



Icelandic Sheep Breeders of North America

Icelandic Sheep at Borg Farm, Iceland

Brynhildur Inga Einarsdóttir
Snæfellsnes, west og Iceland

I am a farmer in Iceland with about thirty-five milking cows but as a hobby I have ninety Icelandic sheep - eighty-five ewes and five rams. I also have seven Icelandic sheepdogs, two cats and twelve Icelandic chickens.



I love to be around the sheep, they lamb in May and at that time we go to the sheep house every two hours to see if everything is alright with them. I think it is good to have them inside when they are lambing because then it is easy to help them if they are having any trouble with the birth. We earmark the lambs and register them right after they are born.

After the ewes have given birth we keep them inside for the first 3-7 days, depending on the weather. After that they can go outside with their newborn lambs but we keep the barn door open so they can come inside if the weather gets bad. Some of the sheep go directly to the mountains but many of them stay around the farm for 2-3 weeks. Most of the sheep have two lambs, some have only one and there are always one or two who have three lambs.

Last year two of my ewes that had given birth to two lambs each rejected one of them; they just left them behind when they went up to the mountains. I took the two lambs back home, a ram and a ewe, and bottle fed them every two hours for about a month, after that they did not get milk so often, only 3-4 times a day. My granddaughters loved to bottle feed them when they came for a visit. All children love the young lambs, and the lambs love being around children.



Every time we went for a walk we called the little ram and ewe and encouraged them to come with us. They loved to go for walks but if we went up to the mountain to pick berries the ram would come with us (see photo on back cover) but the little ewe always went back home. Every day when we went to collect the cows for milking both of them liked to come with us.

My sheep are like pets to me because I do not have so many. Every time I feed them with hay I call them (many of them have got their own name) and sometime I give them some feed pellets that they really enjoy. I do that to form a bond with them so that in the summer when they are released I can go into the mountains and call them. My sheep are housed indoors for 7-8 months. But after I have got them down from the mountain in October I keep the door open at the sheep house so they can go out if they like, but after the weather gets bad, I lock them inside until April or May, it depends on the weather. I have to give them hay twice a day like we do to the cows. In February or March I start to give them some fishmeal because it is good for their lambs that they will give birth to.

It makes me so happy when some of them come to me or just call back (baa). Their lambs are too shy or afraid to come so they just stay behind and watch their mothers. After they have talked to me they go back where they can run free in the mountains.

In the west of Iceland where I live, the farmers round up their sheep in September, all on the same day. Many farmers use dogs for the work, it is very helpful to have a good sheepdog. Sometimes you cannot see the sheep if it is foggy or raining a lot or a lot of snow, but then the dogs will tell you where the sheep are. Dogs have such a good sense of smell and very good hearing.

If the weather is too good it can be difficult to get the sheep home; they like to be in the mountains. When this happens then we just have to go up there again and again until we have brought them all home.

Two years ago two of my lambs were missing at the roundup, I thought they must have died in the mountain. The next winter was very mild, we did not get as much snow or bad weather as usual.

In June the following year when my ewes were going out with their lambs, I saw two sheep coming down from the mountains. They were in a good shape and they had a very thick coat of wool. They were rather shy and ran away when they saw me but I recognized them, they were the two lambs that were missing from the year before.

In September they came down from the mountain with the other sheep, it took me about two weeks to get close to them after they came home.



"The reason for that we do not take the wool from the rear end is because sometimes it gets very windy on the mountain even at summer time and also because it can snow after the sheep has gone out with their lambs and then keeping the wool at their rear end will protect their udder so they do not get mastitis. We shear their rear end when they come down from the mountain in Sept. or October."

In March we shear the sheep. I leave wool on their rump and back end and under their belly to protect their udder so they do not get mastitis. In October we shear them completely. Many farmers only keep white sheep because you get more money for white wool. When I became a farmer in 1998 I decided to have my sheep in all the colours. I think it is wonderful to have so many colours.

In breeding I use my own rams. I will not have my ewes inseminated because I like to breed them naturally. I bought two rams from another farm. Most of my sheep have horns but some do not. I had a four-horned ram four years ago and my neighbour has two of them. We must not lose the four-horned rams from our breeding of the Icelandic Sheep.

Our favorite sheep is a leadersheep; we call her Trutta. She gave birth to two ewes last year and we gave them the names Skessa and Grýla. Trutta is always the first one to leave the farm and go up to the mountain. Usually she goes over the mountain so we have to go far for her in October. If the weather is good it can take us some days to fetch her. Somehow she always knows where to find the best blade of grass. Sometimes she is like a dog when she jumps up at us to get something good to eat. We also have got one leader ram. I do not know what to think about him. I got him 2 years ago. The ewes are a bit frightened of him because he is too "eager." I only gave him 14 ewes so he is trying hard to get some more!

All photos this story are courtesy of Brynhildur Inga Einarsdóttir.