

Brockleby's Winter 06-07 Newsletter

You can tell how busy we've been because it has been a year since I wrote the last newsletter, many apologies. And, like last year, I am using my holiday time to compose this witty diary of last year's events!

We may be on holiday but we haven't actually gone anywhere just closed the shop for 2 weeks, told all the staff to take some annual leave, (makes life easier for us during the busy season) and invited the joiners in to do some alterations to the production kitchen, giving Suzy more work space to make even more pies!

Down on the Farm

Last year has seen many changes on the farm; we have new land, new pigs, new rams, more horses, piglets and we've started some building work.

You may remember we decided to lamb indoors last year and overall this proved most successful. The ewes kept in good condition and we lost very few lambs. During May the orange van could be seen screaming up the A6006 between the shop and the farm as Net phoned me for assistance with either a tricky delivery (she thought breech births didn't happen in sheep) or another escape. Our main escape artists were three Manx Ewes (sold to us by another farmer who also happens to have a local farm shop!) These athletic ewes spent all their time jumping in and out of the maternity pens and at the end of the season, after much frustration and time wasted returning them, they didn't even produce any lambs. It wasn't until I started to load and move all the ewes and lambs from Goosenest Farm to the grazing at Kirby Bellars that I noticed that they were in fact three castrated males!! (Someone somewhere had a good laugh!)

We've taken yet another change of course with our pig farming activities as last year we decided to let Debbie from Mill House, Melton Mowbray and Di Crane from finish all our porkers for us. They supplied us with an excellent assortment of very fat Old Spots, Middle Whites and Large Blacks. However, Debbie made the mistake of naming two of her weaners (Paw-Paw and Trio, because of their distinctive shaped spots), and then could not face putting them into the food chain!! I was then bullied into taking them as breeding sows!! (I did double check they were definitely female!) Having ripped out my sties at the farm to make way for a new shed floor (we've concreted two barn floors, one for the horses and the other as a new maternity shed, at the cost of about 5000 lamb burgers!!), I had nowhere to put them. However, John, my landlord, kindly allowed me to accommodate them by the farm shop drive in his front paddock. There, they became very popular with everybody and even more popular when seven more of them arrived one night! What a bonus! Nine for the price of two!!(Makes up for the Manx Ewes!) Having trashed the paddock (I did warn John that might happen), I decided to move them after Xmas so the Sows are now back at the farm and the weaners have gone to Debbie. I named one of them Beyonce (because she had nice hams) so who knows may be she'll be coming back to me? If you're a fan of our pork, don't worry, there's no chance you'll be eating Beyonce, as this year we have arranged a new contract with farmer Richard Mee of Hathern who breeds Organic Saddlebacks. As of Jan 07, all our pork, bacon, ham, sausages etc will be not only be rare breed, they will also be certified organic!

On the 'pet' side of the farm, we now have three horses with the addition of 'Dusky' who is kindly on loan to us. She and Rosie are both in foal so we'll have to set up a horse maternity suite later in the summer!!

Our farm has had some land additions as well. We've been grazing Robert Pyke's farm at Widmerpool which has an airstrip next door; the young hebrideans loved the short grass on that. We've also become graziers in Lincolnshire, helping out Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust by grazing Ancaster Valley. This is a nature reserve and part of an ancient Roman fortification (according to Time Team!). It's a long way to drive every day to count the sheep, but fortunately it is Suzy's (chief pie maker) home village, so before

work she has been doing her farming duties and when she's too busy, her mother has 'took the crook'. Brockleby's now farm in three counties! If only we could have all our holding next to the farm, life would be so much easier but, as many farmers have found, trying to establish yourself by acquiring land is a costly and time consuming exercise and it takes some families several generations.

Brockleby's Farm Shop

We've had another excellent Christmas - thank you all for your support. This year we sold nearly three hundred head of poultry, including our Norfolk Black turkeys, with free range geese, ducks and multi-birds (Daren would make an excellent seamstress), all proving even more popular than last year. We've also had many additions to the team: We now employ exchange student Jenny from Canada who can often be seen driving her orange van (company car!) on the wrong side of the road heading to a farmers' market near you. We have Matt, the world's tallest pie maker and scariest Santa (don't ask about the Grotto!) in Suzy's charge. We have my cousin Oliver, the oracle who knows more about our sheep and pies than I do. We have 'Sad-sack', (anyone remember the Raggy Dolls?) aka Ian, as the new apprentice butcher and, finally, we have Harold the master butcher who came out of retirement to help us in our hour of need (most Fridays!!).

Pies have been one of our great successes in 2006. Not only have sales gone through the (barn) roof but we won a Gold Award at the Great Taste Awards in London. (Net and I went to the Gala Dinner in the hope of receiving a prize for supreme champion product! Obviously my enthusiasm for our products ran away with me, but at least we had a good boozy evening!). On top of this, we won the 11lb pork pie class at the Melton Fatstock show; perhaps not such a prestigious event but if you're a serious pork pie maker it's the one to win. Well done to Suzy and the team.

Ever heard of Heston Blooming Chap? (or something like that!) I hadn't until the emails came flying in just before Xmas! Apparently, on his BBC2 cooking programme, he said English Longhorn Rib of Beef is the best beef you can ever eat and, low and behold, we are one of the few retailers in the UK who sell it!! We ran out just before Xmas - hope none of you were let down when we posted it all out to the home counties (must be good BBC2 reception there?).

In 2006, we attended many events. The memorable ones were: Leicester County Show, where all the catering was done by Leicestershire Farmers and all the flooding and marquee damage was done by good Leicestershire Weather! The Wood fair in Charnwood Forest - again all catering done by Leics Farmers and all other entertainment done in wood or with wood or on wood! Finally, the Royal Show, where we went despite all advice to the contrary, to sweat, fret and lose money at what we thought would be the best agricultural event in the UK. If only they could get back to their roots and run an event like that at Ashby De La Zouch or Sutton Bonnington, real country shows, with real country people. Please note them in your diary for a good day out.

Events at Brockleby's

I'm a bit late getting my diary together this year but I do know we'll be holding at least one cheese and wine party, a wild game evening and a pie competition. We are very keen to run events that our customers would like to attend, so please feel free to send us an email with your suggestions to ian.jalland@brocklebys.co.uk The actual dates for these events will be posted on our website.

I hope you all enjoy our annual newsletter and we look forward to seeing you at the shop or one of our events.

Belated Happy New Year from

Ian Jalland and the team at Brocklebys.

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