



Monday 2nd January 2012

Dear Customer

Merci mon Dieu, Hallelujah and Happy New Year, Myfa's test results have come back negative.

John at Newfields has been busy picking our veg – he said it's brilliant harvesting weather. The farmers around his way and I suspect, everywhere, are holding their breath that real winter won't come. Even the grass is still growing intermittently.

John said he walked the half mile to his cousin's house to see in the New Year where they had roast beef and Yorkshire puddings. Then he walked home, checked the cows and was in bed for 12.45am. He'd watched the London firework display on TV and said he missed the days when a dozen of them used to get the train down to London when Smithfields Show was held at Earls Court. There would be cattle and sheep as well as all the latest farm machinery – up to 20 combines in one room.

If you're feeling cheeky, you could have a go at this little 'tarte tatin'. Also sweet potatoes in the bags this week:

Upside Down Onion Tart (Tarte Tatin)

200g puff pastry

350g onions (3-4 medium)

small knob butter or margarine

1 tbsp olive oil

1 tbsp balsamic vinegar

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

Preheat the oven to 190C/Gas 5. Roll out the pastry to a 3-4mm thickness and cut out a 20cm circle. Wrap the pastry disc and put in fridge. Peel the onions and slice each one into 6 or 8 wedges, keeping them attached at the root end. Heat the butter and oil in a 20cm oven-proof frying pan or tarte tatin pan. Add the onions, arranging them in a concentric pattern. Sprinkle with salt and pepper and cook for about 15-20 minutes, turning once or twice, until they are fairly tender and starting to caramelize around the edges. Trickle the balsamic vinegar over the onion and cook for a couple of minutes more, so the vinegar reduces a little. Remove from the heat and make sure onions are evenly spread around the pan. Lay the pastry disc over the onions and put the pan into the oven. Bake for 20 minutes, until the pastry is fully puffed up and golden. Invert the tart onto the plate so the sticky caramelised onions are facing up, on top of the crispy pastry. Serve with a salad and you could crumble cheese on top.

Sweet Potato, Potato and Peanut Gratin

*1kg mixed potatoes and sweet potatoes
2 tbsp sunflower oil
1 tsp dried chilli flakes
3 garlic cloves, finely chopped
250ml double cream
150g crunchy peanut butter
finely grated zest of 1 lime plus about 2 tsp juice
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper*

Preheat the oven to 190C/Gas 5 and lightly oil a large gratin dish. Peel the sweet potatoes and potatoes and cut them into slices. In a large bowl, toss the all the potato slices with 1 tablespoon of the oil, the chilli, garlic, cream and some salt and pepper. Arrange half the slices evenly in a gratin dish. Beat the peanut butter with the remaining tablespoon of oil, the lime zest and juice. Spread the mixture in dollops over the potato slices in the dish. Cover with the remaining slices and cover with any remaining cream mixture from the bowl. Cover the dish with foil and bake for about 20 minutes, then remove the foil. Bake for a further 30 minutes or so until the potato is tender and the top is browned and crisp. Serve hot with a crispy salad.

As I'm sure you know, I worship the ground my dog walks on. I cried for 3 days and 3 nights when I found the little blisters on Myfa's tummy and the bare patches on the backs of her legs..... because I had been waiting for symptoms of Leishmaniasis and those are they. The timing was right, 3-4 months after being (possibly) bitten and she has never, ever had a skin problem before. Antibiotics have since cleared her skin. I texted some friends when I found the blisters saying I suspected the disease.

Noone came back to me saying 'what's that ?' Noone came back to me for a good 10-15 minutes and when they did, it was:

"Oh yes", "Is it cutaneous or visceral ?" "Is she drinking more than normal ?" " Has she lost any weight ?", " You need the blood test quick". Because of course, in those 10 and 15 minutes, they had all been on the internet and each knew more about the disease than both the vets in my surgery put together. I didn't have to explain a thing.

A friend the next day told me her horse had just tested positive for laminitis and an x-ray showed he had a sinking pedal bone. I went onto the internet, studied the diagrams, the most up-to-date research, the treatments. What an amazing thing it is to have the internet. Ten minutes later " Oh yes" I said. " Has it rotated too ?".

It took 12 days to get Myfa's results – right through Christmas. When the vet eventually rang I was sitting in the car in a car park. I threw my arms around her, nearly crushed her ribs with my hug, kissed her and kept shouting "thank God, thank God" – she looked so happy but didn't know why we were so happy all of a sudden.

During those 12 days I was online reading papers, researching the best treatments. I also kept finding myself hanging about in ex-pat forums - people discussing their rescued stray 'Leish' dogs. It is so prevalent in the Mediterranean where up to half the dogs have it, but it's working its way north and in France has now reached as far

as Lyon. A day after the euphoria of the results I had a creeping disquiet and went back onto the internet and managed to find evidence of false negatives. I had to slap myself across the face and go into another room.

Thank heavens it's the New Year. I'm sick of the sight of my Christmas tree and it's tinsel. I just want to get it out and Hoover. But I can't. I have no free will in this regard and am bound by tradition to leave it there until the 12th night. My health is suffering, I don't even feel like I can resume a normal diet until it's gone.

I just want to mention the brown sacks. I get an anonymous delivery so that I can check how the bags are being packed. I am sometimes distraught when there's a poor little old crumpled bag on my doorstep – a down-and-out. I decide to kindly end it's days and send it to the masher. It's quite a hard call for our packing team between being ecological and economical, and being respectable. If you do come home to one which you deem has reached the end of it's road – do feel free to mash it out of circulation else you may come home to it again.

All of us at Farmaround wish you a very, very Happy New Year. 2012 is going to be interesting. We love to deliver to you, we love you being our customers. Thank you as ever for all your support.

Kindest wishes,

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

Isobel Davies (isobel@farmaround.co.uk)