

NINA MOINI: This is Minnesota Now. I'm Nina Moini. And we are live from the MPR stage at the Minnesota State Fair in front of a wonderful live audience. Give it up for yourselves one more time. Well, hopefully not the last time. Please keep clapping.

Well, this is Minnesota Now. I'm Nina Moini. Well, it's what many of us wait for all year-- the New Fair Foods, of course. And this year's lineup is a diverse mix of 36 new items. There's the Dubai Whoopie Pie, the Deal With It, Cookie, and so much more. We'll get a chance now to hear about two of these items also on the list. And we're going to give them a taste.

First up, we have Sara Hayden, owner of Sara's Topsy Pies, where you can find the Ube Strawberry Sundae Tart. Thanks for being here, Sara. We're also thrilled to have Aliah Bennett Taylor from Lumpia City. They're behind the Longanisa Cheese Curd Lumpia. Thank you for being with us. Aliah. Whoo! Give it up for them. They're giving us delicious food.

OK. So, Sara, you have been a regular Fair Food contributor, one might say. I just looked this morning back at a story that I got to do with you back in 2015 when you were just starting out. You were having volunteers work for you. You were in a small kitchen there on Marine on Saint Croix. Amazing to see all that you've accomplished. Truly, congratulations in the last decade. How has that journey been? And what keeps you making something new every year? How do you stay inspired?

SARA HAYDEN: By the people that eat the pie and give us the good reviews.

NINA MOINI: That's you! Ooh.

SARA HAYDEN: It's motivating. It's very motivating.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, definitely. OK. So, Aliah, Lumpia City is actually based in Wisconsin. That's OK. We love it. We love having you here. This is the second year that you're at the Minnesota State Fair. What brought you back? What do you think of the fair here?

ALIAH BENNETT Loving the Minnesota State Fair. So it's really exciting to be back for a second year in a row. I think being-- just
TAYLOR: even being here and having that warm welcome last year was such a positive feeling. So I think that definitely contributed to being able to come back this year as well and share lumpia with everyone.

NINA MOINI: Yeah, and tell us a little bit more about Lumpia City and the new item you have this year.

ALIAH BENNETT Yes, absolutely. So Lumpia City was founded in 2015 out in Southern California by Alexa and Sam. They
TAYLOR: eventually moved back to Sam's hometown in Wisconsin. And so the inspiration for this year's Longanisa Cheese Curd Lumpia is to bring some more of those classic Filipino and Filipino American flavors, as well as combine that with something that's a little more familiar. So Longanisa is more of like a sausage-- a breakfast sausage. And to be able to pair it with a cheddar cheese curd-- I mean, phenomenal.

NINA MOINI: So we have official taste tester and audience hyper, Anika Besst, coming up, wearing many hats for us. Anika, you're going to give this lumpia, the cheese curd, a try.

ANIKA BESST: I'm really excited. We were chatting before. And you said just dig right in. So first, I'm going to do it without sauce.

NINA MOINI: Oh, OK.

[CHEESE CRUNCH]

That crunch. [LAUGHS]

ANIKA BESST: It's delicious.

NINA MOINI: All right. Thumbs up.

ANIKA BESST: Now with the sauce. Sorry for the chewing noises, but I just can't help myself.

NINA MOINI: It's part of the gig. The bite just sounded good. I knew it was good by the sound of that bite. Aliah, does it make you happy to see people enjoying your food? I saw you put your hands to your heart. You're just loving seeing that a million times a day, I bet.

ALIAH BENNETT Yeah, absolutely. So I think it's really exciting to be a part of the Lumpia City team at the Alexa and Sam. I mean,

TAYLOR: I'm a little biased to say they do great work, so to be able to share and seeing people try lumpia, it really does-- like the warm and fuzzy.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. OK. And you're not done yet, Anika, because we've also got Sara's tipsy pie new item. Tell us about it.

ALIAH BENNETT So it is the Ube Strawberry Sundae Tart. It is a layer of fudge on the bottom. And then we do a two-sided creme

TAYLOR: with marshmallows and whipped cream. It's topped with strawberries and whipped cream. And the special part is the disco dust. Everything's better with disco dust on it.

NINA MOINI: What is that? What's disco dust?

ALIAH BENNETT It's just sparkly and fun.

TAYLOR:

NINA MOINI: Oh, it looks like sugar. Love it. OK. Anika, how is it?

ANIKA BESST: It's refreshing.

NINA MOINI: Oh.

ANIKA BESST: It's a bit of everything. It is really a blast.

NINA MOINI: Amazing. A blast. The reviews are in. Everything was delicious. Thank you, Anika. Give it up for Anika, everybody. Wearing a lot of hats for us today. Thanks for doing that. So, Sara, what are you hearing from people at the fair about just how they're enjoying your foods? And what do you like to talk to people about when they come up and visit your booths?

SARA HAYDEN: I love the stories of what their family did with pie. I mean, pie is a very emotional product. We all have a story about it. So I think I've been really blessed to hear what-- I have a lot of grandma stories to share about what people do.

And even when we did the pie crust last year, it's not a crazy product. It didn't have disco dust on it, but everybody had a story. So I think that connection with our products, just like what you said, that tradition is super important, especially here in Minnesota.

NINA MOINI: Yeah. Aliah, how about you? What do you like to talk to people about? What's the kind of feedback that you're hearing from folks?

ALIAH BENNETT The things that we like to talk about with people is how enjoyable and accessible lumpia can be for everyone.

TAYLOR: It's, again, what can we bring from Filipino food and Filipino American food? And what is more like familiar flavors? And just being able to see people waiting in line to get a taste of hot and crispy lumpia is really exciting to see.

NINA MOINI: And I know you all work so hard too. And your staffs work so hard. And it's not without challenges sometimes. Sara, I understand you had a tough year. You had an issue at the business. That was a tough issue. Have you had to make up some time, or how has that been? Tell us about that.

SARA HAYDEN: Yes. So July 13, I moved out of my cafe. I shut it down. And I was acquired by Brine's Market in Stillwater. And somebody left my freezer open while I was moving out. And I lost 1,000 of my tarts.

NINA MOINI: 1,000 tarts? No.

SARA HAYDEN: I was so sad. They were all melted.

NINA MOINI: So what does that mean, timing wise. Was that an issue because the fair was coming up? Or how long would you spend on 1,000 tarts?

SARA HAYDEN: 1,000 tarts takes five people 10 hours.

NINA MOINI: Wow.

SARA HAYDEN: We didn't hit our goal at that time. So it was move, get used to a new kitchen, which is really hard, and get used to freezer space that we have to share.

NINA MOINI: But you bounced back.

SARA HAYDEN: Yeah, there's no choice. As an entrepreneur, you just pivot. And you just keep moving. And you work long hours. But the payback is the lines and the great comments and the stories and--

NINA MOINI: And one thing I remember us talking about this 10 years ago when you were starting out, how helpful vendors and folks are to one another. Aliah, have you noticed that at all, that maybe somebody needs something? Because we're pretty deep into the Fair now, and people might start to-- tempers might be getting shorter. [LAUGHS] I don't know. Are you kind of seeing people taking care of each other that way?

ALIAH BENNETT I have, yes. Like if you run out of cups or you need one pack of napkins to tide you over until the next team

TAYLOR: member can bring some stuff in, that's been really helpful to see.

NINA MOINI: And before we have to move on, I want to make sure everybody knows where to find you both. Sara, tell us where folks can find you.

SARA HAYDEN: So I'm in the Food Building. I'm on the west wall, right across from the Cheese Curds. So look for the Cheese Curds, and I'm right across from them.

NINA MOINI: And, Aliah, where can folks find you all?

ALIAH BENNETTFolks can find us by the Horse Barn. I'm still learning the street name, so bear with me--
TAYLOR:

NINA MOINI: Horse Barn, everybody. We'll make sure the information's on the website, too. And official last question. You can say your own stuff, but you can also say other vendors. That's OK. What is your favorite thing to have or to try at the Fair? Aliah, you can go first.

ALIAH BENNETTI really enjoy the honey ice cream by the Minnesota Honey Producers Association. I had it last year, and it's
TAYLOR: already at the top of my list to go back to this year.

NINA MOINI: OK, nice. How about you, Sara?

SARA HAYDEN: I have to go with the Peachey donuts.

NINA MOINI: Ooh.

SARA HAYDEN: I've partaken quite a few of them this year. My friends just drop them off. And, ooh, it's so good. Worth the line.

NINA MOINI: All right. Well, Sara and Aliah, thank you both so much for your time. Thanks for bringing treats. We really appreciate you. And have a great rest of the fair.

SARA HAYDEN: Thank you.

ALIAH BENNETTThank you so much.

TAYLOR:

NINA MOINI: Thank you. Give it up, everybody. Sara Hayden is the owner of Sara's Topsy Pies. And Aliah Bennett Taylor is with Lumpia City.