

## Bringing Iceland to Cold Creek Road

By Johanna Zomers

Kathryn Stuart and her children are passionate about Icelandic sheep and chickens!

Her father and grandfather grew up and farmed on the property on Cold Creek Road where she lives now. Although she grew up in Cornwall, Ontario, the family spent summers on Mink Lake in a log cabin her father built. After graduating from high school, Kathryn moved to the East Coast where she had a reflexology and yoga studio for several years. Later, she travelled through Canada in a converted school bus as a musician. Six years ago -- with four children of her own -- she felt it was the right time to come home to the Valley and she was able to move into the old farmhouse which had always been her dream.

Her children initially wanted sheep and chickens but Ms. Stuart was hesitant because of her various animal allergies. But she learned that Icelandic sheep were hypoallergenic and discovered that Icelandic chickens are also genetically different than modern birds. Icelandic sheep are one of the world's oldest and purest breeds, dating back over a thousand years. Like many of the old breeds, they are triple purpose, treasured for their fibre, milk and meat.

Icelandic wool is double-layered and makes a high quality wool highly prized for spinning and felting. (Icelandic sweaters are renowned for their warmth and

water repellent qualities). The sheep are long-lived and thrive on pasture. The ewes are good mothers, lamb without difficulty, often with twins or triplets and have enough milk to raise hardy lambs. The meat is mild-flavoured and popular with the gourmet market. They come in many different colours and patterns which results in a wide variety of interesting fleeces for spinning.

Ms. Stuart's flock is purebred and registered with the Canadian Livestock Registry Corporation. She offers purebred breeding stock and is fascinated by the genetics.

"Lambing season is exciting as we await the new lambs and see what surprises will be unveiled," she says.

Icelandic chickens, also known as *Viking Chickens*, are a land-race breed which means a species of plant or animal which has distinctive characteristics arising from adaptations to a localized geographic region. This typically displays greater genetic diversity than breeds developed by formal breeding practises. Because the Viking chicken was isolated for over a thousand years, they are over 79 percent genetically different from modern chickens. They are a hardy breed and continue to lay well over winter and are happy to forage rather than eat grain even in winter. Unlike modern chickens, Vikings can fly which enables them to escape predators.

Ms. Stuart and her children learned farming and artisanal



Kathryn Stuart spins wool at her *Northern Viking Farm* as sheep graze around her. She produces Icelandic wool products and much more.

skills from neighbours and family. She says, "the three younger children are very involved. My oldest daughter is away at university and enjoys it all from a distance. My father helps out quite a bit as well. It has been a real trial by fire experience. We just dove in; the artisanal skills were learned by doing. It was during Covid-19 so I couldn't find anyone to teach me. The challenges continue, particularly with fenc-

ing in new pastures as the flock increases."

As well as breeding stock, Northern Viking Farm produces Icelandic wool products, hand-forged utensils, wooden items and leatherware, available at Cobden and Pembroke *Taste of the Valley*, at the Bluebird Collective in Barry's Bay as well as in future in *Our Space* in Eganville. You can reach them at [northern-vikingfarm.com](http://northern-vikingfarm.com).



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