

PRESS RELEASE

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Calving interval conditionality data confirms crofters' concerns

A new report by Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) analysing the effects of the recently introduced 410-day calving interval conditionality on the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme (SSBSS) has confirmed what SCF has been warning about: the new rules mostly affect producers with small herds, while the country's largest production units benefit.

In 2025, the Scottish Government introduced a new rule that made newborn calves eligible for support under SSBSS only where the interval since their mother's previous calving was no more than 410 days. The calving interval condition was aimed at reducing the overall carbon footprint of the beef sector. SCF has repeatedly warned that this policy was likely to disproportionately affect smaller producers and those reliant on ferries and hired bulls.

New research by SRUC corroborates these concerns. A recently published report analysing the 2025 claims under the scheme finds that the proportion of cows meeting the 410-day criterion is heavily correlated with herd size, with the smallest herds having the lowest proportion meeting the eligibility threshold (74%), whilst the largest herds show the highest proportion (92%). Consequently, large farms have benefited most from recent changes to SSBSS eligibility criteria. The largest 10% of businesses received 40% of the funding, while 40% of businesses received less than 10% of support.

As the researchers state, the data "indicates that policy impacts are likely to be felt unevenly, especially where small herd numbers make annual performance more variable". SCF has been lobbying for a small-herd derogation, which was eventually introduced by the Scottish Government. From this year, producers claiming SSBSS support for fewer than 10 calves are exempt from the 410-day condition. The SRUC report provides further evidence to support this derogation.

Donna Smith, SCF Chief Executive, said: *"We have seen a positive shift recently, with the government demonstrating more willingness to listen to crofters' concerns. The small-herd derogation is a much-needed relief and recent commitments to better support smaller producers are encouraging. However, for some, this comes too late. We have been seeing a concerningly high number of small producers already dropping out of the system."*

This, too, is reflected in the recent SRUC data. Of the 618 producers that previously claimed SSBSS payments but stopped in 2025 when the condition was introduced, over half were businesses that claimed 10 or fewer calves in 2024. As the report finds, the last decade has seen a 23% drop in businesses claiming, but only a 15% drop in animals claimed, suggesting some smaller producers have withdrawn from the scheme and production.

Mrs Smith continued: *"More is needed to halt and reverse the decline of actively worked crofts. Crofters are facing increasing costs, admin burdens and conditions, whilst getting little reward. This needs to be addressed urgently – we cannot wait until 2030 or beyond, whenever the new support structure is implemented. We need practical solutions and tangible improvements now."*

The report stresses that regional, breed and farm-type differences remain important, and advice and support may need to be targeted, taking this into account. Claims from small producers remain minuscule in the grand scheme of things, with claim sizes of 10 calves or fewer accounting for just over 2% of animals and payments, and herds of up to 25 claimed animals accounting for just over 6%. Many of those failing to meet the condition were only marginally outside the eligibility threshold, missing it by just a few days.

As Mrs Smith said: *"The data shows that for many crofters, the new rules are simply disproportionate. One size does not fit all, and we will continue to advocate for policy solutions that work for crofting."*

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For further information or interview requests, please contact mike@crofting.org or donna@crofting.org

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

About the Scottish Crofting Federation

The Scottish Crofting Federation is the only organisation solely dedicated to supporting crofting in Scotland. Our mission is to ensure the sustainability of crofting for future generations and advocate for crofting so that its value is recognised from within communities to government. We support crofters to meet the challenges of a changing world and champion the need for crofting to remain accessible and affordable for young people in crofting communities. As a member-led organisation, SCF works to secure a thriving future for crofting, rooted in community, culture and care for the land.