



Nordic Association of Agricultural Scientists

**Proceedings**

**Horse management - premises and landscape**

Seminar nr. 367

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences  
Alnarp  
Sweden  
18 – 20 November 2004



## **Development of semi-natural horse pastures in Ypäjä**

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### **Background of the studies**

Most traditional rural biotopes are threatened by overgrowth with weeds or over-fertilization caused by the present land use. The protection of traditional rural biotopes requires acknowledging the traditional rural biotopes in land use, developing support systems, advising and organizing management.

In 1993-1994 a project was carried out to examine the landscape and use of Ypäjä horse pasture in the period following establishment in the 1930s. The essential question of the planning of the pastures is how to sustain the values of the landscape and how to fit together the horse sport activities. MTT/equine research and the Equine Collage of Ypäjä will continue to develop its activities as a demonstration area concerning environmental questions on horse husbandry.

### **History of Ypäjä horse areas**

The history of equine institutions in Ypäjä is long, their roots going back to the late 1800s, when interest in organised horse breeding (and raising) developed in Finland. The State Horse Breeding Farm was founded on the grounds of Kartanonkylä Manor in the year 1937. Today The Equine Collage of Ypäjä and The Equine Research unit of MTT are operating there.

The whole horse area covers an area in excess of 360 hectares in the Ypäjä municipality. All facilities which are needed in horse breeding and training, areas for equestrian sports, pastures and grazing fields, as well as fields for feed production, are located within the confines of the ranch. The ranch stables have a maximum capacity of 400 horses; currently, the stables house approximately 400 horses, either owned by the institutes or privately owned.

### **Natural horse pastures**

Horses have been grazing in the pastures of Kartanonkylä manor ever since the 1930s with the first plan for pasturage being completed in 1931. The combined natural pastures in the area comprise the largest horse breeding heritage site in Finland. In a survey of plant life conducted in 1993-1994, the area pronounced a national precious heritage site due to the richness of vegetation and endangered plant and insect species found in the area. The entire area of old pastures covers approximately 90 hectares.

### **Recent studies**

The purpose of the study is to assess the importance of natural pastures as a growing environment for horses and, at the same time, to evaluate the landscape value of such pastures. Another aim is to look at possible ways of conserving areas which have been in use as horse pastures for a long period of time as traditional biotopes belonging to the Finnish horse grazing culture, and to examine how their management and care could be improved.