

Grainfree feeding – sense or nonsense

A healthy diet for the horse: this is what all owners want, and even more cereal-free feeding is recommended. We explain when cereal-free feeding makes sense. Learn about the dangers to be taken care of and how to feed horses suffering from metabolic diseases in a healthy, cereal-free diet. Plus: 3 tips for cereal-free feeding.

Basically, it's quite simple: Originally the horse is a Savannah animal. Which ate for decades and centuries fibre-rich fresh food. This was not sugar-rich cow grass (e. g. Welsh pasture grass) but rather very old and thus particularly long and rich in raw fibres. The digestive system of the horse is tailored to this continuous admission of low energy food. This is how it is even today.

This does not mean that a horse automatically feels worse when it is fed with cereals or other plants. Watching around the globe today's feeding often deviates from the original one. Horses are e.g. fed differently in Iceland than in North Africa or Spain.

The differences, seen globally, are really huge: In Spain, there is fed mainly pure grain, with just little hay added, and also sugar rich carob, as well as in North Africa. Where it is very dry, good hay is extremely difficult to cultivate. In Iceland, on the other hand, breeding horses have to be content with grasses and mosses during the summer.

Keyword sugar

It should be considered, that large quantities of sugar affect metabolism, especially if it is not used as an immediately available source of energy for high performances. Same effect as it is at us humans. The tricky thing about cereals is, they contain a lot of starch, i. e. carbohydrates. The body transforms these into (blood) sugar and then has to be further metabolized by the horse like e.g. normal fructose.

Efficient without cereals

Of course, we would like to optimise the nutrition of our domestic horses, to improve their well-being and their ability and willingness to perform. Grain rations are appropriate for horses, that are difficult to feed or horses in medium to strong training - so enough energy can be absorbed efficiently. However, it makes sense for some horses to be fed completely without cereals.

Grain-free muesli

On the one hand, many of our horses are far less in work than we generally assume. Muscles, however, only arise from the combination of training and feeding. With high-calorie cereal, pellet and grain feeding coupled with little work, they become round, and that often means: fat.

Prosperity illnesses are thus caused by too much feeding and at the same time too little training: this can disrupt metabolism. In extreme cases, it can be found in diseases such as Cushing's, EMS or laminitis. However, insulin resistance can also occur more slowly; for example, insulin resistance is often only noticed by experts due to special fat deposits. These diseases are usually caused by many factors. One of them is too abundant, too carbohydrate-loaded and sugar-rich feeding with too little necessity for such a diet.