

Monday 12th January 2015

Dear Customer,

It's a blustery day here and Royal Oak Farm in Ormskirk have taken a good battering. They lost power to their farm so instead of being able to use their floodlights to harvest when the light faded, they had to use torches to pick your cabbages – at least they thought they were cabbages. If you find a big weed in the bag, do of course let us know.

Here are a few easy and tasty recipes you could try with this week's ingredients:

Sweet Potato and Parsnip Soup

400g sweet potatoes
1 onion
500ml double cream (optional)
fresh chives

400g parsnips
1 knob butter or margarine
1 litre vegetable stock
pinch salt and pepper

Peel and dice the sweet potatoes, onion and parsnips then fry in the butter or margarine until lightly coloured. Cover with vegetable stock and cook the vegetables until soft. Add the double cream, if using, and simmer for around 20 minutes, do not allow it to boil. Puree with a hand blender and add seasoning to taste. Garnish with chopped chives.

Parsnip and Tomato Gratin

500g parsnips, peeled and sliced
125g mature Cheddar cheese, grated
paprika

400g tin whole plum tomatoes
4 tbsp coarse breadcrumbs
salt and pepper

Set oven to Gas 6 / 200C. Add the sliced parsnips to a pan of boiling, salted water, bring to the boil and simmer for 5 minutes. Drain well. Spoon half the parsnips into a buttered, deep ovenproof dish. Season well, then spoon the tomatoes and their juice over. Layer the rest of the parsnips on top. Season, then sprinkle with the cheese, breadcrumbs and paprika. Put the dish on a baking sheet and cook for 35-45 minutes, or until browning on top and the parsnips are tender.

Potato, Leek and Tomato Crumble

2 tbsp olive oil
400g tomatoes, cut in wedges
300ml vegetable stock
1 tsp dried thyme

450g leeks, trimmed and sliced
250g potatoes, cubed
300g cream cheese

Crumble

275g plain flour
150g Cheddar, grated

150g butter
100g chopped mixed nuts, toasted

In a large pan, heat the oil and gently fry the leeks for 8 minutes, until softened. Add the tomatoes and potatoes and cook for another few minutes. Add the stock, cream cheese and thyme. Stir to combine, until the cream cheese has melted and you have a creamy sauce. Season with salt and pepper to taste and transfer the mixture to a baking dish. In a large bowl, rub together the butter and flour until it resembles fine breadcrumbs (or blitz in a food processor). Add the cheese and nuts and sprinkle the mixture over the leeks. Bake in the oven at 190C for 20-30 minutes until the topping is golden and potatoes tender.

I did my World Service interview the other day. I went over to Broadcasting House.....in Middlesbrough. They'd asked me if I could go to my nearest BBC Radio, which was Radio Tees. I took my dairy folder to bed with me the night before to recap on facts and figures – the cow abuse stats. I also had to re-familiarise myself with the statistical details of the Cow Nation model. I didn't understand any of my notes so at midnight I had to go back to the beginning and recalculate everything – the litres per lactation, consumption of milk per calf, the longevity of the cows and how the herd wouldn't increase exponentially. That took until about 2am but I had it all back in my head. But most importantly I was going to be using the opportunity to talk about the abuse of dairy cows and their calves. Then, in my folder, I found a 4-page letter from the NFU threatening me about undermining the dairy industry, which I'd completely forgotten about. It threw me. On my way there in the car next morning I decided I must come across as being vaguely supportive of the small dairy farmer and lay the blame with the supermarkets and their forced price pressure. But I worried I wouldn't not have any control over what came out my mouth, I never do.

The receptionist showed me into an empty studio, I put on my earphones and waited for London to call. First question " So what's wrong with the today's dairy industry ?". That was it, straight up against the wall. I paused a second, took a deep breath and then painted every farmer in the country to be a ruthless, murdering *****. Ripping the calves away from their mothers at birth to shoot them or send them for veal or live export - slaughtering cows, these 'beautiful, kind, sentient creatures' at 5 years old with zero tolerance for low yield, lameness, mastitis. Battery cows, dairy factory farming - cows in increasing numbers never ever seeing a blade of grass, the only time they come out is to be loaded on the lorry for the abattoir.

I then went for a long walk on Redcar beach to contemplate my inability to restrain myself..... and the NFU.... and the British Wool Marketing Board for that matter. Oh well. 'Je suis Charlie', it is all true, my allegiance is to the animals, and how often do you get to put their case to a 180 million strong audience.

Ernest came with me to take Myfa for a walk today, we stopped on a couple of moors but the wind was too strong to walk for long. I suggested to Ernest that I walk down the road with the wind behind me and that he could just follow, driving my car. I walked about 1½ miles with him crawling behind me. When I signalled to him to stop, he stopped initially, but not used to my car, an automatic, he panicked and couldn't find the brake, he was rolling forward, then he tried to change gear and started accelerating. He managed to come off the accelerator but was still rolling forward at some speed as he started getting out the car. I had to run alongside him, him hanging halfway out, telling him to get back in and telling him where the brake was – all observed by the 2 cars behind.

I hope you are having a good week,

Kind wishes,

Isobel