

[Monday 17th October 2011](#)

Dear Customer

I hope you have been enjoying this mild weather. As I drove up the A1 the other day there was an ominous neon sign above the road saying 'Is your car ready for winter?' I could imagine all of us drivers silently and simultaneously pondering on what that meant and on what we have in store.

We have delicious sweet potatoes in the bags this week - my favourite. You could bake them in wedges: preheat the oven to 200C and grease a baking tray. Cut the sweet potatoes lengthways into quarters then toss them in a little olive oil with a sprinkle of paprika and bake for approximately 20 minutes. You could bake them whole like a normal baked potato or roast them.

Sweet Potato Falafel

*500g sweet potatoes
1tsp ground cumin
1tsp ground coriander
1 clove garlic, chopped
20g fresh coriander, chopped
juice of half small lemon
splash olive oil
sprinkling sesame seeds
100g gram flour
salt and pepper*

Preheat oven to 220C/425F and roast the sweet potatoes whole until just tender (45 mins-1hr). Turn off the oven, leave the potatoes to cool, then peel. Put the sweet potatoes, cumin, garlic, ground and fresh coriander, lemon juice and gram flour into a large bowl. Season well and mash until completely smooth with no lumps. Put in the fridge for an hour or the freezer for 20-30 minutes, to firm up. If the mix is still wet, add some more gram flour. Reheat oven to 200C/400F. Using a couple of soup spoons, put a well-heaped spoonful of mix in one spoon and use the concave side of the other to shape the sides (as demonstrated on Masterchef) to create little spheres. Put them on an oiled tray, sprinkle sesame seeds on top and bake in the oven for around 15 minutes until the bases are golden brown.

Korma-Style Dhal with Sweet Potatoes and Cauliflower

*1 large onion, thickly sliced
3 tbsp mild korma curry paste
1 large sweet potato, peeled and diced*

seeds from 8 cardamom pods
250g green lentils
750ml vegetable stock
1 cauliflower, in florets
20g fresh coriander, roughly torn

Put the onion and curry paste into a large flameproof casserole with a lid. Cook over a low heat, stirring continuously for 3-4 minutes. Add the sweet potato and cardamom seeds and continue to cook for a further 3-4 minutes. Add the lentils and stock to the casserole and bring to the boil, cover and simmer for 15 minutes. Remove the lid and add the cauliflower. Bring back to the boil and simmer for a further 8-10 minutes or until the sweet potato and lentils are both tender and the stock has been absorbed. Stir in the coriander and season to taste. Serve with a dollop of yoghurt and some naan bread.

Sauteed Kale

2 tbsp olive oil
1 onion, chopped
2 cloves garlic, minced
100g breadcrumbs
1 bag kale, shredded

Heat the oil over a medium –high heat in a large frying pan. Add the onion and garlic, cook and stir until soft. Mix in the breadcrumbs and cook and stir until brown. Stir in the kale and cook until wilted and tender, then serve.

I have been away again and up to no good. From my previous trip, I returned with some 'savon de Marseille' – easy, I just put it in the bathroom. This time I have returned with a 60-strong dairy herd and 12 little baby jersey bull calves all under the age of 16 weeks. They would all have been slaughtered. Thankfully for Ernest, they haven't physically returned with me and remain on their farm for the time being, but I return with their ownership and the responsibility to look after them for the rest of their lives. Over the years I have become unbelievably skilled in risk-taking. I have it down to a fine art. I do my brother's head in. Since I was 18, he has longed for me to get a proper job. As recently as this year he suggested I could do a teacher-training course. At least I now understand the relevance of my childhood recurring nightmare – walking across a narrow open ladder, up in the sky, thousands of feet above the ground with nothing to hold on to. I would wake up just as I lost my balance. However, this time I am not alone and I have a 'collabatrice' in my friend Liz, so for once the risk is shared – halved. The 'slaughter-free' milk has been a long time coming, an 18 month saga, with the farm facing increasing, unbearable and now insurmountable pressures. Three more small dairy farms in East Anglia have packed up or gone under this week alone. I cannot imagine there can be many left as this has been going on for over a decade now - them being paid less than the cost of production for their milk. The move towards large, indoor systems is getting well-established now, where the cows never, ever go outside – battery dairy cows. Very soon, it is all there will be. In these bigger systems the bonds between cow and farmer inevitably weaken. It's easier to have a ruthless culling policy when the animals have no names. Most are now culled at an average of 5 years old when they should live to 18 or 20. A farmer friend in Somerset is working against the clock to

instigate 'free-range' milk and for it to be labelled thus, to throw a lifeline to the few authentic small dairy farms which remain. Back to our milk, it is now imminent and I will let you know as soon as it becomes available. I have also been to visit the Sussex egg farmer and we have finalised the model for the slaughter-free eggs, which again, will be available fairly imminently. Nearly all egg-laying hens are taken to be killed at 68-72 weeks – battery, free-range, organic – the lot. This is mainly because their eggs become slightly more fragile which doesn't suit the date stamping machinery and the conveyors. At 72 weeks, they are young birds in their prime. Because of the banding about of free-range, organic etc., we might assume that things are improving for farm animals, but on the whole they are getting much worse. Live exports of un-weaned calves has resumed, they are shipped out by the thousand from Ramsgate on big Soviet ships. They hardly even have the muscle to stand up. Little baby calves just like our 12 !

Kind Wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Isobel', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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