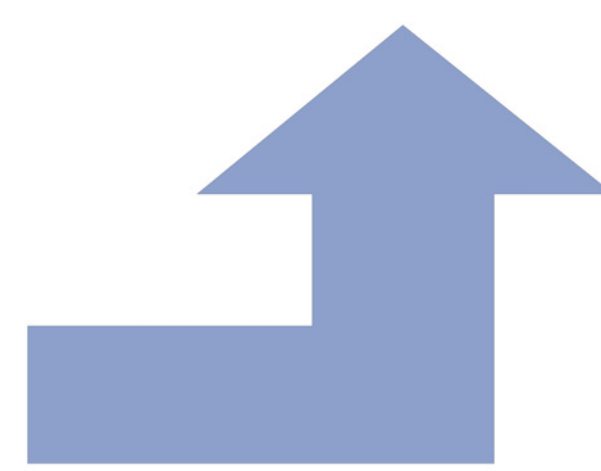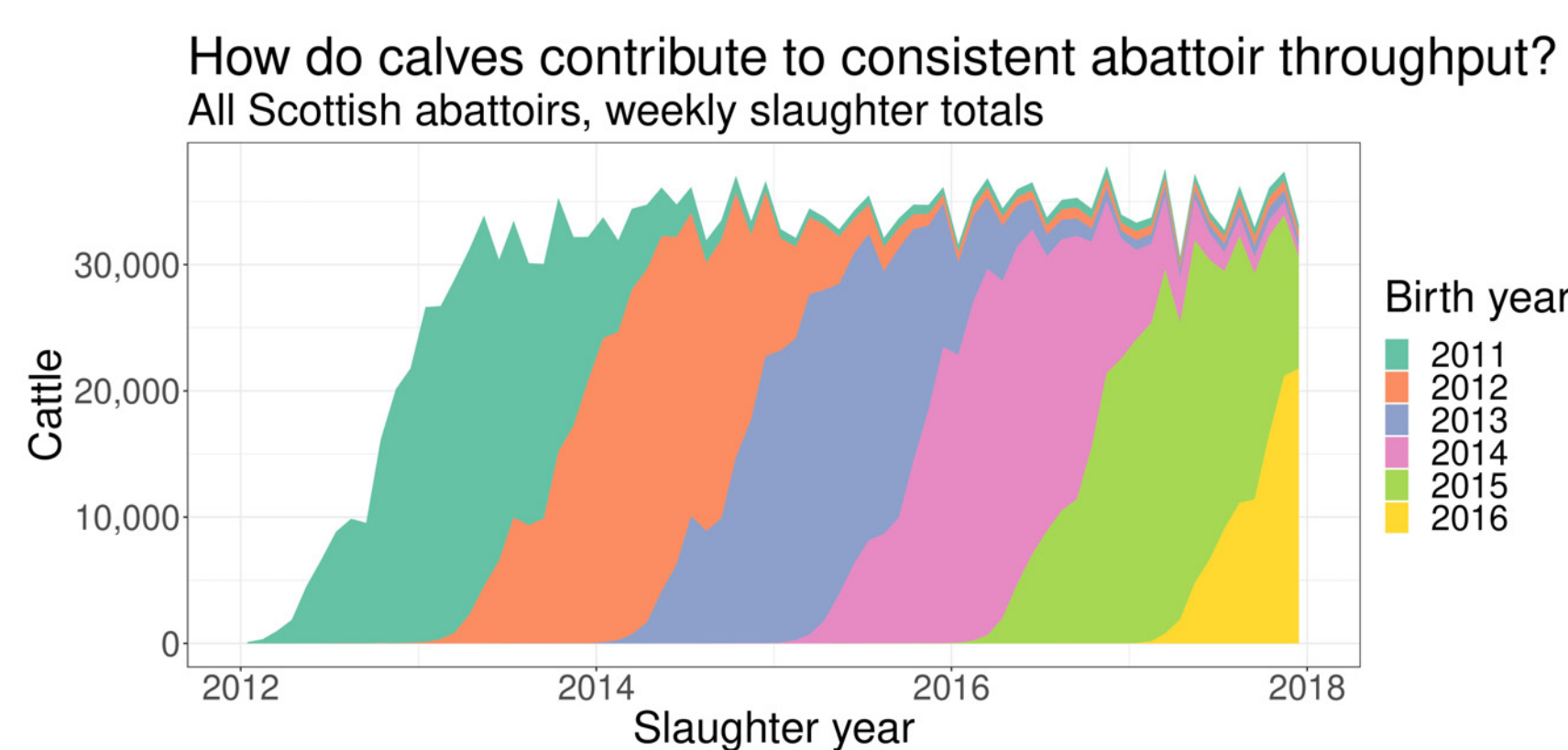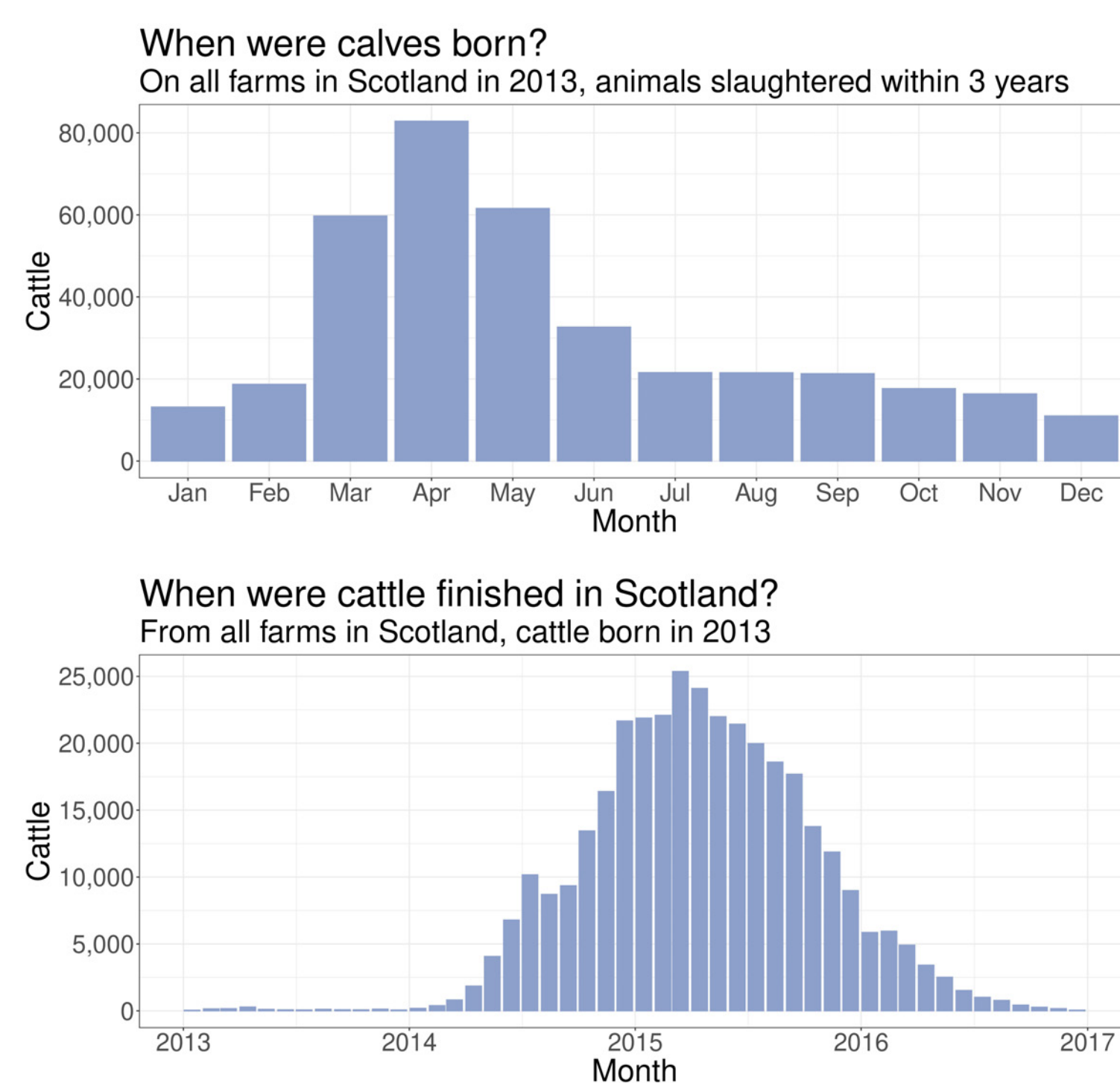# Abattoir supply

The monthly registrations of Scottish calves during 2013 peaks during the spring. With so many suckler calves born in these months, phasing of finishing these calves is required to ensure that abattoir throughput remains relatively consistent throughout the year.

The finishing distribution tails for 2013 dovetail into the calves born before and after.

When were calves born?
On all farms in Scotland in 2013, animals slaughtered within 3 years

When were cattle finished in Scotland?
From all farms in Scotland, cattle born in 2013

How do calves contribute to consistent abattoir throughput?
All Scottish abattoirs, weekly slaughter totals

Beef efficiency
Finishing systems

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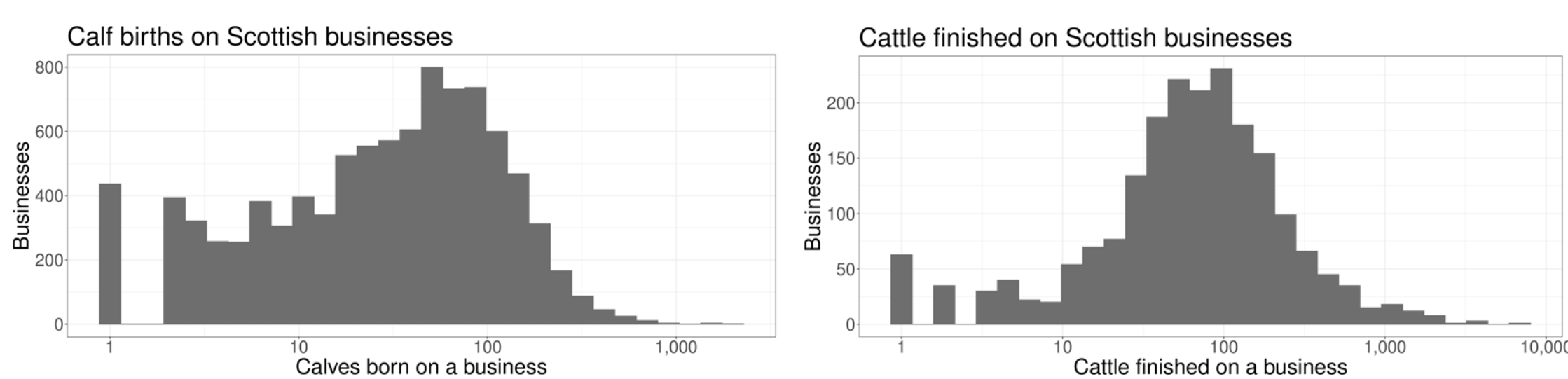
Policy implication

Beef farming is dominated by a small number of large businesses. Targetting these large businesses (20%) means short-term policies like finishing weights, length of time to finish cattle, etc. can impact on the majority of prime stock (80%). For long-term changes (e.g. genetic improvements) then policy needs to target a much wider pool of producers.

There is natural variation in finishing times between breeds, but the variance within breeds suggest that efficiencies can be made across the sector. Future policy must take cognisance of the differences between breeds in any measures, and will also need to consider the positioning of Scotch Beef as a high quality, slow finishing, "grass reared" product that differentiates from more intensive beef production in competitor nations.

Concentration of finishing

Early, late or rearer finishers sent 287,405 prime cattle that were born in 2013 to slaughter. Only 203 businesses accounted for 52% of all the prime animals sent to slaughter from this wider group – an average of 730 head per farm from the 2013 cohort alone. The next decile (group of 203 finishers) accounted for only a further 15% of cattle, with an average of 213 prime animals that were born in 2013. Ultimately 610 (30%) finishers produce 76% of the throughput of prime cattle born from those born in 2013.

Cattle sent to slaughter by size of finishing farm
Each decile is 203 farms and shows the number of animals finished by those farms
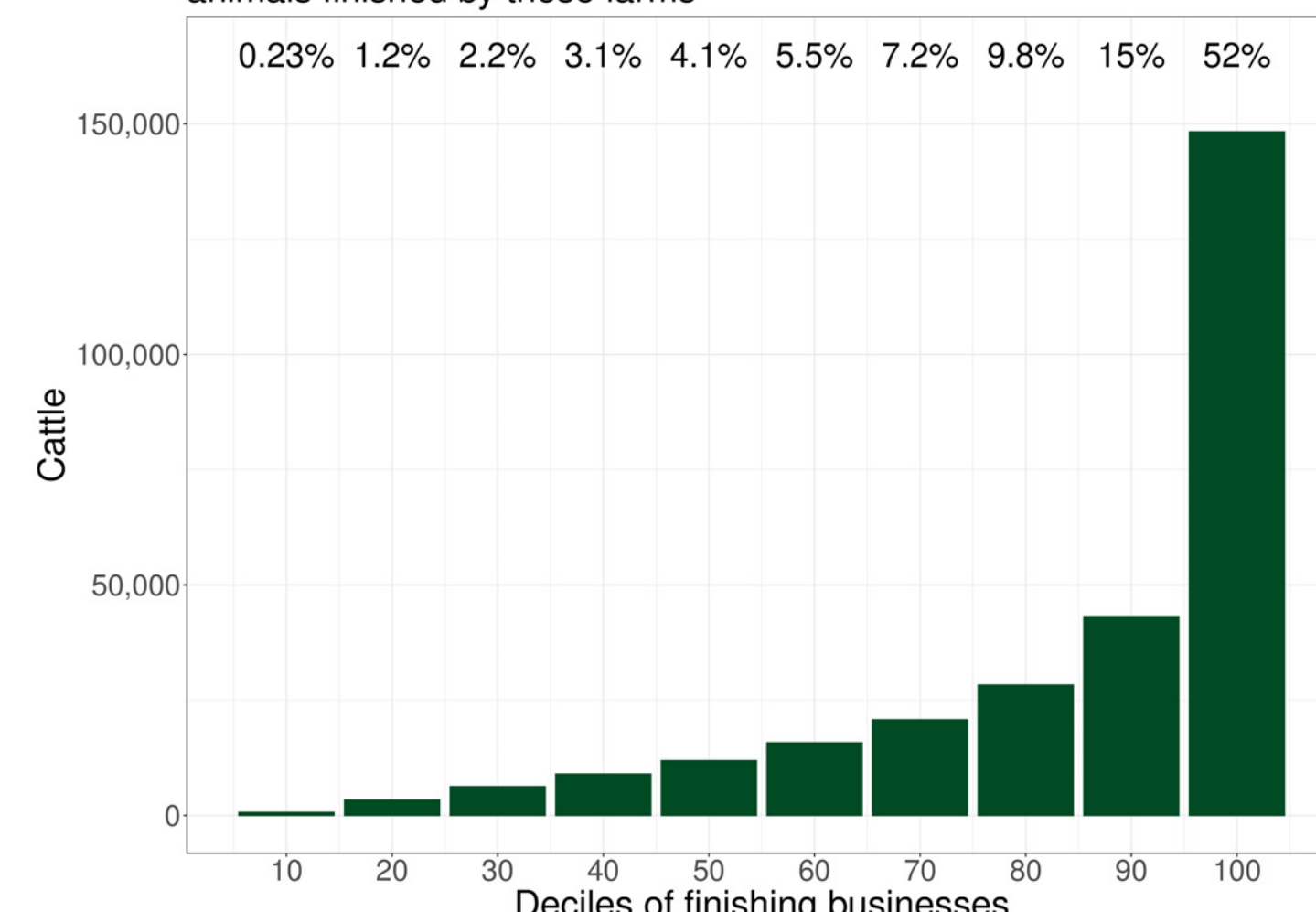
Finishing variation

A tighter box and whiskers indicates a greater uniformity in the age of the cattle slaughtered within a breed. The breeds with the highest median slaughter age are at the top and those with lowest median age at the bottom. The darkest boxes indicate the most popular breeds in terms of abattoir throughput. Slow maturing Highland and Galloway breeds that often graze rough grazing hill areas take longest to finish.

The age profile of slaughtered prime cattle finished on different systems are shown in Figure 8. The difference between rearer finishers, early and late finishers is apparent. It is likely that in dairy, unclassified and rearer finishers there was more bull-beef rearing that give rise to the early slaughter peaks.

Distribution of the age of slaughtered cattle
Individual cattle, tagged by finishing system

Finishing time of Scottish cattle
Most popular breeds, animals born in 2013

Calving vs finishing

About 450 of the 10,792 beef and dairy producers only had a single calf registration in 2013 with a few businesses at the opposite end of the scale spectrum, registering over 1,000 calves in 2013.

A large number of producers sent few prime cattle to slaughter. However, a few very large finishers - who act as key links in Scotland's beef supply chain - each supplied more than 1,000 finished cattle from the 2013 calf crop. There were a handful of farms supplying over 5,000 prime cattle from the calves born in 2013.

Calf births on Scottish businesses

Cattle finished on Scottish businesses

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Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Full report: https://www.ruralbrexit.scot/future-policy/scottish-beef-finishing-cattle-network-briefing-note-1/