

# Underpinning policy through cattle performance analysis



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**RESAS**  
Rural & Environmental Science  
and Analytical Services

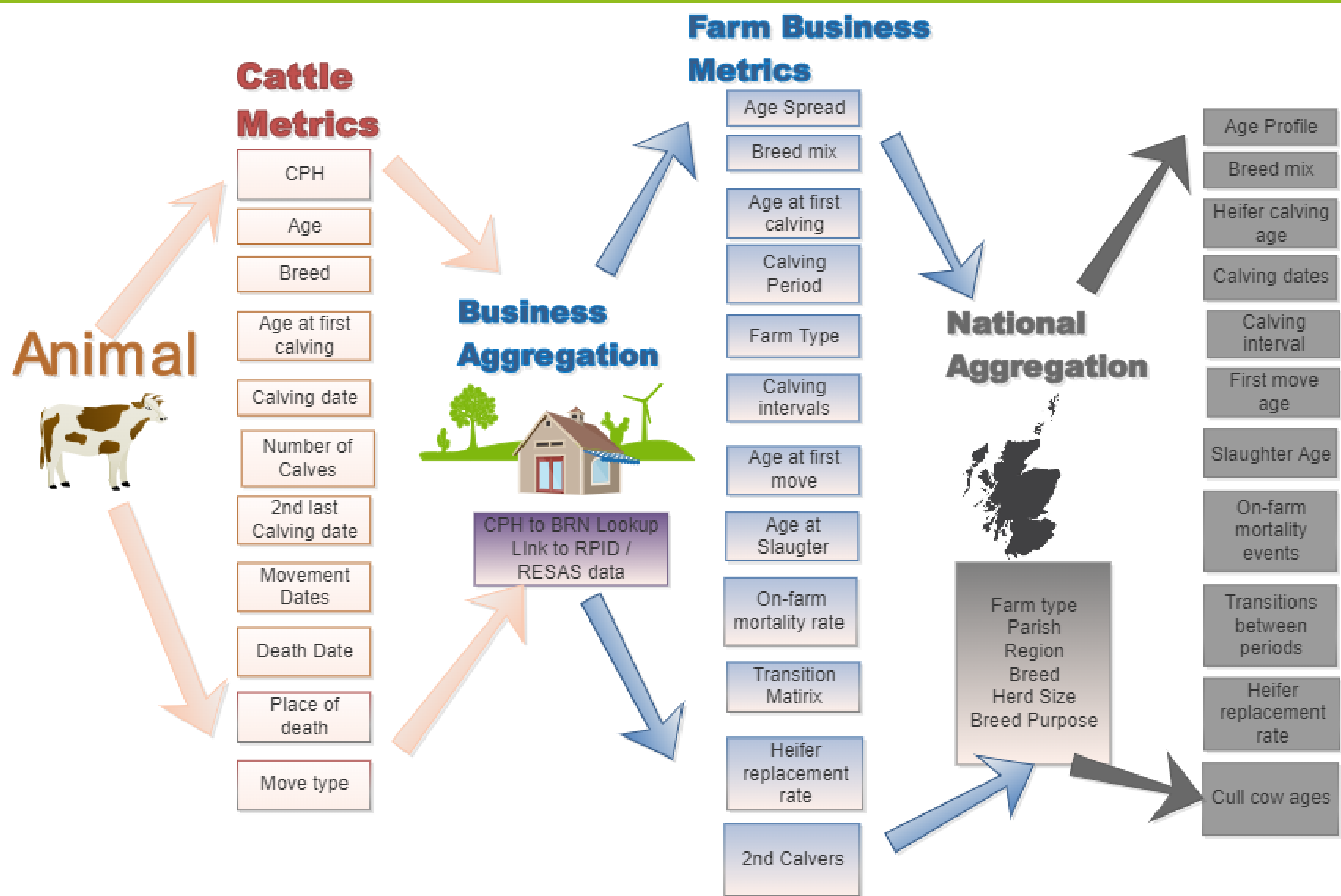


## Introduction

SRUC has provided evidence to the Scottish Government on the structure and performance of the **Scottish beef sector**, associated greenhouse gas emissions, and mitigation opportunities by utilising 'big data' in the form of official cattle registrations and movements databases.

The **analysis has informed policy decisions** through the introduction of a **new calving interval eligibility criterion for the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme (SSBSS) from 2025**, and the **associated derogation for small claimants announced for 2026**.

## Methods



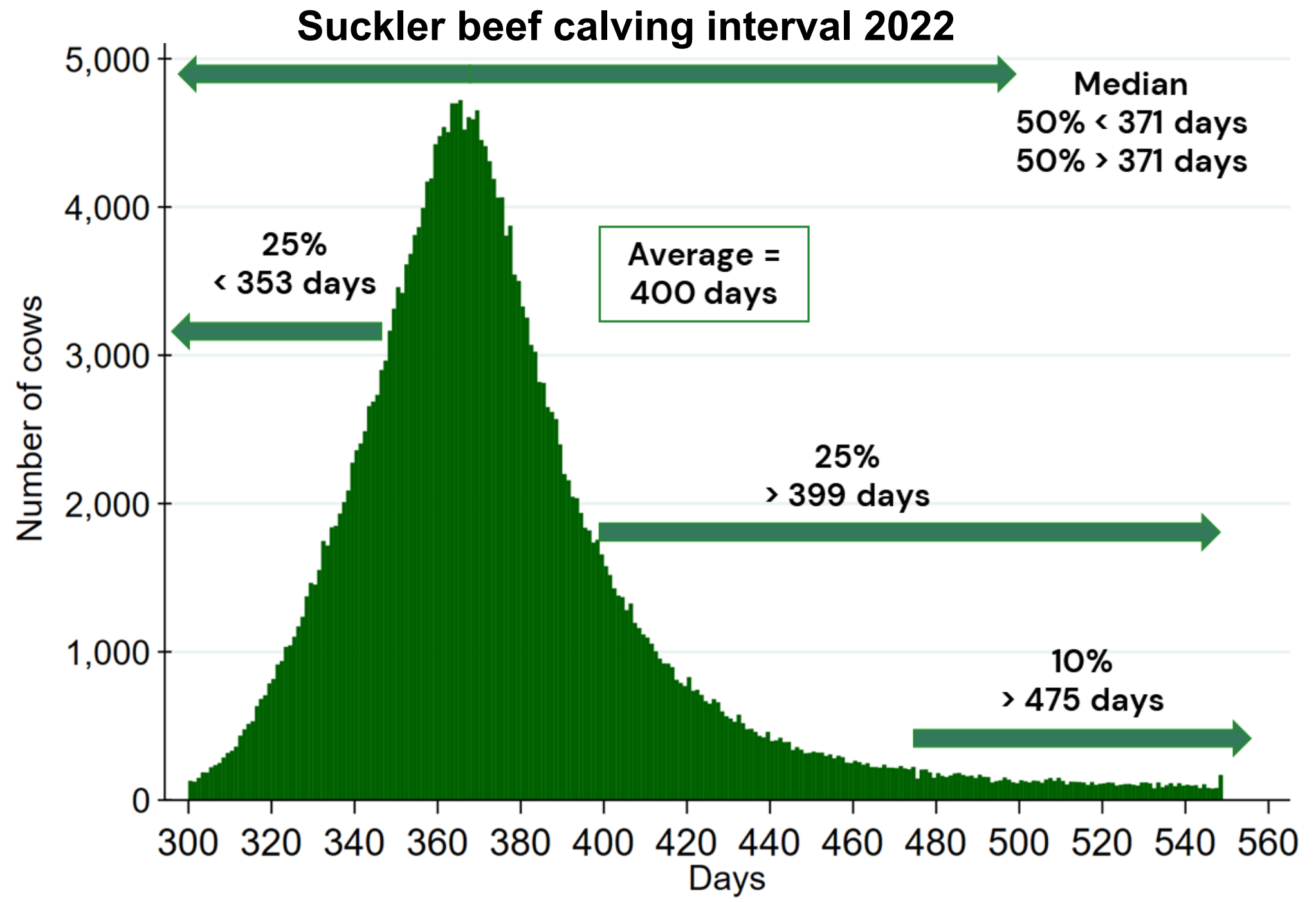
Cattle Tracing System (CTS) data (including ScotEID data) was accessed through a comprehensive **Data Sharing Agreement** with the Animal and Plant Health Agency. Data extracts from SRUC's **EGENES SQL databases** provided unique animal, location and event dates for every bovine animal registered and moved within (and out of) Scotland.

A wide range of key performance indicators were created in Stata to provide analytical insights relating to: **on-farm mortality, slaughter age, calving intervals, age at first move, breeding herd age, location and system of birth**, etc.

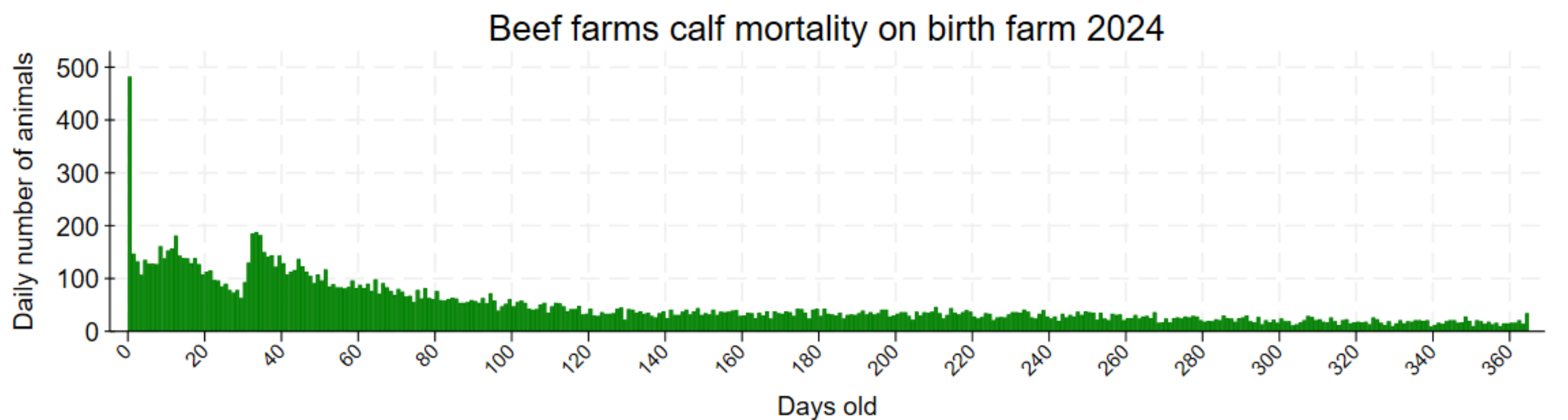
**CTS data is linked to Scottish Government administrative data** through SRUC's **Integrated Research Data Platform (RESAS-funded)**. Linked data (e.g. to support payments) enabled key performance metrics to be aligned to businesses in receipt of Suckler Beef Support Scheme Payments on the mainland and islands.

## Analysis

**Calving interval on beef farms, 2022 – a new 2025 SSBSS condition**



**Calf retention period of 30 days - an existing SSBSS condition**



## Maximising Impact

**Over 5 years**, we have worked closely with Scottish Government **analysts and policy makers**, as well as **industry stakeholders and ARIOB**, to identify a range of plausible policy scenarios to assess. This included bespoke analysis requested by the industry to ensure unintended consequences of the policy were investigated.

Further, through Sefari Gateway knowledge broker time, a large number of engagements were also undertaken **to raise industry awareness of policy changes and insights from the data**. Engagements through press articles, Farm Advisory Service, SAC Consulting subscribers, regional agricultural advisory groups, National Farmers Union Scotland, and Veterinary continued professional development courses:



## Evidence & Reports

- Evidence to Suckler Beef Climate Group (9 papers)
- Calving Intervals in Scottish Cattle – Potential Conditionality Options
- 410-day calving interval condition - an assessment of conditional SSBSS payment rates for 2015-2023
- SSBSS holdings – calf mortality and seasonality of 410-day calving interval condition
- SSBSS: Front-loading and small herd derogation scenarios
- SSBSS Reform Stakeholder Group small herds and second calver data

## Governance & Stakeholders

- Suckler Beef Climate Group (2020)
- Suckler Beef Climate Group Programme Board (2020-21)
- SSBSS Reform Stakeholder Group (2023-24)
- ARIOB (2023-24)
- Academic Advisory Panel to ARIOB (2023-24)
- Scottish Government Livestock Genetics Group (2024-25)

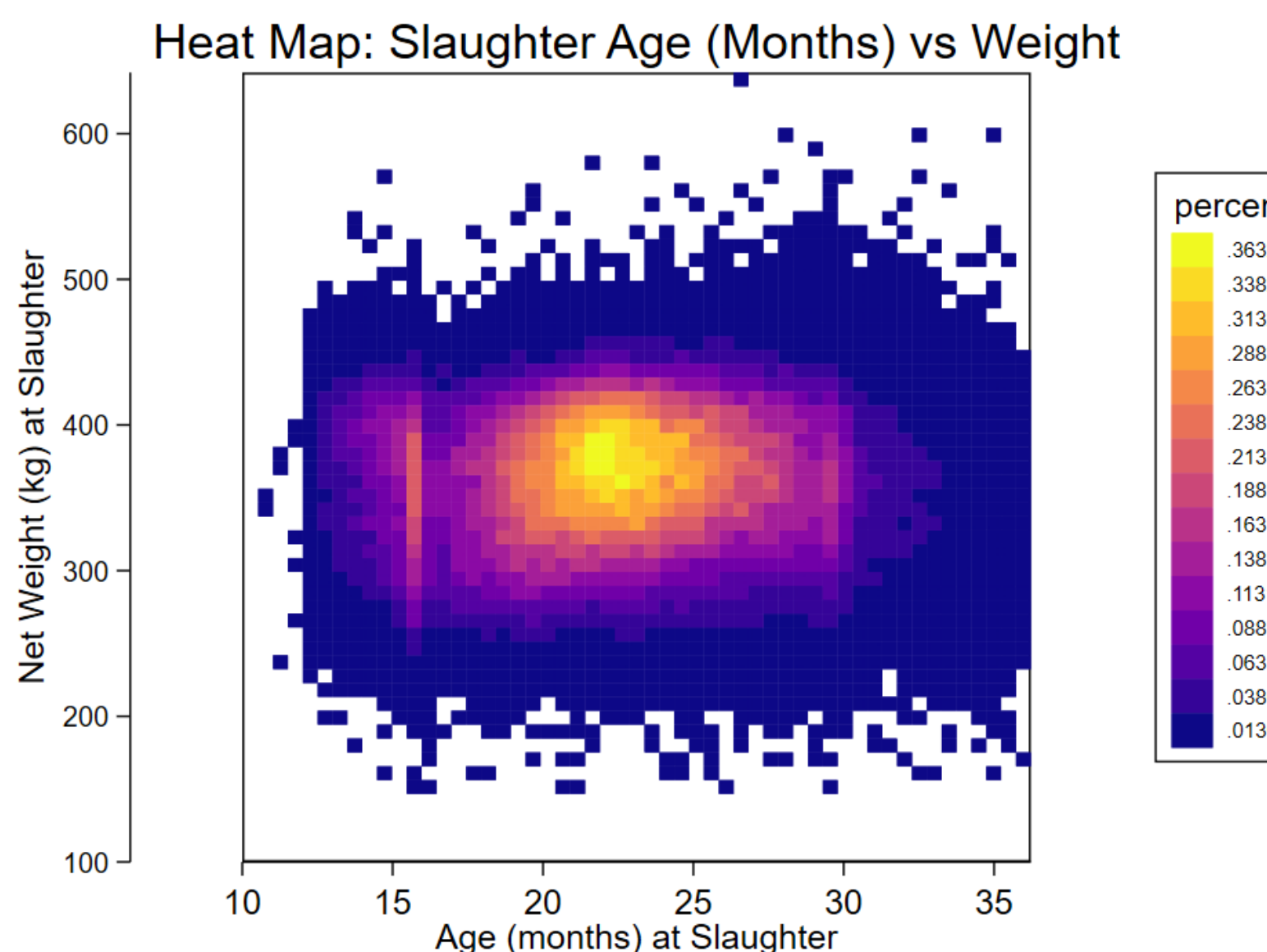


## Political decisions supported

- SSBSS conditionality (2020)
- SSBSS calving interval condition (2023)
- SSBSS 410-day calving interval for dams of calves (2024)
- SSBSS Small claimant derogation (2025)

## Ongoing Analysis

- **Sefari Strategic Advisory Group** on Scottish beef sector in National Greenhouse Gas Inventory (2025)
- **Thoughts on reducing slaughter weights /ages** to lower emissions (2025)



## Key contributors

- Prof Mike Coffey (Professor of Livestock Informatics, SRUC)
- Dr Andrew Moxey (independent agricultural economist - Pareto Consulting)
- Ian Archibald (Experimental Data Manager, SRUC)

## Acknowledgements

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