

# MORE THAN POPCORN

## at the Indiana State Fair

In the past, come state fair time, my ritual was to simply try all of the vendor concoctions created around the “year of the \_\_\_\_\_” theme.

But the Year of Popcorn is different. There’s only so much you can do with popcorn besides caramelize it, shake some flavoring on it, or craft it into the impressive but hardly edible “World’s Largest Popcorn Ball.” So the fair bypassed a competition this year, opting instead to just have a list available to journalists of first-time food variations.

Fair enough (so to speak). But I didn’t adhere too closely to the officially recognized choices, skipping the latest round of “Hey, let’s deep fry something we haven’t deep fried before” and replacing them with a few newbies that weren’t on the distributed list.

Here’s what I found:

**Blue Moo** [\$4]: The Dairy Barn offers sublime grilled cheese sandwiches...which is why I was particularly disappointed in this effort to give the standard sandwich a kick by adding blue cheese. More like Blue Meh.

**Chocolate Bacon Crunch** [\$7.99/bag]: See, there are things you can do creatively with popcorn, as South Bend Chocolate Company has proven time and time again. For a fair world premiere, chocolate-covered bacon has been added to the caramel corn. But until better proportions are worked out, my preference goes to a lower-profile new South Bend creation, Sea Salt Crunch.



IBJ photos/Julie Kirkendall



**Redneck Burger** [\$9]. Yes, there’s a hamburger somewhere in Carousel’s creation. There’s also cheese and bacon. So far, so normal. Now add on a slice of fried bologna, a hailstorm of baked beans, and a sprinkling of potato straws. Result? A surprising combo that tastes—and I mean this in a good way—like eating the remnants of a good plate of cookout food that’s merged on an un-subdivided plate.



**Hot Bacon Glazed Donuts** [\$4 for 6/\$7 for 13]: Welcome to the fair, MCL. Where have you been? The cafeteria staple has wisely limited its menu to three basic items. And while these bacon-flavored nuggets made from super sweet yellow corn may be easier to share, for me the winner was the Sugar Cream Pie [\$5/slice], washed down with a glass of sweet tea [\$3/16 oz, \$5/32 oz.].

**Wheat Wheels** [\$6/bag]: For most addictive new walk-around snack, I nominate Goodwin Family Products for this chip-replacement. Warning: The hot variation does have an impressive kick. Those who don’t want to put their stomachs at risk are advised to stick with sweet or barbecue.



**Giant Amish Donut** [\$4]: When asked about the name, the deep-fryer/roller/dipper said that “The recipe is the only thing Amish about it.” That’s enough for me. Just divvy it up into quarters, have plenty of napkins handy, and bite in while it’s cooled off but still warm. •

— Lou Harry