



marstall[®]
Premium horse feed

Cereal-free feeding – why and for whom?

Every owner wants a healthy diet for his horse, and cereal-free is increasingly recommended. We outline the circumstances under which cereal-free feeding makes sense. Learn about the dangers that need to be taken heed of and learn how to feed horses suffering from metabolic diseases with a healthy, cereal-free diet. Plus: 3 tips for cereal-free feeding.

Basically, it's quite simple: Since horses were originally steppe animals, they fed for decades and centuries on fibre-rich fresh food – not on sugar-rich grass (e. g. annual ryegrass (*lolium multiflorum*)) cows typically feed on, but on grass that had been growing for a long time and was therefore very long and rich in raw fibre. The digestive system of the horse was tailored to the continuous intake of low energy food – and it still is today.

This does not mean that a horse's wellbeing is automatically affected when it is fed with cereals or other plants. Today, all around the globe, the feeding of horses often deviates from the animals' original diet. For instance, horses in Iceland live on different feedstuff than horses in North Africa or Spain.

In fact, taking a global view, the differences are huge: In Spain and North Africa, horses are mainly fed with pure grain, with only a little amount of hay added, and with sugar-rich carob – for a simple reason: It is extremely difficult to cultivate good hay in dry climate. In Iceland, on the other hand, breeding horses have to be content with grasses and mosses during the summer.

Keyword "sugar"

It should be taken into account that large quantities of sugar burden a horse's metabolism, especially if the sugar is not used as an immediately available source of energy for high performances. In this respect, sugar has the same effect on horses as on human beings. The tricky thing about cereals is, that they contain a lot of starch, i. e. carbohydrates. The body transforms the carbohydrates into (blood) sugar which then has to be metabolized like normal fructose.

Efficient without cereals

Of course, we would like to optimise the nutrition of our domestic horses in order to improve their well-being and their ability and willingness to perform. Grain rations are appropriate for horses that are difficult to feed and for horses in medium to strong training – they allow them to efficiently absorb enough energy. For some horses, however, it is reasonable to refrain from feeding them any cereals at all.

Cereal-free muesli

Many of our horses get far less exercise than we generally assume. Muscle strength, however, can only be achieved via the combination of training and feeding. If horses are fed high-calorie cereals, pellets and grain while seldom being in training, they become chubby, which often means fat.

Diseases of affluence are caused by overproportioned rations and too little training, as this combination may disrupt the horse's metabolism. In extreme cases, the results are diseases like Cushing's disease, EMS or diet-related laminitis.

Sometimes, however, the diseases are insidious. An insulin resistance, for instance, is often only detected by experts due to particular fat deposits. Illnesses like these

are usually caused by many factors. One of these factors is overgenerous feeding, the administration of foodstuff that contains too many carbohydrates and is therefore high in sugar when there is no sufficient need for such a diet.

3 expert tips to adjust grain-free rations individually

Tip 1: Providing your horse with energy

You want to feed your horse a grain-free diet, but you are worried that your horse might not get enough energy? An important idea, especially with view to show horses. But the problem can be solved: Apply high-quality oil to the ration as needed. Horses do not have a gall bladder, but they are able to digest moderate amounts of oil because of the bile contained in their digestive system. High-quality linseed oil, for example, contains many omega-3 fatty acids, which provide a lot of energy and also have an anti-inflammatory effect. A sufficient energy supply is especially important for building up muscles and for senior horses that receive heavy fodder."

Tip 2: Low-carbohydrate nutrition relieves the stomach

Incidentally, grain-free fodder also benefits horses that are sensitive to stress. The high percentage of structure stimulates chewing and salivation. For the stomach, well-insalivated food is easier to digest. At the same time, the saliva buffers the aggressive stomach acid. Thus, grain-free food with many fibres is gentle to the stomach.

Tip 3: Amino acids are essential!

Most importantly — and this is something many people who switch to grain-free feed with the best of intentions forget: Make sure that your horse still receives enough amino acids, the smallest components of proteins! Amino acids are essential for muscle growth and maintenance. The amino acids contained in the food also have a major impact on the usability of the foodstuff. Find out more in one of our next feeding articles.

All the best for your horse!

Our recommendation

marstall Bergwiesen-Mash – the grain-free, easily digestible mash!



- Free from grains and molasses
- Low starch and sugar content
- Without vitamin and mineral supplements
- With soothing herbs to support the respiratory tract
- Can be fed warm or cold

marstall Faser-Light – the grain-free, pre-biotic light feed!



- Free from grains and molasses
- Low energy, starch and sugar content
- Concentrated supply of vitamins, minerals and trace elements
- With a lot of crude fibres from the Allgäu permanent grassland
- For light-feed horses with little or no work

marstall Vito – a special grain-free food stuff for horses having problems!



- Free from grains and molasses
- Low starch and sugar content
- With Allgäu chooped hay and Lucerne grass stimulating chewing
- Rich in omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin E, zinc and selenium
- Also ideally suited for sport horses

Sources for research:

"Pferde fit füttern", Dr. Christina Fritz, Cadmos Verlag

Experten-Tipps von Sophia Riegger, Fütterungsexpertin von marstall

"Getreide – sinnvolle Nährstoffergänzung oder doch schädlich?", Prof. Dr. Dirk Winter, Magazin

Pferdebetrieb

„Pferdefütterung“, Helmut Meyer, Manfred Coenen, Enke Verlag