Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme (SSBSS)
Frequently asked questions (FAQs) to help you prepare for change

How is the SSBSS changing?

From 2025, we are reforming the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme (SSBSS) to include a new condition which will both support efficiency of the beef sector, as well as contribute to a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The new condition will incorporate a calving interval threshold of 410 days, and will be introduced from 2025 onwards. This condition will apply to calves born from cows who have an established calving interval. The first calves registered to any dam will be exempt from the calving interval threshold condition and will remain eligible for payment, provided that all other scheme conditions are met. The new condition will relate to the calving interval of individual animals rather than a herd average.

What is the eligibility for the scheme?

All previous scheme conditions will remain in place. From 2025, in order to be eligible for payment under the scheme, claimed calves must be either:

- the first offspring registered to a dam, or
- the registered offspring of cattle with an established calving interval of 410 days or less.

To be eligible for the scheme, you must also complete a Single Application Form. If you do not do this, your claim will not be valid, and we will not make a payment.

The main location code you use on your claim form should be the same as the one on your Single Application Form. To be eligible for this scheme, you must keep your land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) and meet the legal requirements of keeping cattle as part of our Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs).

We will pay on calves which:

- you own or lease;
- are born on your Scottish holding and kept there continuously from birth for at least 30 days (animals which were too young to claim can be entered on a new application in a subsequent year);
- are born on or after 2 December 2014;
- have a valid cattle passport;
- have not been paid under the previous schemes (Scottish Beef Calf Scheme or Scottish Beef Scheme);
- have been correctly officially identified;
- are at least 75 per cent beef bred;
- are reared for the production of beef as part of a suckler beef herd
- are the first offspring registered to the dam, or are the registered offspring of cattle with an established calving interval of 410 days or less.

Will first-born calves be eligible to claim?

The first calves registered to any dam will be eligible provided they meet all scheme conditions other than the 410 day calving interval threshold. This is because a calving interval would not have been established for the dam as there would have been no previous calf registered to that animal.

Is the calving interval threshold based on herd averages?

No, the calving interval threshold is measured on an individual animal basis. The calving interval for each dam will be established based on previous birth registrations on ScotEID.

What are the benefits of this conditionality?

A reduction in the calving interval of suckler cows will improve overall farm productivity whilst reducing excess greenhouse gas emissions. Introduction of a calving interval condition to the SSBSS will therefore support the efficiency of the sector and also benefit the environment.

Will the calving interval threshold be reduced over time?

For the 2025, 2026 and 2027 scheme years, the calving interval threshold will be set at 410 days. The Scottish Government has announced its intention, subject to legislative change, to reduce the threshold to 400 days for the 2028 and 2029 scheme years. Scottish Ministers have previously said that the threshold will not reduce by more than ten days each year for the duration of the scheme.

Why is the calving interval threshold being reduced in the 2028 and 2029 scheme years?

The evidence is clear that lower average calving intervals are associated with lower excess emissions from the livestock sector. Calving intervals are also seen as an indicator of productivity within the sector. Analysis from SRUC (Item - Calving Intervals in the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme: Insights from 2025 410-calving interval eligibility criterion - Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) - Figshare) states that the mean calving interval for previously calved beef dams on SSBSS-associated holdings fell from 398 in 2015 to 391 days in 2025, the lowest level in the 2015-2025 series. The median calving interval in 2025 was 369 days. A lower calving interval threshold will ensure that support is targeting productive beef systems in line with the Vision for Agriculture.

The Scottish Government are clear that we do not have a policy to reduce livestock numbers to meet our climate targets. Instead, we have committed to working with the sector with this reform of the SSBSS continuing support and investment to the suckler beef sector while linking that support to actions and outcomes with lower associated emissions. The purpose of the policy is to encourage improvements in reproductive efficiency where possible and we will continue to monitor the operation of the scheme and wider industry conditions.

Will reducing the calving interval in 2028 and 2029 affect other SSBSS scheme eligibility rules?

SSBSS rules will remain the same as now, with the only difference being the calving interval reducing from 410 to 400, which is expected to come into effect from January 2028.

How long will the SSBSS continue for?

It is intended that the Scottish Suckler Beef Support Scheme will continue until at least 2029. This will allow time for the calving interval conditionality to become established within the scheme.

How will the calving interval condition be calculated, to determine eligibility under SSBSS?

For the SSBSS scheme condition on calving intervals, the calving interval will be calculated based on ScotEID birth registration data. The calculation will use the birth registration details on ScotEID for the claimed calf and the previous calf born to that dam. All calf births must be registered on ScotEID within 27 days of birth in accordance with the cattle identification and traceability regulations.

My cow had a calf that was tagged but then died before being registered with ScotEID. Will this impact on the SSBSS eligibility of future calves born to this individual cow?

Unregistered calves will not be considered when establishing a calving interval.

Where a calf was tagged but then died before being registered and issued with a cattle passport then the existing cattle identification and traceability regulations require that the birth/death should be registered on ScotEID.

For the new SSBSS scheme condition on calving intervals, the calving interval will be calculated based on ScotEID birth registration data. Therefore, once a calf has been registered, that would maintain that dam's calving information and provided the dam's next calf meets all the required scheme eligibility conditions it will be eligible for payment. To register a calf that was tagged but then died before it was registered on ScotEID, you must follow the existing process of registering the birth and death of an animal, providing all the mandatory information required.

My cow had a calf that died before it was tagged. Will this impact on the SSBSS eligibility of future calves born to this individual cow?

Unregistered calves will not be considered when establishing a calving interval. For the new SSBSS scheme condition on calving intervals, the calving interval will be calculated based on ScotEID birth registration data. There is no requirement to register calves that have died before being tagged under the cattle identification and traceability regulations. Unregistered calves will not be considered when establishing a calving interval.

Will there be a derogation for calves born to bought-in (Scottish) cattle, because their calving dates might not align with the businesses calving system?

This condition will apply to bought-in Scottish cattle. It is the responsibility of the buyer to assess the impact any purchase will have on their potential scheme eligibility.

Will the calving interval condition apply to calves born to cattle brought into Scotland from another country?

ScotEID does not hold full historic calving records where cows have had calves born outside Scotland. Where previous calving history is not available, the first calves registered in Scotland to any dams from outside Scotland will be eligible provided they meet all scheme conditions other than the calving interval threshold. This is because a calving interval would not have been established for the dam as there is no previous calf registered on ScotEID to that animal.

Will there be any exceptions made for extenuating circumstances which impact on calving interval? ***(E.g., severe weather conditions, disease outbreak, personal illness etc).***

The calving interval condition will apply to all animals. Outside of the normal force majeure or exceptional circumstances mechanism, there will be no exemptions to this condition.

If you have been unable to comply with the rules of the scheme as a result of force majeure/exceptional circumstances, you may retain the right to aid in respect of the claimed animal numbers.

To qualify, you must notify us in writing with relevant evidence within 15 working days from the date you are in a position to do so.
Examples of force majeure or exceptional circumstances are:

- the death of the farmer
- the long-term professional incapacity of the farmer
- a severe natural disaster gravely affecting the holding's agricultural land
- the accidental destruction of livestock buildings on the holding
- an epizootic affecting part of or all of the farmer's livestock (for example, Foot and Mouth Disease)

You should bear in mind that these are only examples and they are not, by themselves, sufficient to qualify as force majeure or exceptional circumstances. Normal commercial risks cannot be considered as force majeure or exceptional circumstances.

How are cases of force majeure or exceptional circumstances assessed?

The decision on whether a situation is recognised as a case of force majeure is taken on a case-by-case basis using relevant documentary evidence provided.

The notion of force majeure contains two elements:

(i) an objective element relating to abnormal circumstances unconnected with the business in question and beyond its control; and
(ii) a subjective element involving the obligation to guard against the consequences of the abnormal event by taking all appropriate steps without making unreasonable sacrifices.

Therefore, for any scenario to be considered as a force majeure or exceptional circumstance event, a business **must be able to provide documentary evidence** which demonstrates that the event which prevented them from meeting their scheme obligations, was an abnormal circumstance. A business must also be able to demonstrate that the consequences of the event could not be avoided in spite of the exercise of all due care and that they have taken all appropriate measures to guard against the consequences of the abnormal event.

To illustrate the type of evidence that may be relevant, some examples are included below. These are not exhaustive or definitive lists and the evidence that is relevant will depend on the individual circumstances of any given case.

Example 1: Bull Failure, e.g. a bull is infertile leading to claimed calves not meeting the calving interval eligibility requirement

The type of evidence that may be relevant could include –

- Evidence of any pre-breeding testing of the bull or pregnancy scanning of the cows that has/had taken place. Help to demonstrate that the business had taken steps to guard against the issue occurring

- An explanation of bull management, e.g. are bulls rotated around a closed herd, are bulls hired in. Help to demonstrate whether using another bull was possible or obtaining a replacement bull was the only option

- Evidence that the bull been replaced. Help to demonstrate action was taken to guard against such an issue occurring again

- Evidence of herd performance in previous years. Help to demonstrate whether this was an abnormal circumstance that has only occurred this year

Example 2: Disease Breakdown, e.g. inconclusive result in stock bull during routine TB test leading to claimed calves not meeting the calving interval eligibility requirement

The type of evidence that may be relevant could include –

- Evidence of TB test/result. Help to demonstrate the TB test findings.

- Evidence of applying for a licence to replace the bull as soon as possible. Help demonstrate the action that was taken and when by the business after the event was known.

- Evidence bull was slaughtered. Help demonstrate the action taken to guard against such an issue occurring again.

- Evidence of how this impacted the management of the cows affected. Help demonstrate how the disease breakdown was the reason for cows not meeting the calving interval eligibility requirement

Will I still be able to make a historic animal claim?

Yes, historical animals (animals born before 2 December 2024) can continue to be claimed. However, all historic calves claimed from the 2025 scheme year will be required to meet the calving interval criteria in order to receive payment.

Will I be penalised for claiming calves which have exceeded the calving interval threshold?

An administrative penalty will not be applied to calves which fail to meet the calving interval condition and these animals will be deducted from a claim Without Penalty. All claimed calves must continue to meet all other existing scheme requirements and will be deducted With Penalty where this is not the case.

For example, a claimed animal that does not meet an existing scheme eligibility requirement (e.g. not 75% beef bred) and which also fails to meet the Calving Interval condition will be deducted With Penalty. A claimed animal that meets all existing scheme requirements but does not meet the Calving Interval condition will be deducted Without Penalty.

Will the claim submission window change?

The scheme year runs from 1 January to 31 December and claims can be submitted from 15 January of the relevant scheme year with the closing date for submitting claims the 14 January of the following year. For example, claims for the 2026 scheme year can be submitted from 15 January 2026 and the closing date for submitting 2026 claims is 14 January 2027.

Animals born on or after the 2 December 2026 are not eligible until the 2027 scheme year.

Claims can be made throughout the claim submission window and there is no limit to the number of claims you can make but you must ensure all claims are submitted within the submission window.

How will the payment rate be affected by new conditionality?

The payment rate for eligible animals is not fixed. The rate will vary each year depending on the total number of eligible animals claimed in the scheme year. The Mainland and Islands budgets will be divided by the number of eligible animals within those areas to provide the payment rate per calf. We will then pay this as a flat rate for each eligible animal.

The yearly rates will be set once the total number of eligible animals claimed is known, which is normally around March, following the end of the scheme year..

When will I receive payment for my claim?

We aim to acknowledge your claim by letter within 14 days, and we aim to pay all eligible claims by 30 June following the end of each scheme year.

Has the industry been consulted or represented in the decision-making process of reforming SSBSS?

An industry group was formed to support the Scottish Government's development of the new calving interval condition. The group included representatives from the Scottish Beef Association, NFU Scotland, the Scottish Crofting Federation and others. The stakeholder group has provided input on a number of issues related to the reform. The Agricultural Reform Implementation Oversight Board (ARIOB) has also discussed the reform.

Is there a derogation from the calving interval condition for small herds?

From the 2026 scheme year onwards, a derogation has been introduced for the calving interval condition to any businesses claiming a total of 10 calves or fewer in a scheme year. This will mean that those claiming for 10 calves or fewer will not need to meet the calving interval condition.

Will I have to apply for the derogation?

No, the derogation will be applied automatically when claims are processed for payment.

My herd size is less than 10 cows, will the derogation apply to me?

The derogation will apply to the number of calves claimed for SSBSS in the scheme year, not the number of cows in a herd.

I submit multiple SSBSS claims during the scheme year, will the derogation apply to each claim?

No, the derogation will apply if the **total** number of calves claimed by a business in the scheme year is 10 or less.

I claim less than 10 calves, will I still have to meet the other SSBSS eligibility requirements?

Yes, the derogation will only apply to the calving interval condition. All claimed animals will still need to meet the other SSBSS requirements to be eligible to receive a payment.