



Monday 30th April 2012

Dear Customer,

Well it hasn't stopped raining since the last letter. We have beetroot in the bags this week – the great chameleon of the vegetable patch. This week is Cylindria beetroot. Beetroot craftily metamorphoses into different shapes and colours, as a means of getting into your bags more frequently than it otherwise might - ensuring its survival. This though, I imagine, is the last you will see of it for a while, banished until the new crops of bunched in the early summer. It is delicious roasted: cut into cubes, drizzle with olive oil, balsamic vinegar, some garlic and rosemary and wrap tightly in a foil parcel; put in the oven for about 40 minutes.

For a quick supper, cook some pasta. Meanwhile, cut some boiled or roasted beetroot into batons and cook lightly in olive oil with some dill, chives, basil or chopped spring onion, the juice of half a lemon, sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Then tip it onto the cooked, drained pasta, sprinkle toasted pine nuts and add a dollop of crème fraiche or thick yoghurt. Very delicious.

One of the greatest things about dealing with foreign suppliers is the wonderful usage of English. On Cinzia's Sicilian price list she sells 'big bones', 'green bones' (broad beans) and 'cherry tomatoes on wine'. She has done for years, I wouldn't dream of destroying the charm. Laetitia in Perpignan sells 'spinach on the bush'. 'Do you want any 'artichocs' or 'cucumber' ? she writes. She finishes her email 'have a nice work'. You too 'have a nice work'.

I've been spending a lot of time checking on the sheep lately. (as I said last week I know !) Because it is the parkland of a big house there is a road running through all the 'lots'. Meaning I can sit in the car and observe them. I know I keep saying how odd my sheep are but it occurred to me that there is actually nowhere else, probably in the world to observe the behaviour of hundreds of males together which are past the age of being cooked ie 6 months or so.

They remind me of Italians and towns which are peaceful during the day but come dusk everyone comes out onto the streets. Late afternoon having stuffed themselves all day and after their siesta the games begin. The tussles, the chasing, the stampedes – others just kissing each other. There are protagonists and taunted, participants and observers. The other day a farmer with a trailer of sheep passed through. His sheep were blaring and mine, hundreds of them, emerged from every tree and hollow and chased after him down the road like a herd of wildebeast. He must have been terrified. I could watch them for hours – I do watch them for hours. It's better than watching a baby zebra about to be ripped to pieces by a lion (Live Planet ? – no thanks) Nature is abominably cruel. I unfortunately have had to deal with it's horrors this week. **If you are eating breakfast please stop reading now but come back in for the bit about the website.** Two of my sheep were found dead with their eyes pecked out. One of them a very old ewe and the other, a healthy young Shetland which had 'bloat' from the new lush grass. But he also had a gash in his neck. I had always assumed that birds only pecked the eyes out of dead sheep but then a horrible though occurred to me which made me shudder. A google investigation showed they often don't wait until they are dead – just in trouble. Maybe my Shetland was down and unwell but not dead when the birds descended, hence the gash. Maybe the ewe wasn't either. I read that they kill a lot of lambs and also the ewes as they give birth. I never saw them as a sheep predator but I do now. It's very sinister. It was very upsetting and also the reason why I'm checking on them a lot.

My car is conking out. It's ten years old and each time I take it to the garage they tell me I need a new car. I drive off knowing our days together are numbered. I'd bought her when she was little - three years old, depreciated to the maximum but with a long life ahead - just out of warranty or 'just weaned' as Ernest put it. Lack of oil in the engine has taken it's toll over the years – I regret how I recklessly used to manage London and back two or three times with the oil light on. It has lost all power, I can't even overtake a tractor. It has worsened over the last months and I booked it into the garage again. I then decided here was no point spending another penny on it and went onto Autotrader. I found the same car, same model, same colour but 5 years younger and which had had an owner who had put oil in, and went for a test drive. I hated it – clunky and stiff. I drove home feeling sick that I couldn't bear to part with the money or my car to which I am very attached. I took her for her service and waited nervously in the waiting room for the prognosis. They serviced her, and messed about with her 'parameters'. Their computer said she was ok but I know otherwise. Anyway, we live to fight another day..... Yes another very exciting week !

Now for the bit you must please read

It is Sunday and in theory we are going live with the new website on wednesday. If you have given us your email address (username), an account will have been set up for you showing your existing order and order pattern. Your current password is 'test' but you can go in and change it if you wish. The website now allows you to log in

and see your order templates and to make any changes to your current and future orders. Diane will be alerted to any changes to your order that you make and will update our internal system accordingly.
If you haven't given us your user name, you can go in and set up your own account using your account number.

Hopefully we will have a smooth transition and you will find it more user-friendly than the last.

Kind wishes,

Isobel