



Monday 16th July 2012

Dear Customer,

I'm sure you are in no doubt about the impact this weather is having on crops. At Royal Oak Farm in Ormskirk, a lot of their fields are completely flooded and the crops destroyed. The fields which aren't flooded are saturated and they can't get onto them. The quality is suffering as they try to salvage what they can. Noone has ever known anything like it.

John at Newfields Farm's disappointment at the Great Yorkshire Show being cancelled, not showing his Bantams, is nothing compared to the despair over his crops. His expected 500 tons of potatoes will not materialise. They aren't growing, they haven't flowered and blight has now struck. He can't pull the infected plants quick enough – he fears the whole crop will be lost.

Eighty thousand plants, his autumn crops, have been sitting waiting on trolleys for the last two weeks – waiting to be planted – purple cauliflowers, leeks, sprouts, fennel, cabbages, lettuces. He can't plant them, he can't get onto the land. To go onto the land now is to compact it and when (if) it eventually dries, it would be like concrete and nothing would grow. He has already had to re-plough one field after an attempt to get some plants in. He is losing the battle with the weeds – he bored and scuffed but they just kept coming back at him. He tried going into the crops with the inter-row cultivator but the wheels just span. His crops are being smothered out. In the only good weather we have had this year – the last week of April and first week of May – his celery, red cabbage and kale crops were scorched and killed under their fleece. The plants that are out there in the fields are slow and stressed. With no sun and warmth to get growing and established they are being decimated by the pigeons. John said he was going to back and put fleeces on them – unheard of for July. And John's farm is one of the drier ones !

Jonnie at St Helens Farm in Tadcaster has been trying in vain to lift a few potatoes. As I was talking to him the heavens opened and they had to get off the field leaving the potatoes to be rained on, which is not good. Blight has just started to infect his crop too. The flea beetles are prevalent on the brassicas. After heavy rains they come in their thousands and eat little holes in all the leaves. The pigeons are hammering his struggling plants too – everything is just a third the size it should be. No area of the country has escaped. We longed for the end of the hungry gap but this is now looking like it is going to be a very hungry year and a financially disastrous one for UK vegetable growers.

Rhubarb Crumble

200g butter, cut into small chunks

150g golden caster sugar

For the filling:

*500g rhubarb, chopped into 1" pieces
sprinkling*

½ small lemon, juice only

300g plain flour

1½ tbsp golden caster sugar plus extra for

knob of butter

Preheat the oven to 180C/350F/Gas 4. Place all the ingredients for the crumble mixture in a large bowl. Rub the butter into the flour and sugar, lifting and dropping the mixture lightly through your fingers. Pile the rhubarb into a buttered earthenware dish. Sprinkle over with the sugar, pour over the lemon juice and distribute the flakes of butter over the fruit. Cover the fruit with the crumble mixture, sprinkle over some extra sugar and place in the oven. Bake for 35-40 minutes or until golden on top and jammy juices are oozing around the edges of the dish. Serve with thick cream or crème fraiche.

This is how bad and bored my Sunday is. I've been searching the house from top to bottom for the instructions for my bathroom scales. I'd been on the BBC website where one can currently input ones age, gender, height and weight to see how fat one is compared to everyone else in the world – the Global Fat Scale. I have finally been plumping up these last few years and entered the weight I assumed I now am. It told me I have the same BMI as someone in Eritrea. That can't be right, I added another stone and now have the same BMI as a Papa New Guinean woman. I feel and look more like a Texan, haven't weighed myself for years and I needed the truth. The scales are broken, I prised the back off hoping to replace the batteries but there were none, just a silver disc which wouldn't come out – probably solar charged which would explain it. I am on a mission now. Boots were shut so I popped round to see if Ernest had bathroom scales. I came home with my current weight, weighed my clothes, measured my height as I may have

shrunk with age and input the new figures. Still like an Eritrean..... which is very strange given how much weight I've put on, that I actually look quite fat, and what has happened to my calf muscles living on a hill. I must have been skeletal before. It did make me recall a couple of years ago in the toilets of a service station. I washed my hands then put them under a drier and nothing happened. I'd turned to the woman in the next drier and asked her if I was just a figment of my imagination. She confirmed I was actually there. It was grim to have a BMI so low that I couldn't even dry my hands. Eritrea was 5th from the bottom of the list of 177 countries. At the bottom was Bangladesh. Two years ago I would have had the same BMI as someone living in the Underworld. While I was at Ernest's I told him I'd take his details and input them – 5ft 10", 9st 6lbs – yep – Bangladesh. Ernest is confirmed as one of the thinnest men in the world. He had his house shoes on when I went round there. I took a photo of them to put on farmaround facebook. So please go and have a look at his poor little shoes.

I hope you are well and not too upset about this interminable rain. I think we have all downgraded our expectations for the rest of the summer now. No doubt many of you will be leaving the country soon for your holidays. Please have a lovely time and bring us some sun back.

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Kind wishes,

Isobel