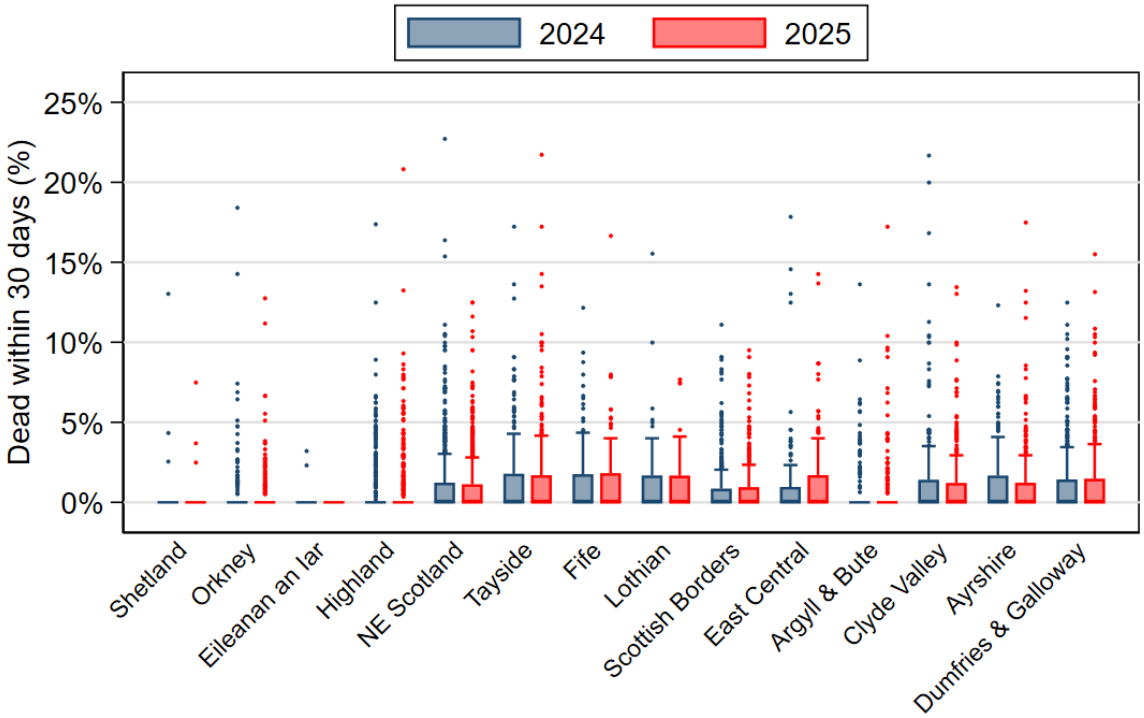


Figure 22 Box-plots of 30-day beef calf mortality levels (including outliers) on holding of birth per SSBSS claimant business with more than 20 beef calf registrations by farm type, 2024 and 2025



5 Conclusion

69. The introduction of the 410-day calving interval condition in the 2025 SSBSS scheme year appears to have contributed to improved calving interval performance among beef dams on holdings associated with SSBSS claims. The mean calving interval fell to 391 days in 2025, the lowest level in the 2015-2025 series, while the poorer-performing tail of the distribution improved substantially, with the 95th percentile falling from 662 days in 2015 to 560 days in 2025.
70. The reform reduced the number of claimed calves eligible for support, with 32,636 validated claimed calves, or 9.7%, failing the new 410-day eligibility requirement in 2025. However, many failures were close to the threshold, with 10% of failures at 417 days or less and 25% at around 430-431 days or less. This suggests that some affected dams were only marginally outside the eligibility condition, while a smaller tail of dams had very long calving intervals.
71. The 410-day condition appears to have redirected support away from some less technically efficient dams. Excess days over 410 days for SSBSS-claimed dams fell from around 9 million days in 2015 to 4.17 million days in 2025, equivalent to a reduction from 24,657 to 11,419 life-years. Based on emissions assumptions, this equates to around 35,000 tonnes of CO_2e lower excess emissions in 2025 than in 2015. The 2025 fall in excess emissions was the largest annual efficiency-related change observed in the series.
72. The payment effects were not uniform across businesses. Larger, more efficient herds were generally better placed to retain eligibility, while smaller herds showed greater variation in performance. The largest 10% of businesses received around 40% of SSBSS funding in 2025, while 40% of businesses received less than around 10% of total support. This reflects existing herd structure as well as differences in claim size, calf retention, and calving interval performance.
73. Herd size was strongly associated with 410-day calving interval performance. All herd-size groups showed improvement over the longer term, particularly from 2020, but the smallest herds had the lowest proportion of dams meeting the 410-day condition in 2025, at around 74%, compared with around 92% in the largest herds. This indicates that policy impacts are likely to be felt unevenly, especially where small herd numbers make annual performance more variable. This provides further evidence to support the announced calving interval derogation for claims of 10 or less from 2026[19].
74. Second calvers remain an important management challenge. In 2025, second calvers had a median calving interval of 376 days and a mean of 408 days, compared with 369 days and 391 days respectively for the total dam population (that includes second calvers). Their average calving interval was therefore 17 days longer, confirming earlier concerns that second calving dams may be more exposed to future tightening of the threshold.

[19] AgriScot: Ministerial speech - gov.scot

75. The data also suggests behavioural responses to the policy change. A visible kink around 410 days in the 2025 calving interval distribution indicates that management, recording, or claiming behaviour changed around the eligibility threshold. In addition, recorded day-of-birth calf deaths rose sharply from around 100 per year over 2015-2023 to 485 in 2024 and 548 in 2025, likely reflecting calves being registered that may previously not have been recorded in the same way, because calf registration now resets the dam's calving interval clock.
76. Overall, the 2025 reform appears to have met its broad policy intent: less SSBSS funding was directed toward calves from dams with long calving intervals, and national calving interval performance improved. However, the scale of greenhouse gas savings and the precise attribution of changes to the new rule should be interpreted carefully because claims include calves from mixed birth years, some apparently eligible calves remain unclaimed in-year, and wider market conditions have also driven herd restructuring. Further monitoring will be needed to distinguish lasting productivity improvement from one-off behavioural and claiming responses.

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