

# Heritage Turkey

By Kiera Hay / Journal North Reporter on Sun, Nov 20, 2011

At Talus Wind Ranch in Galisteo, the turkeys are a work of art.

Their feathers give off a lustrous sheen that appears almost metallic – a mix of white and chocolate with swaths of orange that, depending on the light, glint yellow and green.

It's not so surprising, then, to learn that Talus Wind's owner is an art dealer-turned-rancher who sees similarities between his two seemingly disparate careers.



"My focus now is really, rather than nurturing the creative soul, I'm trying to nurture the human body through traceable food sources and keeping it all local," Timothy Willms mused during a recent tour of his 460-acre property.

Besides being pretty, the turkeys are friendly. The feathers on Willms' slew of heritage Standard Bronzes and Rio Grande Wilds were barely ruffled when visitors entered their enclosure Saturday. One hen pecked away at a reporter's notebook.

"They're very curious," Willms said.

Willms' turkeys wander freely in an enclosure strewn with grass and water bowls. They can fly, if they choose, into a larger area, also fenced in. It's part of Talus Wind's commitment to humanely raising healthy animals.

"One of the best ways to engage people with food is to reveal the story of the animal's life and the life of the people who raise it," Willms said.

Eventually, the turkeys will make their way to Willms' slaughterhouse in Mountainair. This Thanksgiving, Willms expects to sell about 175 birds.

Willms, the type of rancher who calls his turkeys "sweet pea" and "honey," is philosophical about the deaths.

He said a friend told him to look at it this way: "They have a great life, but then they have one really bad day." The saying is also featured on the ranch's website.

Most of the turkeys, thanks largely to a recent Sunset magazine feature on Talus Wind, are going to individual households this holiday, though a few chefs are serving them in local restaurants.

Willms said his birds have a unique, delicate texture. The white meat isn't "that kind of pasty white," but rather has "a soft almond tone to it."

"When you're eating these turkeys, they taste like turkey. There's a taste to it. It doesn't just get mixed up with chicken or some other sort of poultry," he said.

Among other things, the ratio of white meat to dark meat is more evenly distributed in a heritage turkey than in the Broad Breasted White turkey, the most dominant supermarket breed today.

Broad Breasted Whites' large size, due to selective breeding, prevents them from flying and makes mating and even walking troublesome.

Massive, tightly controlled "factory farm" operations have made them relatively cheap, however, and certainly less expensive than the average heritage turkey.

Willms' birds grow to between 10 and 15 pounds – that takes about six or seven months – and cost about \$5.95 per pound.

For now, Talus Wind turkeys remain mostly a holiday special, though Willms said he hopes to eventually make them available year-round.

"Wild turkey just isn't on a lot of menus expect at Christmas and Thanksgiving," he said. "I'm hoping to change that."

Lamb, Talus Wind's other primary animal product, is a much bigger seller and can be found in Santa Fe restaurants and at Whole Foods. Willms also recently started a venture involving lamb-based dog food and toys. And then there's the Mountainair slaughterhouse, which serves other small ranchers in the area.

Willms said he sees animals raised for slaughter as a gift.

"That's why I feel at peace with thanking them for their transition from pasture to plate. Because I revere them and I know that they are a living being," he said. "In their sacrifice, I should be cognitive of the fact, 'Well, when am I going to do good today?' rather than it just being a self-serving commodity."

There's still an opportunity to buy a Talus Wind turkey, according to Willms, though the odds are better for a Christmas reservation. For more information, email [josh@taluswindranch.com](mailto:josh@taluswindranch.com) or visit [TalusWindRanch.com](http://TalusWindRanch.com).