

How it all began

From life with horses to Nordic Stride

For me, the story of horse nutrition and wellbeing began back in the 1980s. Horse feeding was much simpler then: hay, oats, molassed beet pulp and salt. There was less scientific research available, yet even then it was clear how profoundly nutrition influenced a horse's body, hooves, metabolism and overall wellbeing.

I got my first pony in 1989 at the age of thirteen, and ever since then horses have been teaching me something new every single day. Over the years, the number of horses I have owned or cared for has grown into the dozens, and so has my interest in species-appropriate horse keeping, nutrition and holistic wellbeing.

I have tried an enormous range of supplements, mineral products and herbal preparations over the years. Yet it often felt as though the row of containers in the feed room simply kept growing, while the overall feeding programme never became truly simple or fully satisfactory. Then I discovered these products. I used them with my own horses for a long time before I ever considered any kind of business opportunity. One thing, however, kept repeating itself again and again: the horses genuinely thrived. Their coats shone, their hooves became stronger, their digestive systems settled, and feeding became simpler. It felt as though the nutrients were truly absorbed and utilised naturally by the horse's body.

When the products were no longer available, I decided to do something about it — simply to be able to continue using them with my own horses.

That decision eventually became Nordic Stride.

Milli and Nordic Stride herd

The Nordic Stride philosophy

Let horses be horses
Movement matters as much as nutrition
Horses tell us long before problems appear
Rhythm creates security
Good forage comes first
Water is the most important nutrient
Supplements should support, not complicate

NORDIC STRIDE

1 Let horses be horses

- Horses need the opportunity to live a species-appropriate life.
- A calm and stable herd reduces stress.
- Excessive disturbance and constant changes place a burden on the horse.
- Wellbeing is reflected in both the body and behaviour.
- Horses can do many things, as long as they are also allowed to simply be horses.

2 The importance of movement

- Horses are designed to move continuously.
- Simply eating and standing still is not enough for wellbeing.
- Movement supports metabolism and digestion.
- A varied environment encourages natural activity.
- Proper nutrition and movement always go hand in hand.

3 Horses tell us something before a problem becomes visible

- Horses communicate through small changes long before problems become obvious.
- Behaviour, gut health and hoof quality reveal a great deal about wellbeing.
- Restlessness or sensitivity are often not “behavioural problems”.
- Even small changes deserve attention.
- A new horse needs time to settle into its new home.



4 Horses thrive on rhythm

- Horses live through routines and daily rhythms.
- Sudden changes increase stress.
- Changes in the environment affect horses just as much as changes in feeding.
- A stable herd and familiar companions provide security.

5 Forage is the foundation of nutrition

- Hay quality directly affects nutrient digestibility.
- Supplements cannot compensate for a poor foundation.
- Hay analysis helps us understand a horse’s nutritional needs.
- Continuous access to fibre supports gut health and wellbeing.

6 Water and drinking

- Water is the horse’s most important nutrient.
- Fibre-rich diets increase water requirements.
- Stress and environmental changes can quickly reduce water intake.
- Adequate drinking supports digestion and normal gut function.
- A calm environment and easy access to clean water encourage drinking.

7 Why do horses need complementary feeds?

- Complementary feeds help balance the diet, but they cannot replace a good nutritional foundation.
- Nutritional requirements vary from horse to horse.
- The nutrient content of hay varies between years and regions.
- Well-chosen complementary feeds help keep feeding simple and practical.
- The goal is not to use as many products as possible, but to create a balanced nutritional programme.

1 Simply being a horse

I have invested a great deal of time, effort and money into allowing my horses to be “just” horses. To eat, move, rest and spend time within a stable herd, without excessive changes or constant disruption. The impact this has on a horse’s wellbeing and physical condition is remarkable.

Over the years I have explored concepts such as Paddock Paradise, barefoot management, and later spent nearly ten years studying farriery and hoof care. Even so, I do not believe there is only one correct way to keep horses.

Today, the thing I value most is creating an environment that is calm, predictable and respectful of the horse. A horse can compete, teach riding lessons or work as a therapy horse and still approach those tasks with curiosity and contentment. But in order to truly thrive, it must also be given the opportunity to simply be a horse in between.



2 Movement matters

For many people, “being a horse” means unlimited access to forage and the freedom to stand around. But horses do not naturally spend their lives standing in one place eating. They move, play, explore, browse, react to their surroundings and live as part of a herd.

In reality, forage feeding is fairly straightforward. Breed, age, workload, body condition and metabolism determine a horse’s nutritional requirements. Once those are understood, it becomes possible to calculate whether those needs are actually being met.

Even pasture management offers endless opportunities for optimisation. What kind of pasture is it? At what time of year? In what environment? How much movement and natural stimulation does the landscape encourage?

A horse is more of a browser than a simple grazer. It is naturally inclined to nibble from everything within reach while continuously moving through its environment. It is a prey animal whose body was designed for movement. If we truly want horses to be horses, we must support their need to move — not just their need to eat.

3 Your horse has told you something before the problem becomes obvious

Horses communicate long before a problem becomes clearly visible. Small things, like: A worried expression. Hasty movements. Restlessness. A tightened abdomen. Loose droppings. Crumbling hoof walls. A little less brightness in the eye. Ears that are no longer quite as alert as they used to be. Some horses express discomfort through behaviour. Some through their digestive system. Some through both. And some so subtly that the change only becomes obvious in hindsight, once we finally understand what was happening.

With a horse we have known for years, change can be difficult to notice because we see that horse every day. With a new horse, it is easy to assume that it is simply “like this” — when in reality it may still be adjusting to its new life and finding its place in the new environment. Has it settled in yet? Personally, I would not even begin evaluating a new horse properly until it has been in its new home for many months. In my experience, true settling-in often takes nine to eleven months. Before that, I try to avoid making repeated major changes to the horse’s environment unless absolutely necessary. For a horse, adapting to a new home is a long process.

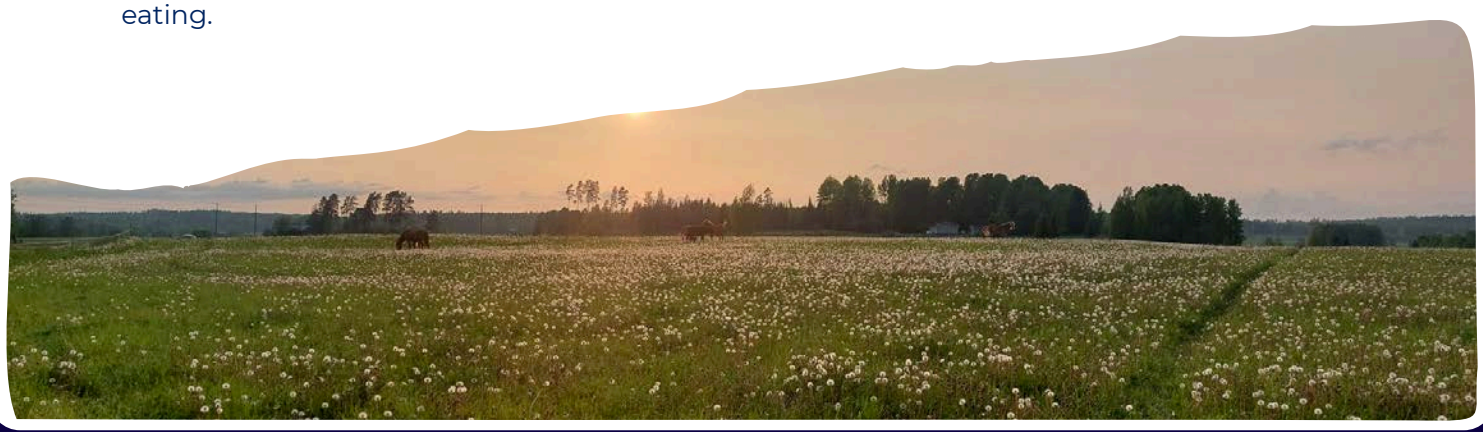
The horse will tell us what it needs. Our job is simply to listen early enough.

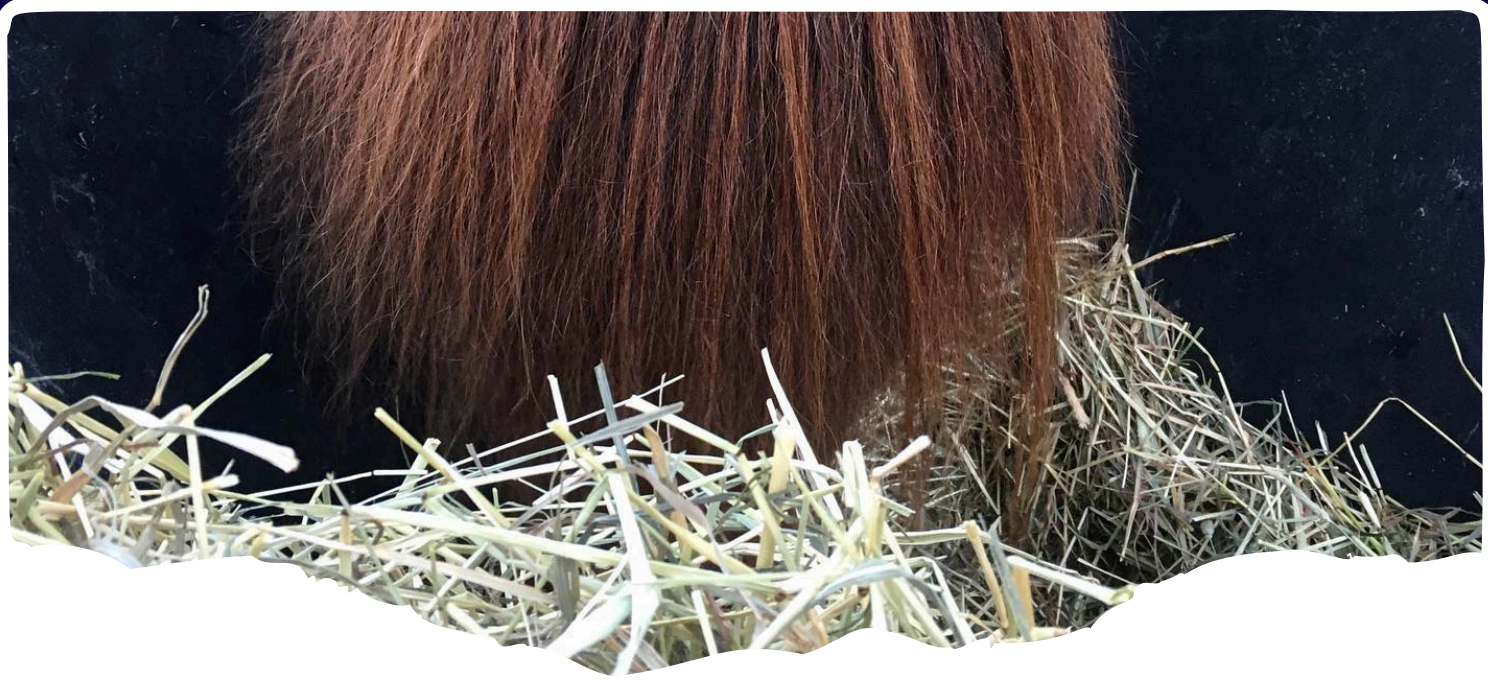
4 Horses love rhythm

One of the most rewarding things about observing a horse herd is watching how horses create different rhythms within different social groups — and then stick to them.
They adapt surprisingly quickly to the feeding routine of a new stable, provided that the other horses around them are calm and settled into that rhythm. On the other hand, if the environment is stressful, that tension spreads just as quickly.

Even so, I believe it is only fair to adjust a horse’s internal clock gradually rather than expecting everything to change overnight. We all know that changes in feeding should be introduced step by step. But how many of us think about exercise routines, herd dynamics or neighbouring horses in the stable with the same level of care?

It is incredibly important for horses to keep their friends close and to be given time to adjust gradually to new situations. In my experience, the best approach is to give the horse the opportunity to establish its own rhythm whenever possible — especially when it comes to eating.





5 The importance of forage

Forage forms the foundation of every horse's diet. Its quality has a direct impact on how well nutrients are digested and how effectively the horse can utilise the feed it receives. The more fibrous and lower in quality the forage becomes, the lower the digestibility of nutrients generally is. No supplement can compensate for a poor foundation.

Although my own horses live and eat within a herd, making it nearly impossible to know exactly how much each individual consumes, I still consider it important to calculate feeding requirements every year based on a comprehensive forage analysis. It improves understanding of both forage quality and the individual needs of each horse.

Research has shown that horses may attempt to compensate for lower forage quality by increasing their feed intake. In practice, this may appear as a constant desire to eat, restlessness, or difficulty maintaining good muscle condition. Muscle condition, however, should not be confused with excess body weight. When forage quality is properly understood, the use of complementary feeds can also remain simpler and more precise.

Because horses are designed to utilise fibre continuously, I consider regular forage availability an important part of wellbeing. This can be supported in many ways, including straw alongside hay, slow-feeding systems, forage nets, multiple feeding locations or timed feeding solutions. The method itself is less important than the outcome: giving horses the opportunity to consume fibre regularly throughout the day in a way that suits their individual needs and management environment.

Source:
Edouard et al. (2008). Voluntary intake and digestibility in horses: effect of forage quality with emphasis on individual variability. Animal, 2(10), 1526–1533.

6 Water and drinking

Water is the horse's most important nutrient. Many people focus on minerals, supplements and feeding programmes, but sometimes the single most important factor affecting a horse's wellbeing is something much more basic: is the horse drinking enough?

A horse's body constantly requires water for digestion, temperature regulation, metabolism and normal intestinal function. Fibre-rich diets, in particular, increase water requirements because the horse's large intestine relies on microbial fermentation and requires a substantial amount of fluid to function properly.



Water requirements increase rapidly under conditions such as:

- increased salt intake
- high protein diets
- high forage consumption
- (free-choice hay or additional feeding during cold weather)
- transport
- exercise and competition
- hot weather
- fever
- lactation

Water leaves the horse's body through urine, faeces, respiration and the skin. Although horses obtain water both from drinking and from feed, water consumption remains closely connected to eating. If a horse is not eating, water intake decreases rapidly as well.
Horses do not always drink when we think they should. Stress, environmental changes, transport, a new stable or changes in feeding routines can quickly reduce water consumption. At the same time, the fluid balance within the digestive system begins to change. Studies have shown, for example, that horses moved from pasture conditions to stabled management doubled their water consumption, produced less manure and passed drier faeces. These changes are suspected to contribute to the development of large-colon impactions.

My own observations regarding drinking behaviour relate to a calm environment, the palatability of water and shared herd behaviour. Wild horses often travel considerable distances to drink and spend time near water sources. I have observed foals learning from the herd to spend time around the water trough. It is beneficial for the water source to be large enough for several horses to drink at the same time, allowing them to establish their own drinking routines.

And yes — I have also noticed that horses often enjoy drinking from every imaginable ditch or puddle, even when a clean water trough stands only a few metres away. If the location is safe, I have not prevented them from doing so. A healthy immune system is built through life experiences, and in my view, any voluntary drinking behaviour is a positive thing.

Source: Freeman, D. E. 2021. Effect of Feed Intake on Water Consumption in Horses: Relevance to Maintenance Fluid Therapy. Frontiers in Veterinary Science.



7 Why do horses need complementary feeds?

As the name suggests, complementary feeds are intended to complement the basic diet by providing specific nutrients. In everyday language these products are often referred to as supplements, but the official term is complementary feed.

The foundation of every horse's diet should always be good-quality forage, clean water and the opportunity to eat in a species-appropriate manner. Complementary feeds cannot replace this foundation. Their purpose is to supplement the diet when the horse's needs, life stage or available feed make it necessary.

Nutritional requirements are not the same for every horse. They are influenced by factors such as age, breed, intended use, health status, body condition, pregnancy, lactation, workload, season and individual metabolism. The nutritional content of forage also varies considerably. Hay and salt alone are not always sufficient to provide a balanced supply of minerals, vitamins and trace elements. The importance of complementary feeds becomes particularly evident when the goal is to keep feeding simple while ensuring that the horse receives the nutrients it needs in the correct proportions.

A well-chosen complementary feed can help balance nutritional gaps without filling the feed room with countless containers and overlapping products. The goal is not to add as many products as possible to the diet. The goal is to understand what the horse genuinely needs. Excessive supplementation can be just as problematic as nutritional deficiencies, particularly when it comes to minerals and fat-soluble vitamins. For this reason, complementary feeds should support the overall feeding program rather than make it more complicated.

For me, the ideal complementary feed is this: a clear, practical and highly bioavailable support for a horse's daily wellbeing. When the foundation is in place, the role of a complementary feed is simply to complete the picture. Not to conceal problems, but to support the horse so that its body can function as effectively as possible.

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