

**Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2013**

Dear Customer,

'Eh alors, les rosbeefs – ca va comme ca ? c'est assez chaud ? ! Tenez une epaisseur de nuages et voir si vous aimez autant la chaleur. Pauvres idiots !'

Get lost, we can handle it. ....even if our government is putting us on a level 3 alert..... danger.....health and safety .....it's 27 degrees, not 40. Don't they like to whip it up ! It's only what we have all been praying for and what we usually spend thousands of pounds traipsing round the world to find.....a summer. And anyway.....it probably won't last.

We have my favourite fruit, the 'food of the Gods', in the fruit bags this week – fresh Dauphine figs. A lot of people find the inside of a fig a very frightening place. They are missing out. They are very nutritious with surprisingly high levels of minerals such as potassium, calcium, magnesium, copper, iron and manganese. In fact they have exceptionally high levels of calcium. They are one of the most alkaline of foods so are helpful in balancing the pH of the body. Their high pectin levels, which is a soluble fibre, makes them good for lowering blood cholesterol. Also we have white flesh peaches, English cherries, watermelons and Santa Rosa plums, according to bag type. We have purple mange tout, new Toluca potatoes from Cornwall, rainbow chards, broccoli, mini cucumbers, fresh peas, cauliflowers, Batavia lettuces and Florence fennel, again, depending on which bag you have – practically all English now thankfully. The onions are semi-dry Babosas so if they seem moist, this is normal. Here is a little recipe you could try with your greens this week:

**Tagliatelle with Chard**

1 bunch chard (or spinach)

50ml olive oil

370g dried tagliatelle

1 clove garlic, crushed

pinch salt

150g hard cheese eg Gruyere, grated

*Separate the green leaves of the chard from the stalks and cut the stalks into strips. Put the oil into a large pan on a medium heat, add the stalks and garlic, season and sauté until cooked. Leave to one side. Cook the pasta according to packet instructions. Just before it is cooked, add the chard leaves to the boiling water and cook for one minute. Drain immediately and add the pasta and leaves to the pan of cooked stalks. Toss everything together with the cheese so it starts to melt. Check the seasoning and serve immediately.*

I had to organise everything for the Escape to the Country filming. I had a batch of Shetlands here in the paddock near my house which were to be sheared. I decided the evening before, to move them a mile up my lane to a field with fantastic views back over Richmond. I could move them, didn't need to ask an army of farmy men. My hairdresser had just given me a short, back and sides and I asked if she might help, it would just take a minute. I asked my neighbour, her daughter and a local friend too. "We can do it" I said, "Girl Power". Once everyone was in position down the lane covering snickets and other potential escape routes, I shook the bucket and called "sheepies". They lifted their heads and came running – thought I'd better go straight away while I had their attention, the gate was opened and they poured after me..... except for three. I then did a U turn and let the sheep make their own way – there was nowhere else they could go providing everyone stayed in position. The hairdresser and I then attempted to round up the other three. I rang my neighbour and her daughter and told them they were on their way. Half an hour later, I called to see if they had arrived. No sign of them. They must have stopped to nibble on the wild flowers and hedges. We gave up on the three, we couldn't catch them. We got in the car and drove up the lane expecting to find the sheep ambling along but they weren't there. They must have got there already. We arrived at the other field – there was no trace of them, they had never arrived. I drove back up the lane mystified – had they jumped a fence, slipped off into town like me and my mates used to on school cross-countries and on the way to the hockey field. Eventually I found a gate that was very slightly open leading into a deep hay meadow so went to investigate. I saw some ears poking up – they were trying to hide. We then trampled the crop trying to round them up but only managed to get twenty out and up the road into the field., leaving the rest in there. That night I texted the shearers and told them there were 'some in that field, some in that field and some in that field'.

I had to set my alarm for 6am so allow a generously for an inevitable wardrobe crisis. Eventually I got it - sheep shearing – high heels and a silk, Vivienne Westwood dress – perfect !

Anyway, filming went well and I got my four minutes of showing the sheep, the clothes, and talking about Izzy Lane, traceability of animal fibre in the fashion industry and British manufacturing.

It's Sunday today, newsletter day. We are baling hay. Good haymaking weather but the grass is scorching and burning and we actually desperately need some rain. Breakfast on the terrace in shorts and flip-flops..... or rain ? I have to go with rain..... the vegetable farmers certainly need it too.

If you are suffering in the heat – one piece of advice – ignore the beauty care and sun product industry. Applying moisturisers and greasy creams as this will trap the heat in your body and stop you from perspiring to cool down. We apply grease to keep warm when we swim the Channel. Use calamine lotion for sunburn as it is chalky and porous and draws the heat out.

The schools have now broken up and many of you will be fleeing. Wherever you go, have a wonderful time.

Right, I'm off now to see how many bales they've managed to make, and calculate how many months of winter I can get through before being subjected to the prices on the open market. And winter, as we just found out, can last 4 months or nine. It takes about 300 big bales to feed my sheep through the average winter, if we ever see one of those again.

Kind wishes,

Isobel

PS We had a few problems with the new potatoes last week. They looked fine when they were packed but deteriorated quickly. Somewhere en route to us, they had heated excessively. Please let us know if you were affected as we will apply a credit to your account.