

# Taste

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*OVER THE TOP*

**SUPERLATIVE**

Helge Rubinstein's  
chocolate desserts

**WITTY**

Miles Kington  
on the menu



**SEASONAL**

Beaujolais Nouveau—  
ripe for drinking

**EXOTIC**

Travelling in Thailand



# RETURN TO REAL MEAT

*A Devon company is delivering meat with the flavour and quality of days gone by.*

*Robert Temple finds out how the old values are being revived,*

*and brings good news of a special offer for Taste readers.*



It is now possible to step back in time and taste meat as it was in the good old days of the 18th century, when pork was pork, beef was beef, and George III would eat only Portland lamb.

Anne Petch, of Heal Farm in North Devon, is leading a crusade to give us real meat again. For the past seven years she has been supplying more and more people with meat from rare breeds of pigs. She rears them herself by traditional methods. In the past year or so she has expanded her range and now also offers beef from North Devon cattle; known

locally as 'Red Rubies', they are direct descendants of ancient Roman plough oxen.

The latest addition is North Ronaldsay lamb from Linga Holm. On this island off the coast of Scotland, the lambs live on seaweed which they graze from the rocks. George III's favourite, Portland lamb, is now available from Heal Farm, too.

The Rare Breeds Survival Trust, of which Anne Petch has long been an enthusiastic member, encourages her use of rare breeds for the table. 'They believe that I both call attention to the breeds' existence and provide a reason for more people to want to breed them,' she says. 'That, in turn, will ensure their survival.'

She herself has a great love for her pigs: 'Look at that Tamworth. She carries herself like a great lady, doesn't she?' John Thomas from Umberleigh, her gentle farmer friend who supplies her with beef, says of his North Devons: 'They're lovely cattle. There's no breed like them.'

Anne Petch is waging a campaign on several fronts. On one hand, she is trying to bring back rare traditional breeds of farm animals that had almost become extinct. On the other, she is trying to bring back real flavour and quality to meat-eating.

Her perfectionism and dedication to quality and flavour know no bounds, and if she weren't so mild-mannered, quietly spoken and smiling, one would be tempted to think she must be a fanatic. Furthermore, she is waging an implied campaign against additives and 'rubbish meat', along



*Below: Heal Farm, North Devon, where rare breeds of farm animals are reared just as they were back in the 18th century when meat tasted like meat.*





Right: Anne Petch is strongly against additives and the intensive-rearing techniques used in most meat production today.



with intensive-rearing techniques. It is difficult to find finer meat in Britain than that offered by Anne Petch. She even has arguments to demonstrate why her North Devon beef is superior to the best Aberdeen Angus: 'It has better marbling and a finer flavour. It also has a better fat cover to protect it when it is hanging and keep the moisture in; after



Above: succulent beef olives, just one of the dishes available from Heal Farm. The beef comes from North Devon cattle, which Anne Petch claims are second to none.

hanging I cut the fat away. With Aberdeen Angus you can't do this.' Anne does her own smoking using oak chips. She provides smoked pork tenderloin, hams, bacon, sausages and beef. Her hams, whether smoked or un-smoked, are probably the finest in Europe. The flavour is spectacular, and the meat dissolves on the tongue like butter. Her sausages

are a triumph: the garlic ones are made with Isle of Wight garlic; the tomato, chilli and basil variety combine piquancy with mellowness. One sausage makes a meal. She uses only shoulder meat and real casings.

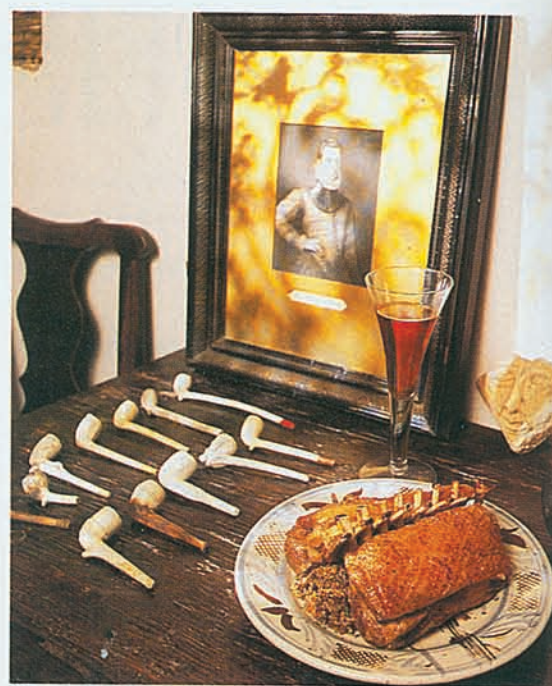
Her venison is from two-year-old prickets (young harts) of either roe or fallow deer, rather than the inferior red deer commonly available. She has just brought back real mutton from the traditional Ryland or South-down breeds: 'This is not just old ewe but proper mutton, that is, a wether (castrated ram) which has gone through two whole summers and winters.'

Anne is believed to be the only maker of native English salami. She has made eight different kinds, but during the 15 weeks it takes she cannot be away from home for more than a day at a time, as she personally supervises the entire process.

She also prepares bresola, which is a very lean topside of beef cured in brine and Rioja wine, and then dried and cured for four weeks. Other products include beef olives and smoked beef rolled in chilli and cayenne pepper. Now and then she makes a liver terrine. And her standard pâté is made with ham or bacon, some fresh pork, and very little liver, some herbs, salt and pepper, and local Devon cider.

Heal Farm marketing has improved over the years and there are now some remarkable bargains. Kebab packs of beef, lamb and pork for £61.40, including delivery, are estimated to feed 60 people, thus making the price about £1 per head. For about £1.20 a head you can feed 100 people with the Barbecue/Grill pack, which otherwise 'could feed a whole family for a summer'. It includes a wide selection of different meats and cuts, along with recipes, sachets of marinade spices and cooking instructions.

But the most spectacular of all Anne Petch's offerings is unquestionably her hamper. She does a few for Easter and other special occasions, but her masterpiece is her Christmas hamper, which is fast becoming famous. For £235



it will feed a family of eight with plenty to spare for the entire holiday season, apart from vegetables, bread and drink. The food is packed in well-insulated, stout wicker hampers. The 24-hour delivery service ensures that all the produce arrives at the customer's door in perfect condition, ready for immediate use or storage for later on.

Anyone who orders their hamper through *Taste* (see page 70)

Above: Heal Farm provides a wide range of cuts of meat, such as this rack of lamb, presented in the traditional 'Guard of Honour'. Anne Petch also provides recipes and marinade spices.



Below: When you buy Heal Farm sausages, you can be sure that you are eating the real thing. They are made in the traditional way, using only real casings. Each sausage is a meal in itself.

will get a special 'bonus' — an additional 2lb layered breast of Linga Holm lamb interleaved with Heal Farm's own apricot and cashew stuffing. The meat from these animals, available exclusively through Heal Farm, has a

subtle piquant flavour and is very tender. The stuffed breast in the hamper is delicious hot or cold, and as it is attractively layered and easy to carve makes an interesting feature at a meal.

Certainly one of the strongest attractions of Anne's meat is that it contains no additives. None of her animals has had any copper or hormones pumped into it as growth-promoters. Nor have they been given antibiotics and arsenic as is often the case with intensive rearing. For her cured meats she uses the smallest possible amounts of saltpetre.

In the early days, a salesman discovered that Anne had lost 35% of the weight of a leg of fresh pork in the process of turning it into a ham. He boasted he could sell her a machine that would increase the weight by 60% instead. But she spurns this technological approach to meat production. She says that six years ago a trade journal carried a revealing advert headlined: 'Why sell meat when you can sell water?' and offered a machine to extend the fibres of meat and inject water into it.

But Anne Petch refuses to sell water, or stabilisers, or water-retainers, or soya slurry extenders. She is interested only in quality, and she has shown that quality will sell. When she was first written about in a national newspaper in 1981, she received 15,500 letters containing orders for her products. The market for flavoursome 18th-century meat is, aptly, bullish. □

Heal Farm Quality Traditional Meats, Kings Nympton, Umberleigh, Devon EX37 9TB (0795 2077).

Catalogue and recipe booklets available by post. Meats shipped or delivered anywhere in Britain.



Left: a treat for any table, this balotine of lamb is filled with savoury stuffing. North Ronaldsay lamb from Linga Holm in Scotland is the latest addition to Heal Farm's range.

Above: delicious, melt-in-the-mouth ham cooked on the bone. Heal Farm ham is also available 'home-smoked', using oak chips.