

# Turkey Au Naturel

Indicators: Nov. 24

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**\$5.75** is the price per pound of a heritage turkey from Talus Wind Ranch in Galisteo.

**\$.98** is the price per pound of a frozen Private Selection turkey from Smith's.

" The turkey male should be large in frame and deep in body, with a broad, round, full breast that...gives the fowl a stately and majestic appearance. The head should be of good size, and the eyes possess an alert and bold expression. " —**1910 revision of the 1874 American Standard of Perfection, issued by the American Poultry Association**

When it comes to turkeys, America has come full circle. Back in the 18th century, we hunted them wild. In the 19th century, we raised and slaughtered them ourselves. But by the 1900s, we realized that time is money and resorted to that paragon of holiday shortcuts, the frozen Butterball.

Today's demand for heritage turkeys—the original breeds descended from native turkeys—can only mean one thing: We're going back to our roots.

"Heritage is anything raised on farms before they developed the genes that led to the commercial turkey," Wendy McGuire, the co-owner of Gallina del Sol farm outside Edgewood, explains. "These birds can take care of themselves, raise their own children, breed normally and fly."

In other words, they have a life—unlike the commercial turkeys bred to eat until their breasts are so big they often can't walk. And, according to Talus Wind Ranch owner Tim Willms, heritage birds also taste better.

"It's the coming together of two value-added ideals: One, the animal is treated humanely; two, the flavor is one that's unique to turkey," Willms tells SFR.

The only problem is finding one.

According to the Heritage Turkey Foundation, only 20,000 heritage turkeys will be sold this year, compared to an estimated 230 million "laboratory turkeys."

And despite the higher price tag for heritage turkeys, both McGuire and Willms sold out weeks before Thanksgiving. (Willms still has birds for Christmas, though.)

Willms says he's noticed more local farmers getting into the heritage poultry business but, according to McGuire, there's still more demand than supply.

"There is more room for people to be doing what I'm doing," she says, "and I'd love it if they did."

Before long, we'll be calling it the national bird.