



Monday 6th February 2017

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. Thankfully we are still managing to fill the bags despite the now famous vegetable crisis. Broccoli, courgettes, aubergines and lettuces are thin on the ground but I'm sure we can live without them for the moment. Cauliflower is a perfectly good brassica and we have sweet potatoes making their first appearance of the year. Thank you for bearing with us – probably bumpy weeks ahead.

Here are a few recipes you could try with this week's produce:

Cauliflower and Sweet Potato Dhal

2 tbsp olive oil	2 cloves garlic
curry paste, to taste	400g sweet potato, cut in 2cm chunks
1 cauliflower, in florets	juice of 1 lime
1 large onion, sliced	2 tsp grated fresh ginger
150g red lentils	500ml vegetable stock
chopped fresh coriander to serve (optional)	

Heat the oil in a frying pan and cook the onion for 5 minutes until softened. Stir in the garlic, ginger and curry paste and cook for a further minute. Add the lentils, potato and vegetable stock. Bring to the boil and simmer for 8 minutes. Add the cauliflower and cover and simmer for 8-10 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the lime juice and coriander. Serve with rice and popadoms.

Chilli-Baked Sweet Potatoes

500g sweet potatoes	1 medium onion
3 cloves garlic	1 fresh chilli
3 tbsp olive oil	½ tsp dried thyme
½ tsp dried rosemary	sea salt flakes

Preheat the oven to 200C/ 400F/ Gas 6. Peel the sweet potatoes and cut into wedges. Peel the onion, halve and cut into small wedges. Peel and halve the garlic cloves. Deseed and thinly slice the chilli. Pour half the olive oil in a roasting tin, arrange the sweet potato wedges, onion and garlic in the tin. Scatter the thyme, rosemary and chilli over it all. Trickle the rest of the olive oil on top and sprinkle with sea salt flakes. Bake for 35 minutes or until the vegetables are nicely coloured. Check them from time to time.

Hazelnut, Maple and Sweet Potato Brownies

1 large sweet potato, peeled and cubed	150g dark chocolate, chopped
50g coconut oil	100ml maple syrup
2 Hen Nation eggs	100g ground hazelnuts or almonds
2 tbsp cocoa powder	½ tsp baking powder
½ tsp salt	½ tsp cinnamon

Put the sweet potato cubes in a saucepan of boiling water then cook for around 10 minutes until tender. Drain, mash until smooth then set aside to cool. Preheat the oven to 160C/325F/ Gas 3. Put the chopped chocolate in a glass bowl over a pan of simmering water then gently melt. Take off the heat then stir in the coconut oil and maple syrup. Stir in the chocolate mixture into the sweet potato, add the eggs then fold in the ground hazelnuts, baking powder, cocoa powder, salt and cinnamon. Spoon into the tin then bake for 30-35 minutes until the brownie is crusted on the outside but squidgy in the middle. Allow to cool then cut into squares.

It's Sunday evening. I met a friend for lunch today and driving home I saw the first new-born lambs. Born in the freezing middle of winter, to be ready for 'harvest' in the early summer, to sit on the plate alongside the first new potatoes – both commanding premium prices of course. It's hard living in the countryside when you love animals.

Winter is emotionally slightly less draining – most of the lambs are dead and gone – the ewes are all pregnant but not visibly so. In spring it all starts up again – the fields fill up with joyful lambs but you're so pertinently aware of their fate - the grief of separation from their mothers as they are pulled off to go to the fattening fields, and then the route to and the manner of their deaths. Any older or unfit ewes are graded out for culling at the same time. September is diabolical seeing lambs penned up in fields having their bellies shaved, the recent new prerequisite for slaughter. It's the month of the main lamb sales and the motorways are a horror of articulated lorries heading south.

It's bad all year round but some months are harder than others. My accountant in Leyburn knows I won't go there on a Wednesday or a Friday – the days of the livestock markets. You spend your time trying to dodge such things but always get caught out. You go to post some letters and a trailerful of sheep rolls past and you see their faces.

As I mentioned the other week, I am looking for grazing as the farm where they live is being sold. I am therefore forced to scan the farming pages of the local paper. I squint my eyes trying to see around the photos of rows of lambs at market with rosettes pinned on their bottoms next to grinning farmers, the lone cow in a sales ring with a rosette on – and descriptions of which butcher bought them. The livestock auction ads inviting entries – dedicated slaughter, cull cows, store cattle, deadweight lambs, rearing calves – the terminology is chilling.

So when I received my first response to an ad I had been running in the paper for several weeks seeking grazing, it was from a farmer who texted that he had arable and 2000 pigs in a barn and may have some grazing at the end of February, I was taken aback. It is almost impossible to find grazing but how would that work. I roll up to see the sheep and park in the yard and have to walk past a barn of 2000 factory farmed pigs. An hour later he texted 'had he said something wrong, and was it the pigs'. I replied that I would just want to rescue them. To which he texted "they get nasty when they get big tho". I couldn't reply and then later I got a text "think u must be with a good man and a good bottle of wine". I felt sick. The search goes on !

Kind wishes,

Isobel