

Pepperoni Rolls

The pepperoni roll, a West Virginia delicacy, is a roll baked with pepperoni inside. The grease from the pepperoni creates an orangeish-red spot on either end. While pizza crust hardens after baking, pepperoni rolls remain a soft treat that you eat right out of your hand.

[Fairmont](#) baker Giuseppe “Joseph” Argiro, founder of the Country Club Bakery, is credited with having invented the pepperoni roll in 1927. Argiro, a former miner, remembered his coworkers eating bread and pepperoni at work and combined the two. The innovative baker passed the recipe down to his son, Frank “Cheech” Argiro, who later owned Country Club Bakery. Other West Virginians picked up the pepperoni roll idea and developed their own versions. Filippo Colasessano, also a former miner, opened his own Fairmont lunch spot, and in 1957, Colasessano’s son, “Spider,” started selling pepperoni rolls there. Spider Colasessano experimented with the recipe, adding cheese, hot peppers, and even hot dog sauce.

Future production of pepperoni rolls was threatened in 1987, when the U.S. Department of Agriculture wanted to reclassify the roll bakeries as meat packers, forcing them to meet more stringent regulations. [Sen. Jay Rockefeller](#) addressed the issue with then-Secretary of Agriculture Richard Lyng. Rockefeller was concerned that the mostly family-operated bakeries would die, and along with them the cherished tradition of the pepperoni roll. Fortunately, the U.S.D.A. backed off.

While still most popular in the areas of heaviest Italian settlement, particularly in northern West Virginia, today pepperoni rolls may be found in most parts of the state. In fact, pepperoni rolls promise to spread far outside their traditional homeland in the 21st century, as a version of the popular snack is now included in the U.S. military’s MRE’s (Meals Ready to Eat). The war-going pepperoni rolls are produced by a North Carolina company.

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Citations

1. Mozier, Jeanne. *Way Out in West Virginia*. Charleston: Quarrier Press, 1999.