

Storegården's Icelandic horses

At Storegården located between Ulricehamn and Falköping, Sweden, Maria Vemdal has been breeding Icelandic horses for about 10 years now. In total 17 Icelandic horses live here and Maria feed them forage from her and her husband's own forage production. She is particular about the protein content, it has to be high. These horses are not fed concentrate, if the forage has sufficient energy and protein values it can cover the horses' requirements.

Maria has a Master of Science Industrial Work Environment. Therefore she has also built a stable optimized to require as little work as possible. The horses are kept in a loose housing barn 24 hours a day year round and she cleans out the stable once a year with her Avant 365, a small articulated tractor. All stable chores have got smart practical solutions from Maria's perspective as a work environment engineer.



The loose housing barn. Photographer Maria Vemdal

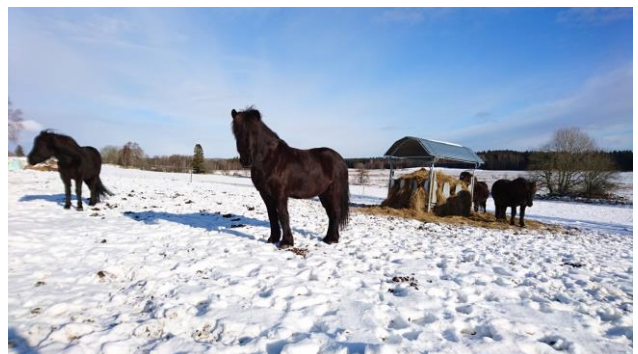
In addition to work and her own business Maria has time to study to become an Equestrian Entrepreneur Iceland, where it is included to become a certified B instructor. Hopefully it may also be possible to become a C trainer within the scope of this education.

The goal of her own business is to produce horses typical for this breed which are nice to handle, says Maria. Therefore she also breaks in and educates all the horses before they are sold, to get to know them and more easily be able to match the horses with the right rider.

Together with her husband Maria produces high quality forage at their farm Storegården. They also lease land and now they have an abundance of forage which they sell. Parts of the leased land is a wetlands area in the north valley of the river Ätran where it during the nineteenth century was created nice arable land by lowering the water levels in the two nearest lakes. Since the seventies it has been considered too much work to keep the ditches open and the land did not carry the tractors of that time so the land has been lying fallow since 1973. But after a couple of years work with chainsaw, excavator, tractor with wide tires and low ground pressure they now produce forage with very good protein content.

When they invested in machines for forage production they considered 1) the bales should be wrapped within a few hours after baling, 2) after wrapping they should be handled as little as possible, 3) they should rather not be moved during storage.

For all horses it is important to feed a lot of forage, which also applies for Icelandic horses and Maria has her broodmares and young horses on free access. As a qualified engineer you like to calculate and read about a lot of things, that I have also used when it comes to feeding says Maria. What she discovered was that the horses need forage with high content of digestible crude protein (cp) to cover their protein requirements. Preferably over 70 g digestible cp per kg DM. Therefore the goal is to produce forage with higher protein values. And of course they analyse all their forage consignments.



Enjoying the winter sun. Photographer Maria Vemdal

Icelandic horses are known to be easy keepers but even easy keepers will get protein deficiencies if the daily protein requirement is not fulfilled. Proteins are the body's important building blocks and the

requirements cannot fall below during longer periods without negative consequences.

Maria's broodmares and young horses have free access to forage with higher nutritive values and Maria has discovered that it works altogether excellent. They are outside 24 hours a day and never needs blankets. But at five years of age when they aren't growing anymore and have started training they get way too fat on free access says Maria. Then they get a restrictive amount of the same forage with higher nutritive values morning and evening that covers the daily protein requirements. 24 hours a day they also have free access to good quality straw in a fodder rack with roof so they always have something to chew on.

If one has to limit the daily forage ration 1.5 – 2.0 kg DM per 100 kg body weight and day is appropriate.

They are not fed concentrate but the forage is supplemented with a suitable mineral feed and salt. Forage can rarely cover the whole mineral requirements and therefore it is important to analyse the forage for mineral content as well and choose a mineral feed that matches that forage consignment. By doing that you get a balanced and optimized feed ration that fulfills the horses' daily nutritional needs.



Small furry Icelandic foals. Photographer Tom Söberg

For her broodmares Maria has often used the stallion Flipi from Österåker which is only a stone's throw away from her own farm. Flipi is considered to be one of the world's best inheritors in Icelandic horses and because Maria's goal is to produce high quality

broodmare material for her future breeding he has shown to be a good choice. Now she has several young mares after this stallion which are very promising.

Right now Maria has three six-year-olds that are for sale. She has spent a lot of time on them to get to know them properly and educate them into nice riding horses. Maria ride dressage with her horses and also engages an external trainer in the education of the horses.

When it comes to Icelandic horses the mentality is important, they should be calm and safe but still fun to ride says Maria. When she sells her horses she wants every horse to come to the right rider, they should fit together.



Maria puts a lot of work into her horses. Photographer Tom Söberg.

Maria is one of the people involved in the Swedish Forage Agency, www.grovfoderborsen.se/om-oss/the-forage-agency/, and don't hesitate to contact us if you want to get in touch with Maria regarding buying horses or forage. We summarize by concluding that easy keepers also need forage of high quality with good nutritive value!

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