



Monday 21st March 2016

Dear Customer,

It's Monday morning here in the Northern Powerhouse. I hope this finds you well. The first week of our restructure seemed to go disconcertingly well. In normal Farmaround life, there is a major crisis every day. Just when we think things can't get any worse, a phone call from our driver 'x' returning to his van after a delivery, thought he'd left his handbrake on but saw it setting off down the hill without him, ran after it but it picked up speed and he couldn't catch it and had to watch as it smashed through the fence of a multimillion pound property in Dulwich (that was Christmas week). Driver was mortified. Driver 'y' spinning his van keys round on his little finger while crossing the footbridge to Eel Pie Island – they took flight and plopped into the Thames. Diane is struggling to cope with the newfound lack of stress. Of course our drivers are still out in London but things are much simpler and more efficient now and our collaboration with the Watsons here in the North is working out very well too.

Courgette and Basil Pasta with Pesto Crumbs

500g penne	450g courgettes, grated
2 tbsp olive oil	2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 onion, finely chopped	500g pot crème fraiche
25g Parmesan, or alternative	small bunch basil
85g chunk of bread	handful toasted pine nuts

Cook the pasta to al dente according to packet instructions and drain reserving a ladleful of the cooking liquid, Toss in a little oil and set aside. Fry the courgettes in oil for about 10 minutes to get rid of most of the liquid and add the onion and garlic to the pan, cook for 2 minutes more, then season really well and add to the pasta. Stir in most of the crème fraiche and half of the Parmesan, season and tip into an ovenproof dish. Dollop the rest of the crème fraiche over the top. Heat the oven to 180C/160C Fan/Gas 4. Whizz nearly all the basil, remaining cheese, bread and pine nuts together to make pesto crumbs then scatter over the top. Finish with a few more pine nuts. Bake for 20 minutes until the topping is crisp and bubbling at the edges. Serve.

Courgette and Tomato Gratin

450g courgettes, sliced	450g tomatoes, sliced
2 tbsp olive oil	1 large clove garlic, crushed
110g Mozzarella or Cheddar, sliced	1 tsp basil
salt and pepper	

Heat the oil in a large frying pan, add the garlic and courgettes and saute until they are golden on both sides. Arrange layers of courgettes, cheese slices and sliced tomatoes in a heatproof gratin dish. Sprinkle on the grated Parmesan if using or drizzle with olive oil, the sprinkle the basil and season with salt and pepper. Bake in the oven for 30 minutes on the top shelf at Gas 5 /375F/190C. Serve with crusty bread and a salad dressed with a lemony vinaigrette.

Leek and Broccoli Muffins (makes 24 mini or 12 regular)

100g mixed cooked broccoli or / and leeks	225g self-raising flour
½ tsp salt	½ tsp ground black peppercorns
75g grated Cheddar cheese	175ml milk
1 free-range egg	2 tsp mustard
50ml olive oil	

Preheat the oven to 200C / 400F / Gas 6. Blend the cooked vegetables to a pulp. In a bowl combine the flour, vegetables, seasoning and half the cheese. In a separate bowl whisk together the milk, egg, mustard and oil and gradually pour this liquid into the dry ingredients. Mix gently, there will be some lumps. Lightly grease a tray of 12 muffin moulds or 24 mini moulds and half fill each one with the batter mixture and sprinkle with the remaining cheese. Bake for 20-25 minutes or until each muffin has puffed up, Remove and place on a cooling rack. Serve for lunch with poached eggs and grilled tomatoes or as a snack in lunch box.

Stress though comes in many forms. I finally found time to go to the O2 shop to get my Blackberry fixed. For 6 weeks I haven't been able to hear what anyone says to me, they could only hear me. Bad news, they would have to send it away. I couldn't survive the days until its return so I had to get another one. They don't sell Blackberries anymore and I had to choose one with a touch-screen keypad – I'd get used to it I thought. I asked them if they'd transfer my contacts onto my new phone and they suggested I go off for 10 minutes while they did it. I wandered out onto Northallerton High Street feeling insecure and lost without it. And how on earth would I know how long 10 minutes is with no Blackberry. I walked up the road and back. I may have been gone for 5 minutes or 20 minutes – I will never know.

Armed with my new phone, all communication has now completely broken down. The phone kept ringing I didn't know how to answer it, I kept prodding it, I didn't know I had to swipe. After missing four calls I can do that now at least. I have no emails, and texting is so 'do8ggfivltt' that I've given it up except for 'OK cx'. I don't have the necessary tiny pointed fingers. There isn't a comma or a question mark on my keyboard, both of which would seem vital. I'd rather have a comma than a 'z'. And there's a horrible song which plays when it rings which I can't change. It ruined my week and it's set to ruin this one. I want my Blackberry back, not hearing what anyone says to me would seem a small price to pay but I told them to dispose of it. I am past the point of no return.

A 'for sale' sign went up on a nice 3 bedroom semi-detached house towards the bottom of my hill. When I got in I went onto the internet to check out the price. It was on for £250,000, a real bargain I thought. It needed modernisation but that would be straightforward. Suddenly the economics of selling my house and downsizing seemed feasible, sensible. I rang up the agent. It had been sold already. The sign had only been up for 5 minutes. I was suddenly furious, it must have been an inside job. They undervalue it, buy it for their sister and at the same time devalue all the property in our road. If I'm furious, how is the owner of the identical house next to it feeling whose property is on for 360k.

I hope you have a lovely Easter. I'm getting my first break for a year and a half. A friend is arriving from London and we're going up to Scotland to eat Easter eggs and look for the Loch Ness monster. I was 5yrs old the last time I was there. It was Easter then too, on a campsite with our Alpine Sprite caravan backed onto the loch. From morning until night all eyes were on the water.....waiting.

Kind wishes,

Isobel