

# GAME *for anything*

As a member of pop band JLS, JB Gill conquered the charts. Then, in an unlikely career move, enjoyed similar success as a poultry and pig farmer. Next on the menu? Venison...



**F**rom the top of the charts to lord of the manor - not the most logical of transitions. But for JB Gill, it's been a move that has proved both smart and satisfying. Since purchasing a 10-acre smallholding five years ago with the money he'd saved from his tenure with JLS, he's developed both personally and professionally - and built a pretty enviable animal entourage along the way.

Humble, hardworking and keen to make a mark in his new industry, JB's turning his attention to venison. With chef and chief Westminster Kingsway lecturer José Souto happily assuming the role of his expert mentor, this former popstar seems to have *The X Factor* in a whole new discipline.

**Many - indeed most - people will be surprised to learn of your new career?** When I moved out of my family home in 2011, I bought a property with 10 acres of land. I rescued my first pig, Ginger, from the RSPCA in 2012 and the rest, as they say, is history! It's been a learning curve, but I've been given some excellent advice, and researched various types of farming to identify what was both viable and environmentally mindful.

*'I was in awe of the wild herd of fallow deer that grazed the land'*

**Did you initially find farming at odds with your other interests and routine?** That could look to be the case from the outside, but I am aiming to prove that I'm a sum of many parts which can coexist! I'm as much a farmer as musician, although it's a 365-day-a-year job,

I love farming because it allows me to still enjoy all aspects of my life. It gives me so much more freedom with my family than music did. I can be out all day with the animals, or filming a television show, and still be home ready for bath- and bedtime.

**Speaking of which, you're a presenter on CBeebies' *Down on the Farm*. How important is it to make children aware of where their food comes from?** Incredibly important. Beyond the effect on general health and wellbeing, an understanding of food provenance is vital for the future of our food economy and production. It's no secret that fewer young

people are interested in farming, or relate the food they eat with the way it is cultivated, so introducing 6 year-olds to farmed foods is a key component of *Down on the Farm*.

**You now farm Tamworth pigs, chickens, and Kelly Bronze turkeys. What's in your current 'animal entourage'?**

At the moment, it stands at two pigs, four chickens, and 170 turkeys, together with our dog Nala and the 'rat-catcher' cat, Phantom. We also have a herd of wild fallow deer which we like to call our own - the very reason why I want to establish a venison farm in Scotland.

**What turned you on to venison farming?** I was a huge fan of the meat well before I started farming. While still in JLS but living at my new place, I was in awe of the wild herd of fallow deer that grazed the land. I'd effectively stumbled across a method of low-intensity farming an essentially 'wild' animal. It was a perfect fit for me, and I'm now extremely >>

## JB'S LOCAL HERO

'A butcher is a farmer's best friend. A good friend of mine at Ye Village Butchers in Walton-on-the-Hill, Surrey, makes the best flavoured bacon and sausages. In my humble opinion, the vanilla bacon is the best by far, but he also makes many exotic flavours for me.'





*‘I respect JB’s passion for provenance and I found his interest in the whole production process refreshing’*

- José Souto

passionate about developing my own venison range in the future.

**What’s so good about the meat itself, and what are your favourite cuts and recipes?**

Venison is exceptionally healthy; low in fat and cholesterol and high in iron. My favourite ‘primal cut’ is probably the haunch, as that’s where the steaks come from. Recipe-wise, it would be José’s venison bon bons. You’ll never be able to eat enough of them.

**What part has José Souto played in your venison project?**

José wanted to work with me on one condition – that I looked at the past, present and future of venison and its transition from field to fork. He gave me his book, *Venison; The Game Larder*, and we went stalking in Norfolk and spent time looking at production at Houghton Hall Deer Park. Although I’d explored the differences in processing wild, park and farmed venison before meeting José, my knowledge has developed greatly with his influence.

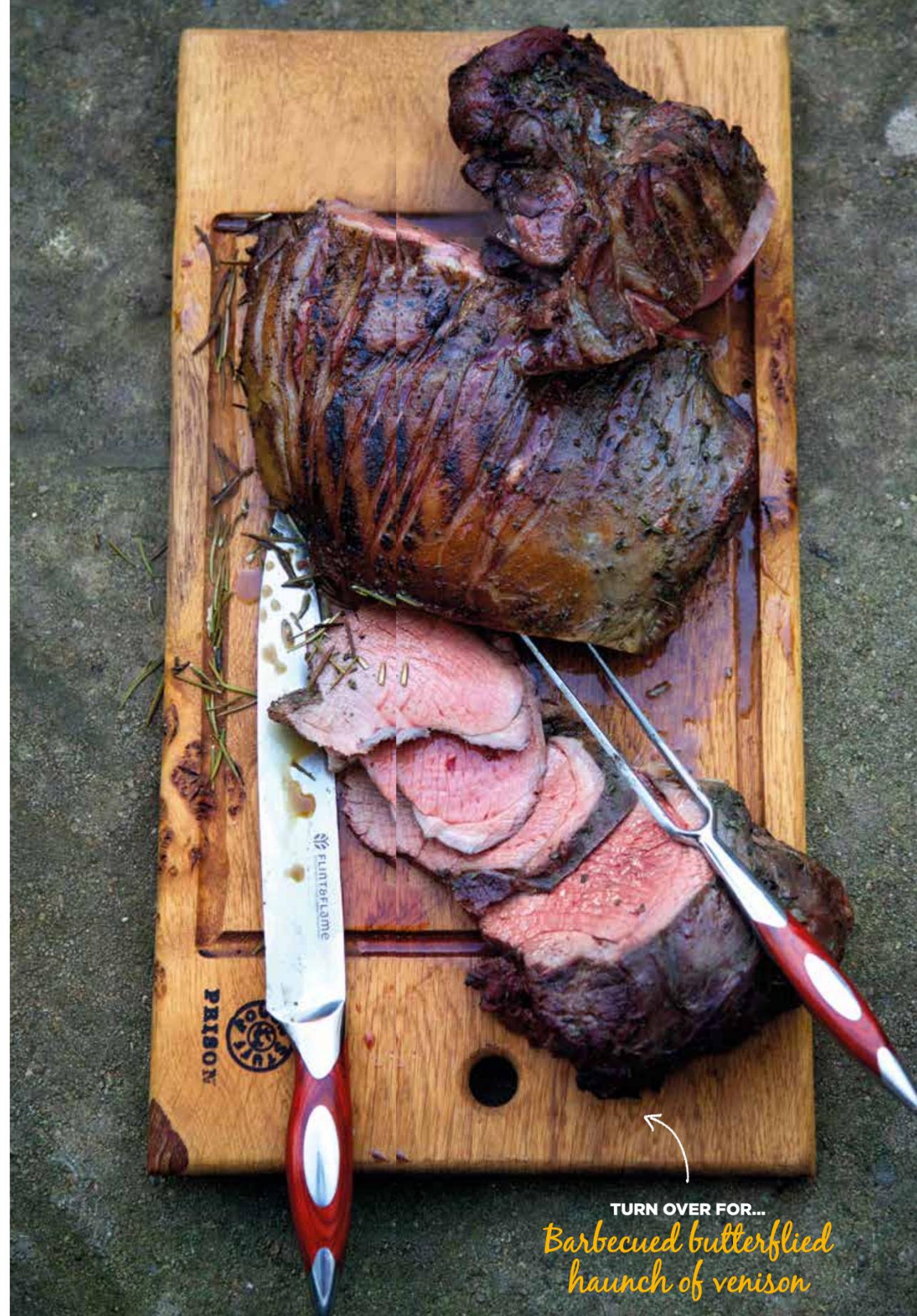
**His mentorship seems to have had a real impact on you. In turn you’re active in promoting youth education?**

I’ve been working alongside the Mayor’s Fund for London on an initiative called ‘CityPitch’ – a *Dragons’ Den*-style initiative which develops children’s business acumen and allows them to address key environmental issues within their communities.

I’d love to ultimately use my farms to offer access to the countryside for those who would never get the experience. If the opportunity is there, I believe that many more children would see a countryside career and lifestyle as viable.

**You seem really fulfilled – do you relish your farming successes as much as you did pop triumphs?**

Success, in my opinion, is universal. Whether it’s accomplishing a small, personal goal, purchasing your first farm, or hitting number one in the pop charts, the anticipatory excitement and feeling of satisfaction are one and the same. >>



TURN OVER FOR...  
*Barbecued butterflied haunch of venison*



**Venison & porcini pudding**

*The filling can be made the day before, allowed to cool and then the pudding filled the next day. A great dish to cook ahead, and it also creates a real spectacle when you cut into it at the table.*

Serves 4-6

**INGREDIENTS**

**For the filling**

- 50g dried porcini mushrooms
- ½ litre brown chicken or venison stock
- 2 tbsp vegetable oil
- 1kg diced shoulder of venison
- 50g flour
- 50g butter, plus extra for buttering the mould
- 1 onion, finely chopped
- 1 heaped tsp tomato purée
- salt and pepper

**For the pastry**

- 400g flour
- 20g baking powder
- pinch of salt
- 200g suet
- 250ml water

**METHOD**

1. For the filling, place the porcini mushrooms and stock in a medium saucepan, bring to the boil, simmer for 10 minutes, then set aside.
2. Heat the vegetable oil in a frying pan set over medium-high heat. Season the venison and dust in the flour. Add half the meat to the pan, sealing on all sides and allow it to colour. Remove and set aside, allow the pan to get hot again, then repeat with the remaining venison.
3. Melt the butter in the same pan, then add the onion. Sweat over medium heat for 3 minutes, then add the venison and tomato purée and cook for a further 2-3 minutes.
4. Stir in the reserved stock and mushrooms, stirring until sauce-like in consistency. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 1½ hours, or until the venison is tender. Set aside to cool.
5. For the pastry, sieve the flour, baking powder and salt into a large bowl, mix in the suet, then make a well in the centre. Add the water and mix lightly to yield a soft, sticky paste that comes away from the edge of the bowl. For the lid, set aside ¼ of the pastry and keep it covered. Roll the remaining pastry into a 40cm circle.
6. Butter a 20cm, 1½-litre pudding mould and line with pastry, allowing it to stand slightly higher than the top of the mould. Roll the reserved pastry into a 20cm circle.
7. Fill the lined pudding bowl with the cold filling mixture, then sit the lid snugly on top, enclosing the filling. Brush the edges with cold water and press firmly to seal.
8. Cut out a disc of greaseproof paper three times as large as the top of the pudding. Butter the paper and form a pleat in the middle, then place on top of the pudding, folding the excess paper over the edge and tying a piece of string around it to keep it in place.
9. To cook, place a folded teatowel into a large, lidded saucepan of boiling water then stand the mould on top so the water comes ¾ of the way up the mould (the cloth stops the bottom of the pudding burning). Cover and simmer for 45 minutes, then remove the pudding, take off the paper lid, and turn out to serve.

Recipe images: Steve Lee



## Barbecued butterflied haunch of venison

Serves 6 (depending on the size of the haunch)

### INGREDIENTS

- 3 tbsp chopped rosemary
- 3 large cloves garlic
- 150ml olive oil
- 180g Maldon salt
- 1 venison haunch, boned and butterflied (ask your butcher)

### METHOD

1. Put the rosemary, garlic, olive oil and salt into a food processor and blitz to a paste. Place the venison in a large dish and rub the mixture into the meat, coating it completely.
2. Transfer to a plastic bag, pour in the remaining paste, tie the bag at the top, and refrigerate for at least 2 hours (or overnight). If the meat is refrigerated overnight, allow it to sit at room temperature for 1 hour before cooking.
3. Light a lidded barbecue and bring it up to temperature.
4. Scrape off excess marinade from the venison, barbecue the meat on all sides to seal, then remove from the grill.
5. Place a large square of foil doubled over 4 times (shiny side out) in the centre of the grill, sit the venison on top, close the lid of the barbecue and cook. After 15-20 minutes, turn the meat, then continue cooking for a further 10-15 minutes.
6. Remove the meat from the barbecue and set aside to rest for 10 minutes before slicing and serving.



## Venison epigrams

*Epigrams of lamb are good but venison ones have even more flavour. This recipe can be eaten as it is, or included as part of another venison dish.*

Serves 4-6

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 tbsp olive oil
  - 1 medium onion, roughly chopped
  - 1 medium carrot, roughly chopped
  - 1 clove garlic, roughly chopped
  - sprig of thyme
  - ½ a bay leaf
  - 250ml red wine
  - 1½ litres venison stock (or chicken stock)
  - 2 boned breasts of venison (approximately 2kg)
  - salt and pepper
- To coat and cook**
- 100g Dijon mustard
  - 200g plain flour
  - 2 eggs, beaten
  - 200g fresh breadcrumbs (or panko)
  - oil, for deep-frying

### METHOD

1. Heat the olive oil in a deep saucepan (large enough to hold the meat) set over medium heat. Add the onion and

sauté for 5-6 minutes.

2. Add the remaining vegetables and herbs, cook for a further 5 minutes, then add the wine and cook until reduced to half the original volume.
3. In a separate pan, bring the stock to the boil. Place the breasts on top of the vegetables and herbs, season, add the stock, then slowly return to the boil.
4. Reduce the heat to a simmer, and cook for 2-3 hours, or until the meat is tender when pinched between finger and thumb.
5. Remove the meat from the stock and set aside to cool for 10 minutes.
6. Place one of the breasts onto a tray lined with greaseproof paper, then place the other breast on top, covering with another sheet of greaseproof paper. Top with a weighted tray, and refrigerate overnight.
7. Remove the paper and carefully place the breasts onto a chopping board. They should have become

loosely bound together.

8. Trim and square off the whole breasts, then cut into portions - square, triangular, or round - and insert a wooden toothpick into the centre of each piece.
9. Place the flour, beaten eggs and breadcrumbs in three separate shallow dishes. Holding each epigram by the toothpick, brush the meat liberally with Dijon mustard, then pass lightly through the flour, tapping off any excess.
10. Dip each piece of floured meat in the beaten eggs to coat, followed by the breadcrumbs.
11. Heat the oil for deep-frying to 170°C, and carefully lower in the breaded epigrams. Fry until golden-brown, then drain on kitchen paper.
12. Remove the toothpicks and serve hot.