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Some Fork Over \$200+ for Turkey

By CHARLES PASSY

When it comes to this year's holiday bird, New Yorkers aren't afraid to break out their wallets.

A number of gourmet markets and high-end butchers throughout the city are selling specialty turkeys for Thanksgiving that run \$200-\$300-plus. And in most cases, that doesn't include sides.

At Eli's Market on Manhattan's Upper East Side, options start at \$6 per pound for a free-range, all-natural turkey, but can go as high as \$11 a pound for a "heritage" breed variety.

With turkey weights that run from about 10 to 30 pounds, the cost for a bird

easily could hit the triple-digits.

"People are really concerned about where their meat is coming from, and because of that they're willing to pay higher prices," said Marc Reyes, head butcher at Eli's Market.

Purveyors of these pricey birds say they have no problem finding customers.

Le Coq Rico, a restaurant in Manhattan's Flatiron District that specializes in poultry, says it has sold out of its allotment of heritage turkeys for to-go orders, priced at \$280 each with sides.

The restaurant is offering a variety sourced from a Kansas farm, where, according to Le Coq Rico manager Patricia

Grunler Westermann, the birds have plenty of pasture to explore.

The result, she says, is one tasty turkey. "You really feel how they live" with every mouthful, she said.

Still, some food experts remain skeptical, noting that turkey isn't very flavorful—no matter where it is sourced or how it is raised. Hence, the reason the Thanksgiving meal is so much about the side dishes.

"Unless a turkey can get up, turn on the oven and put itself in the roasting pan, it is rarely worth much more than a dollar a pound," said Allen Salkin, a New York-based food writer.

Sure enough, New Yorkers can still find plenty of turkey

options for \$1-\$2 a pound, or even less.

ShopRite, the supermarket chain with more than 200 stores in the tri-state area, offers a free-frozen turkey, up to 21 pounds, to customers in its Price Plus Club program, provided the shoppers spend \$400 in the weeks leading up to Thanksgiving.

Still, sellers of high-end turkey stick by their product and say there is no comparing a supermarket bird with a specialty one.

Stanley Lobel, a partner in Lobel's, an Upper East Side butcher store that sells farm-raised birds for \$10.98 a pound, likens his turkey to the best in beef.

"It's like prime rib," he said.



Marc Reyes, head butcher at Eli's Market, said consumers will pay more for a turkey because they want to know the source of the meat.

MARK KAUZLARICH FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL