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## FEARS CHRISTMAS COULD BE RUINED DUE TO BIRD FLU 'ENDEMIC' STOPPING TURKEY PRODUCTION

Grace Piercy

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A turkey farmer has warned that Christmas could be ruined this year with her and other farmers being forced to cut back bird production due to "endemic" bird flu.

Charlotte Blackler, 49, runs an artisanal farm in Perthshire and normally sells 200 organic and free-range turkeys over the festive period.

This year, however, the disease has forced her to take drastic measures and she will not be raising turkeys for the season.

Her chick supplier has had four of his largest farmers pull out, with orders dropping from 700 to 50.

Due to turkeys being predominantly produced by small farmers, it has been speculated that supplies of the bird may be hit especially.

Charlotte Blackler runs a farm in Perthshire

Charlotte, who runs Michelin-star restaurant favourite Herb Majesty, told the Independent: "My customers were very sad to hear of the news. But we felt as though the risk was too big this year to rear turkeys.

"It's like Covid - it's so endemic now, it's everywhere. Bird flu is so rampant around here, different areas are affected differently, but I do feel like the scale of the problem isn't being understood.

"I have been agonising over raising turkeys this year but it would go against our ethics to have the birds living their whole lives without access to our herby pastures, fruits and berries."

Ms Blackler added: "I don't know on a grander scale whether this will affect people in terms of ordering turkeys around Christmas. I imagine commercial producers will still be fine.

"But maybe perhaps the steps we have taken is something all suppliers, especially smaller ones, should be considering."

One of Ms Blackler's organic turkeys

Greendale Farm Shopp in Essex spent £100,000 building a turkey shed in case of a bird flu outbreak.

Tom Lomas said: "We want to be in control of our own destiny in case of a shortfall so decided to rear our own turkeys.

"We have 600 turkeys in, and they are all free range, and far from a scare, our orders have actually gone up."

But not all are worried about bird flu, with Mike Dalton of MJ Dalton butchers in Bristol saying they hear about it every year and its "a load of nonsense - probably started by some vegan".

The National Farmers' Union said: "As far as we understand there won't be a shortage of turkeys this Christmas."

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