

Monday 27th May 2013

Dear Customer,

I hope you had a lovely weekend and managed to get a soak of sun. It was glorious here for two days. Grey and drizzly again now though of course. There is still a Mediterranean flavour to the bags this week as we wait for some UK crops to start. We have Galia melons, aubergines and cherry tomatoes from Andalucia. We have baby new Nicola potatoes and new season carrots which need to go straight in the fridge to keep fresh.

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

Penne with Aubergine, Cherry Tomatoes and Cumin (serves 4)

1 medium aubergine, in 2cm dice	1 medium onion, finely chopped
25ml olive oil	¼ tsp cumin
good handful cherry tomatoes, halved	handful pine nuts
handful raisins (optional)	350g penne pasta
1 tbsp flat-leafed parsley, chopped	1 tbsp grated parmesan (optional)

Sprinkle the aubergine squares with salt and drain for 5 minutes to remove any bitterness and stop them absorbing too much oil. Saute the onion in half the oil until just cooked, without colour. Remove from the pan, heat the remaining oil on medium and add the aubergine. Scatter cumin over the aubergine as it starts to colour, add the onion, then the tomatoes. Allow to cool until it breaks down into a sauce. Throw in the pine nuts and raisins, if using. Cook the penne according to packet instructions. Drain and toss into the sauce. Finish sprinkled with the parsley and sprinkled parmesan.

New Potato and Broccoli Bake (serves 2)

1 head broccoli (approx. 360g), cut in florets	1 leek, finely sliced
50g Cheddar cheese, grated	220g new potatoes, chopped
1 tbsp vegetable oil	400ml milk
25g plain white flour	25g margarine/butter
2 tsp grated Parmesan	1 tsp English mustard

Preheat the oven. Cook the potatoes in lightly salted water until tender and keep water for cooking the broccoli later. Meanwhile, heat 1 tbsp oil in a frying pan and cook leek for 4-5 minutes until soft. Cook the broccoli in the reserved water for 3-4 minutes, or until tender. To make the cheese sauce, melt the butter/margarine in a saucepan. Stir in the flour and cook over a medium heat for 1 minute. Turn down the heat and add only as much milk as the mixture can absorb to make a slightly smoother paste. Work the paste into a smooth and glossy consistency. Gradually stir in the remaining milk and turn up the heat. Bring to the boil and simmer, stirring constantly, until the sauce thickens. Stir in the Cheddar cheese and mustard. Season with salt and pepper. Mix the potatoes, broccoli and leek with the cheese sauce and spoon into an ovenproof dish. Sprinkle with the parmesan over the top and bake in the oven until top is golden brown and bubbling.

On Friday night, the farmer and owner of the land in Hornby rang me to say that she couldn't cope with the sheep anymore. For the last two weeks they have been on the rampage. They have been forming gangs and barging down their gates and fences and jumping over them to get into the brother-in-law's wheat crop. Once they've got the gate down, they all flood in, hundreds of them and like locusts, start gorging themselves. Other gangs, 20-strong, just head straight for the village and cottage gardens. We have spent so much time attending to the fences but nothing works. She had spent all Friday evening on her quad bike rounding them up, getting them back in and no sooner did she sit down but she'd look out the window to see them all out again. So on Saturday morning I called the lorry and they were taken to some fields I am renting in Galphay, near Ripon. As soon as I got there I had to call fencers as in the neighbouring field are tiny lambs and my sheep have a fixation with little lambs. My sheep have always been naughty but they have never been as bad as this. I think it is the exuberance of spring, fresh grass and a new home after a dire winter – they can't contain themselves and we can't contain them either. The day after they all left, the farmer rang me to say that 10 Shetlands had just appeared in the farmyard. They had no doubt just returned from an expedition. Now to call up the proper fencers to come to Hornby. If they don't sort it this time, the sheep are evicted and they and I join the gipsy encampment on the grass verge at Scotch Corner.

So by the time the beautiful actress / producer arrived on the 11.30 from Kings Cross, I was a wreck. I hadn't had time to have a wash, change or brush my hair, I had a migraine threatening. I fully approve of her playing me, couldn't have imagined anyone better. All went well until I told her I already had the songs for the soundtrack – my songs. Her face dropped, she looked very concerned and quickly changed the subject. Her suggestion for Ernest – Jim Broadbent! Next stop, Richard Curtis. I've already thought about the merchandising, the children's books, the collectable stuffed sheep – Barney, Barak Obama and the trio of Ernest's most hated 4 people – Polly Toynbee, Chris Huhne, Alex Ferguson, Simon Hughes – "they make my skin crawl" he says.

Well it's now Tuesday and I have missed a day and must start my buying – see what's happening in the vegetable world this week. I hope it's improving. I noted a first UK spring cabbage on an availability list – the price of 18 carat gold.

Really, on that note, I have to do what I always most dread. I have been holding off and holding off but now I absolutely have to increase the prices of the bags. I just have no option unfortunately as I am paying literally 40% more for produce than previously. The adverse weather has seen prices soar and our margin, for paying our distribution costs, wages, rent etc.etc, diminished to the point of impossible. I really had held off, hoping we could ride it, but we just can't any longer. We propose an increase of around 10% on all the fresh produce bags meaning the following new prices effective from Monday 3rd June:

Mini Veg Bag £10.20 - Standard Veg Bag £14.25 - Luxury Veg Bag £18.15 - Big Veg Bag £21.45 - Select Bag £14.85
Green Module £8.80 - Mediterranean Module £10.60 - Salad Bag £9.99 - Juicing Module £9.45 - Mini Fruit Bag £6.99
Standard Fruit Bag £10.45 - Luxury Fruit Bag £16.90 - Big Fruit Bag £14.25 - Egg Nation Eggs £2.09 - Delivery Charge £1.80

I hope you can weather the price increase and that you can understand our reasons for having to do it. I did a price check against our competitors and felt that we remain in line, if not cheaper. If you do have a problem affording this, do let Diane know as we are certainly happy to not implement this for those who can't afford it.

Kind wishes and with a heavy heart for the above !

Isobel