

**Monday 20<sup>th</sup> January 2014**

Dear Customer,

The pretty Rainbow carrots, parsnips, the spring greens and Kestrel potatoes in the bags this week are from Cheryl and Peter Lydiate who farm in the black sands of West Lancashire, 8 miles off the coast. Cheryl told me this morning that they were desperate for some hard frost to kill off the 'roundspot' and 'altenaria', leaf diseases which are generally killed by the frosts which come in 'october'. Nearly the end of January and they are still waiting for their first frost. She said they can't cope anymore with the strange weather patterns where everything is so unpredictable.

Organic farming is a tricky science of organising crop rotations in cycles around the different pieces of land. What to grow, where and when, and how to maximise yields and minimise pests and disease without the use of chemicals - but instead by planting foil crops for example. The need to understand the bugs, the nature of each vegetable, the diseases, understanding weather patterns and understanding the character of every inch of your land. They are heady equations – it's an intelligent and very sophisticated piece of work. But then, when the weather loses the plot, and the equilibrium of the seasons falls to pieces, the careful planning and calculations count for nothing. The organic farm is then a rudderless ship being buffeted about on a reckless ocean. All one can then do is pray!

As I spoke to Cheryl, she told me she was wired up with 9 electrodes in her head. She has been suffering from some neurological illness which they think could be Lyme Disease. ( anyone walking on the moors or in deer parks, wear long socks ! ). But her and Peter are still working 80 hours a week, 52 weeks a year. They haven't had a break since they started 15 years ago, she said they had no life whatsoever. I spent the rest of the conversation pleading with her to find someone they could trust to run the farm for 4 months every year and get away from it, go down to Devon or Cornwall, rent a cottage. Life is fleeting.

Anyway, on a more positive note, spring greens are packed with minerals and are a good source of beta carotene, vitamin C and folate and here are some great recipes you could try this week:

**Leek and Spring Green Filo Pie**

*zest of 1 lemon, finely grated  
225g leeks, thinly sliced  
170g frozen petits pois  
1 tbsp chopped mint  
4 tbsp plain yoghurt  
115g filo pastry*

*2 tbsp olive oil  
150g spring greens, finely shredded  
2 tbsp chopped tarragon  
2 eggs  
85g Gruyere cheese, diced  
salt and pepper*

*Mix the lemon zest with the oil and set aside to infuse for about 5 minutes. Heat half the lemon-infused oil in a large saucepan. Add the leeks, spring greens, petits pois, tarragon and mint. Mix well to coat the vegetables with the oil, then cover and cook over a low heat for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the greens are lightly cooked and have wilted. Season the vegetables to taste, then transfer them to an 8" pie or flan dish. Preheat oven to 220c/425F/Gas 7. Beat the eggs with the yoghurt. Add a little seasoning and Gruyere cheese, then pour the mixture evenly over the vegetables and mix lightly. Brush a sheet of filo pastry very sparingly with a little of the lemon-infused oil and lay it over the vegetables, tucking the edges neatly inside the rim of the dish. Brush the remaining sheets of filo with oil and place them on top of the pie, oiled side up. Brush the remaining sheets of filo with oil and place them on top of the pie, oiled side up, pinching and pleating them into folds to cover the top fairly evenly. Lay a piece of foil loosely over the top of the pie, and bake for about 10 minutes. Remove the foil and bake for a further 10-15 minutes or until the pastry is crisp and golden brown. Serve immediately.*

**Rainbow / Purple Carrots with Honey Glaze**

*300g rainbow or purple carrots  
1 tsp runny honey  
25g butter or margarine*

*1 tsp fresh ginger, grated  
1 pinch chilli powder*

*Blanch carrots in salted water. When just tender, remove and place in a hot sauté pan with a little of the blanching water. Add the honey and butter/margarine and ginger and sauté. Add the chilli powder and toss. Season with salt and pepper and serve.*

**Creamy Carrot and Parsnips Soup**

*4 tbsp butter  
450g carrots, peeled and chopped  
1 level tbsp. finely grated orange rind  
125ml single cream  
salt and pepper*

*1 large onion, peeled and chopped  
1 level tbsp. freshly grated root ginger  
600ml vegetable stock*

*Melt the butter in a large saucepan over a low heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring, for 3 min, until slightly softened. Add the carrots and parsnips. Cover the pan until the vegetables have softened a little. Stir in the ginger, orange rind and stock. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat, cover the pan and simmer for 30-35 minutes, until the vegetables are tender. Remove from the heat and cool for 10 mins. Transfer to a blender and whizz until smooth. Return the soup to the rinsed-out saucepan, stir in the cream, and season well with salt and pepper. Warm through gently and then serve.*

I have the lurgy. Whilst it may seem that I am perpetually unwell, what with my migraines, this is actually the first time I have had a bug/ flu/ cold for about 7 years. That is farmaround vegetables you see. I blame the bug on standing for hours inhaling cold fog into my lungs while Myfa does her daily truffle for rocks in local streams, which she lays out in a line on the bankside. She can do that for hours. That and a nasty incident on the moor one late afternoon last week when I had a run in with a farmer on a quad bike. He had a gun slung over his back and took issue with Myfa running around despite there being no sheep on the moor. I honestly think he would

have shot her if I hadn't got her back on the lead before he got to me. On my own up there, I wasn't going to argue with him and I exited the moor by the nearest path but it was the opposite direction of my car which was then about 5 miles away by road and all uphill. Darkness fell, the road turned to ice and I think I only just made it back. Anyway, now I am ill. Actually, I also blame the stress of idiotically watching the first scene of Hidden Planet when that little elephant shrew got eaten by a lizard, leaving it's little baby all alone to die – and all because it's escape route was blocked by camera equipment - and they tried to make out an elephant had appeared on the 6" wide track but you could clearly see it was a camera box ! I was furious and couldn't sleep that night I was so upset. Anyway, I hope all is good with you.

Kind wishes,

Isobel