



Icelandic Sheep Breeders of North America

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Twelve Years of Icelandic Sheep

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It will be twelve years this coming summer since I got my first Icelandic sheep, 10 ewes and 2 rams. It was a dream that I had been working on for more than two years, doubting right up to the moment the sheep arrived in Canada that it would really come true. At the time the only reason for the importation was that I wanted the sheep of my youth which I thought to be the most beautiful and tastiest sheep I had ever known. Yes, little did I know.

Today my love for the Icelandic sheep is as strong as ever. I get a tremendous pleasure from my flock (particularly now, when everybody is under control and daily chores are in a comfortable rut) even though we still have more sheep than we can really handle. This winter we have 106 breeding ewes, the oldest born in 1989. As I watch the spreading of my beloved breed I feel that I can begin to ease up a bit. For the last few years I have wanted to work on the wool side of the sheep but not found the time. We have been much too busy trying to preserve all the aspects of the breed, which meant that we could not concentrate on any one factor where these sheep could excel. Now, with more and more breeders raising the Icelandic sheep, I hope to see some concentrate on the various abilities of the breed such as prolificacy, meat conformation, colour variation, wool quality, temperament, polled/horned strains, etc. It is all there in the genes. I, for one, dream of breeding all variations of colours/patterns, spotted and non spotted. I also want to breed leadersheep. I feel that when I have got the flock down to about 60 ewes I will have time to spin the wool, felt it, weave and knit to my heart's delight. I also want to spend more time raising the Icelandic sheep dog, and I just recently acquired my first Icelandic horse, completing my set of Icelandic animals available in North America. However, I think that the sheep will always be my first love.



This coming year promises to be an exciting one. I am delighted to be writing in the first Icelandic Sheep Newsletter and hope that it will prove to be a solid link between all breeders of Icelandic sheep in North America. It also looks to be the year when frozen ram semen will be imported from Iceland. At the moment work is being done on establishing conditions and requirements to be met for clearance. Icelanders have been using AI on sheep since 1945 and have a solid experience. The AI stations in Iceland buy top quality rams, so by using AI we could have access to the best genetics of the breed. Mind you, this is by no means a cheap way of getting new stock but a very efficient way of acquiring top quality new bloodlines. Importation of semen ensures that the breed will never run into inbreeding, as has been the fate of so many minor breeds.

It is my sincere wish that we can get this newsletter going strongly. There is so much that I would like to tell you about this sheep. Through the centuries the sheep have played such a big part in the survival of people in Iceland that utilization of the animal for food, myths and legends, emotional relationship between man and sheep, Icelandic fibre culture and more, is all a big part of the heritage of the Icelandic nation.