

## Raising, Showing and Eating Best of Breed turkeys

By PATRICIA WEST-BARKER | [The New Mexican](#)  
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Tim Willms, a Chicago-based private art dealer, toy manufacturer and writer, was one of those people who fell in love with Santa Fe the first time he visited. He bought his first home here in 1995 -- two months after that fateful visit -- and made a longer-term commitment when he purchased ranch land south of Galisteo in 1999.

Two years ago, Willms established Talus Wind Ranch on that 500 acres with the goal of using traditional ranching techniques to raise heritage breeds of sheep and turkeys as humanely as possible and market their meat.

Willms' turkeys -- available to local buyers for the first time this year -- are raised in spacious outdoor paddocks, he said, where they can claw and peck at the natural desert vegetation. He entered his Rio Grande Wild and Standard Bronze Heritage birds in the New Mexico State Fair for the first time this past September, he said, where they took two first place ribbons and one "Best of Breed" blue.

His turkeys are closer in taste and appearance to wild game than to the genetically altered, intensively managed, tightly confined Broad-Breasted Whites that have dominated the market since the late '50s, Willms said.

Frank Reese, a Kansas-based rancher and longtime promoter of Heritage turkeys, defined the three key points that identify a turkey as "Heritage" in a recent article for the American Livestock Breeds Conservancy News.

Heritage turkeys, Reese writes, are self-breeding; have a longer, more productive life span -- 5 to 7 years for hens and 3 to 5 years for toms; and mature at a slower rate (26 to 28 weeks) than the eight weeks generally allotted to turkeys raised on factory farms.

Thanks to farmers like Reese, Willms, Tom Delehanty of Socorro and Wendy McGuire of Stanley, as well as the efforts of Slow Food USA, traditional American turkeys are finding their way to holiday tables.

Wild turkeys are generally smaller than their commercial counterparts, Willms said, with the white meat more of an almond color and the dark meat firmer and more intensely flavored than that of domestic turkeys. His turkeys are well-proportioned, he said, but not as curvy or large-breasted as commercial birds. Their breast bones are more prominent and their drumsticks stick straight forward, he said.

To keep wild turkeys from drying out as they cook, Willms suggested rubbing them with butter -- both over and under the skin -- and stuffing the cavity with herbs de Provence, apples and celery. Since the breast meat will be done before the legs, baste the birds often with butter and herbs and tent the breast meat -- or wrap it in buttered cheesecloth -- to keep it moist after it browns.

For more information about Heritage turkeys and the Slow Food movement, visit <http://www.slowfoodusa.org> and follow the links.

Article courtesy of [The New Mexican](#)



Tim Willms raises his heritage turkeys outside, where they grow naturally, as opposed to the genetically altered, intensively managed, tightly confined Broad-Breasted Whites raised on factory farms.