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# Deep-fried Twinkie stick, anyone? Welcome to the weird-food-on-a-stick capital

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I'd suggest starting with deep-fried Spam curds on a stick, then moving on to teriyaki ostrich on a stick and then finishing with that deep-fried Twinkie on a stick. Can you see a pattern forming here?

It doesn't matter what food it is, or even if it's a complete meal, food vendors at the Minnesota State Fair will find a way to get it onto a stick. And more often than not, this involves a deep fryer. Upon attending the Minnesota State Fair, I got heart palpitations just watching people eat the deep-fried spaghetti and meatballs on a stick. Ish! (That's Minnesotan for yuck.)



The Minnesota State Fair could very well be the world capital of weird food on sticks. [iStock](#)

Mind you, not everything is on a stick. You can also devour a deep-fried turkey leg wrapped in bacon. Actually, you can get just about anything wrapped in bacon. Corn dogs. Fried shrimp. Cake. Yep, you can even get cake wrapped in bacon. Coronary specialists would be rubbing their hands together for all the new patients lining up after the “Great Minnesota Get-Together.”

But that’s not all. You can wash it down with one of 300 different types of beer at the fair, and they can be just as wacky as fried things on sticks. If the food doesn’t make you reach for the Quick-Eze, then try dill pickle ale, chocolate chip cookie beer, s’mores beer or, my favourite, mini donut beer.



Wash down an array of weird foods on sticks with one of 300 different types of beer. ISTOCK

Whether you're totally intrigued, or your stomach is turning, know that this gross gourmet gobbling is not a regular thing in Minnesota. You won't walk through downtown Minneapolis and see people eating heart-attacks on sticks. Most locals only plunge into the world of self-indulgent and artery-clogging workouts once a year at the state fair.

The Minnesota State Fair isn't only about eating, though. Like the Royal Melbourne Show or Easter Show, this event is, at heart, an agricultural expo where people flock to see spruced-up sheep and primed pigs – all while completely unfazed by the smell of manure. And, of course, there are the usual suspects of stomach-churning, spinning, whirling, twirling rides. I took a wide berth around those after noting some ride-goers who had consumed a bucket of candied bacon donut sliders before they got on the ride.

Founded in 1859, the Minnesota State Fair is the biggest state fair in the US by daily attendance. On the day I went, there were 222,202 visitors – a day where they undoubtedly would have gone through a whole forest of sticks. The record attendance is 270,426 – compare that to 40,000, the average daily attendance at the Royal Melbourne Show.



The Pronto Pup is just one of the Minnesota State Fair's more than 500 food options.

Food certainly is the big drawcard. “There is a media frenzy on the day the new foods are announced,” Danielle Dullinger, the head of food and beverage, told me. “We have 300 food and beverage vendors, and the New Foods Committee will look at over a hundred applications for 30 new foods.” But it’s not all about being off-the-wall and on-a-stick. Last year’s new foods included chicken tandoori rolls, sweet potato poutine, hmong sausage and vegan corndogs. I asked what food they rejected. “We want the food to be unique, but edible,” Danielle said. “So, we didn’t go with the deep-fried bubble gum.” Maybe if it had been on a stick, it might have got through.

They did, however, go with the pickle pizza – a pizza base covered in ranch sauce and topped with, um, sliced pickles. I was going to try it, but there was a long snaking line of pickle lovers. “That was a huge surprise,” Danielle said. “The vendor was cranking out a slice of pizza every 10 seconds.”



Not everything is on a stick, like this Fruity Cereal Milk Biscuit.

One of the other big attractions, also food related, is the Butter Queen. It's a contest that honours young female leaders in the state's dairy industry by transforming 40-kilo blocks of butter into the likenesses of Princess Kay of the Milky Way and the nine other Princess Kay finalists. But here's the catch: the "sculptures" are carved live. For 11 days, a sculptor (and each princess) sit in a revolving cooler set to four degrees while hundreds of people watch.

When sculptor Gerard Kulzer had a break to thaw his fingers out, we chatted about the intricacies of butter sculpting. "The hardest part is cold fingers," he told me in-between shivers. Gerard, who is a high school art teacher and usually sculpts in clay, took over from Linda Christensen, the Butter Queen sculptor for the previous 50 years.



Little farm hands: the event is, at heart, an agricultural expo.

I asked what happened to the sculptures at the end of the fair. “The women take them home, along with five-gallon buckets of butter scraps. Some melt the heads and host parties with corn on the cob, while others buy special freezers and preserve their heads for years,” he said.

All in all, the Minnesota State Fair is like the Royal Melbourne and Easter Show on steroids – with a few extra saturated fats. The only thing missing was walking out with showbags full of junk.

## DETAILS

Minnesota State Fair commences on August 24 to September 4, 2023. 1265 Snelling Ave N, St Paul From \$US15 (\$23). See [mnstatefair.org](https://mnstatefair.org)