

London

EAT / FARMING

A DAY IN THE LIFE

LONDON'S GO-TO FARMER

...CONTINUED FROM COVER

4.30AM Calixta takes her first stroll around the 16-acre farm, which has a river at the bottom with a riparian buffer, to see how the crops are looking and to plan the harvest list.

5AM It's delivery day, so lots of crop-picking and a trip to London beckons. It means that cousins Bill and Ben, stocky Comtois horses originating from France centuries ago and a breed little-used today, get to relax. 'Otherwise I'd be giving them their breakfast now,' she says. 'They usually do around 3.5 hours a day. No more than that because they're 17; they're not spring chickens anymore. They're different to most other horses: much shorter and wider, with big chests and big butts. Longer and taller horses are more gangly, often stomping on vegetables by mistake. But Comtois horses are more careful. They do a lot of work preparing the soil and live outside in the fields.'

6AM Before too much sun hits their leaves, so they are as fresh as possible from the nighttime, Calixta starts picking the crops. 'Always salad leaves first, because they are the most delicate,' she says. 'Then on to some of the heartier crops, such as collard greens, spigarello, brocollet, kohlrabi. By now, I'm rushing like crazy.'

7.30AM On to the broad beans, carrots, beetroot, radishes and fennel. The farm grows plenty of forgotten or unusual crops too, such as Chinese red meat radish and purple daikon. Around 10 people join Calixta in the fields: her two 'wonderful' employees – one manages field production; the other customers and packaging – while the rest of the crew is made up of volunteers, as well as chefs up from London for the day who are keen to get their hands dirty.

9.30AM Everything is washed down and the team start moving the produce into the packing room.

10.30AM Final box checks take place. 'The job's actually getting easier. A lot of the restaurants we supply trust us to bring what we want now – including ugly carrots or leaves with holes in. In fact, people actually ask for them. Since we started in 2017, there's been a huge rise in the awareness of food waste.'

11.30AM Calixta and her team start loading the truck.

12PM Lunchtime. 'We eat together at the communal table in the garden behind the cottage. People on the farm and the visiting chefs are excellent cooks. And we always seem to have someone who's good at baking. But if I don't have time, I'll take a packed lunch with me and get moving. Nothing fancy.'

12.30PM Calixta gets in the truck and heads for London, a 90-minute drive.

3PM At Jolene, a bakery, cafe and restaurant in Newington Green, Calixta passes over boxes of produce. 'They mill their own flour, and one of the side products is bran. They give me some and we take it back to the farm to lay down mulch for our garlic. And the chickens and ducks love eating it.'

6PM Calixta arrives back at the farm. It's still





THREE RESTAURANTS SUPPLIED BY FLOURISH

Increasingly, London chefs don't use wholesalers. 'We have a huge list of London restaurants now,' she says, 'so that we can try and meet their needs. It's clear that chefs like working directly with growers. Here are just three of the dozens of restaurants currently supplied.

1. **Kiln** Named the best restaurant in the UK in the 2019 Restaurant Awards, the Thai barbecue restaurant Kiln serves courgettes and cime di rapa in its sour turnip salad.
2. **Brat** The Michelin starred Shoreditch restaurant Brat features a selection of roasted brassica as a side dish in its salad made up of handpicked leaves from the nursery.
3. **Westerns Laundry** (below), Jolene and Poppo are two of the top restaurants owned by Jeremie Cometti and David Gingell all use Flourish produce across their menus.



Central
EAT / RECIPE

How to make Erchen Chang's spicy boiled dumplings.

06

North
AREA GUIDE / SHOP

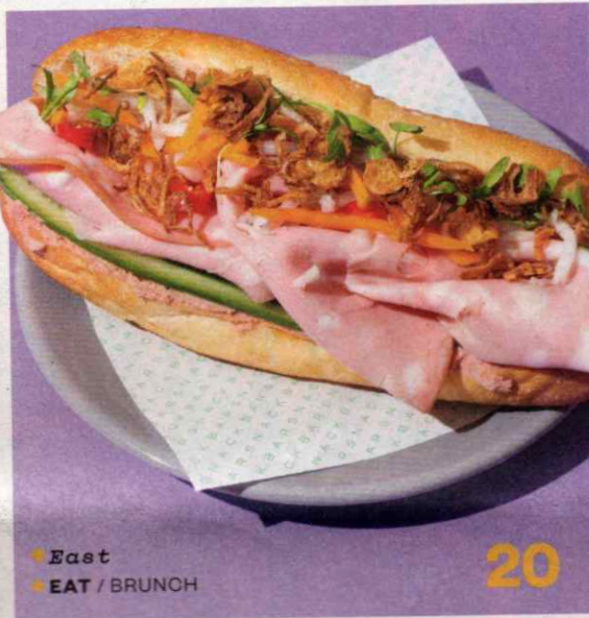
Newington Green – more than a no-man's land.

04

Central
SHOP / STREETWEAR

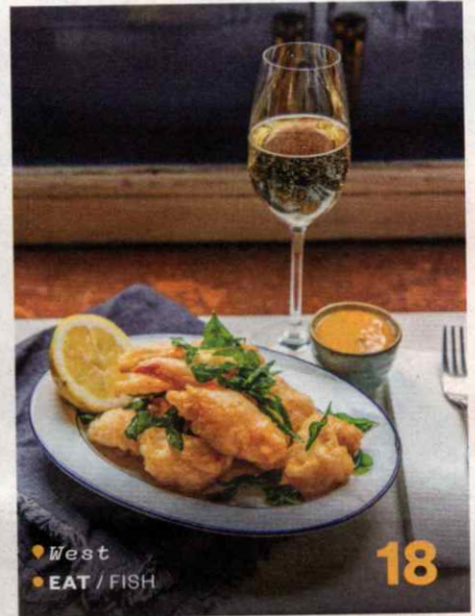
'The UK's first exclusive fashion gallery store?'

20



East
EAT / BRUNCH

20



West
EAT / FISH

18



LIFE S RMER

urish Produce, a
umbridgeshire, two
ciality crops grown
y's tagline. Her
ttached to ancient
ploughing – are not
natural, least
i, says Calixta, who is
n's best restaurants
es Brat, Primeur,
ndry. The list goes
s longer too. Here's
oks like for her



4AM At Cooks Pen Farm, Hildersham, the sun's up and birds are already tweeting. From within a picturesque old flint cottage with a thatched roof, Calixta's alarm goes off. The ducks and chickens need letting out and feeding right away. 'After that, I'll have a quick coffee and start on the paperwork and emails,' she says. 'No time for food.'

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

