

## Transcript — Episode 31: Celebrating the Holidays with Trader Joe's Crew – And Cookies!

Matt: Here's a preview of what's coming up on this episode of Inside Trader ho, ho, hos.

Tara: Trader ho, ho, hos.

*[Preview montage under festive holiday music.]*

Tamika: I have a long list of items that I love to share and because I work here at Trader Joe's, everybody's always excited about what I'm going to bring to the table.

Tara: Let's take a moment to actually thank every crew member in every store. It's been quite a year.

Matt: And we have a little over 60 new products coming to stores.

Toni: It's a party in a bottle.

Alison: We have developed a Pfeffernüsse Cookie Mix. It is a mix that you can make at home for yourself. The customers can mix up their own Pfeffer deliciousness.

Tara: (snort, giggle)

Matt: You got a snort on that one. That was pretty good.

*[End of montage.]*

Tara: Are you ready for this?

Matt: Yep!

Tara: Are the reindeer fed?

Matt: I think you are confusing me with somebody else. Now if I had any reindeer, they would be fed, yes.

Tara: From the Trader Joe's mothership in Monrovia, California.

Matt: Let's go Inside Trader Joe's.

*[Sleigh bells over theme music and two bells ring at a neighborhood Trader Joe's.]*

Tara: I'm Tara Miller, the director of words and phrases and clauses.

Matt: And I'm Matt Sloan, the marketing product guy.

Tara: One thing we know for sure, Matt, these holidays are going to be different.

Matt: In many ways, yes. Less travel, smaller parties, much smaller parties, many of them outside. And while they might be small, they might be greater in intensity of feeling.

Tara: Agreed and really more important than ever lots of all-time favorite Trader Joe's products are back this year.

Matt: More than 200 of those holiday favorites. The Trader Joe's seasonal products are back this year and we have a little over 60 new products coming to stores to spice things up for the holidays.

Tara: So how many products are in the stores only this time of year, total?

*[Adding machine noise.]*

Matt: Let's see...I'm going to carry that one and...300 almost.

Tara: Wow. So what are their names?

Matt: How long is this episode?

*[News bulletin sounder.]*

Tara: We interrupt this episode of Inside Trader Joe's to warn...

*[Light upbeat music begins.]*

Tara: ...that some of the holiday products we're about to discuss may be going, going, or even gone from our shelves by the time you hear this. Every year we try our best to anticipate the demand for our seasonal products. Sometimes we get it right. We want to get it right. We want you to get your products. Our best advice? Come visit us and if you see a seasonal product you like, buy it, buy it now.

Matt: We love the Trader Joe's crew across the country and what a year they've had. And we look forward to hearing from some of them about the holiday traditions that they're excited about.

*[Music ends. Holiday phone ringtone.]*

Matt: Oh, they're early.

Tara: Our first call.

*[Picking up the phone.]*

Matt: Hello.

Leslie: Hi Matt. This is Leslie at Trader Joe's store 426 in Houston, Texas. How are you?

*[Light upbeat music begins.]*

Matt: I'm great. How are you? What's going on?

Leslie: Well, you know, it's a really weird year. Some of my favorite things to do might happen the same, but some of them might be a little bit different. I'm probably going to have people to my house in the backyard, which works okay in Houston. It's not too cold. You know, and so people are probably going to need a lot of things like hot chocolate or hot coffee or tea. They're going to need things to warm them up.

Matt: What's on the hot chocolate menu?

Leslie: My absolute favorite is the Sipping Chocolate, which is done in the European style. The interesting thing about it is if you look at the ingredients, there's actually no milk in it. So it's not like your traditional hot chocolate that has, kind of, a milk added and you're just adding the water and it becomes milky. It is just straight up dark, rich chocolate. It's very good. If you make it with a hot milk, it really becomes basically a cup of chocolate that you're drinking. But we also have our Instant Hot Cocoa packets that come in the box that are delicious and more of a milk chocolate creamy. We have our Peppermint Hot Chocolate. We have these really fun, Hot Chocolate Sticks that are awesome for kids. Good for stocking stuffers. And then we have our Salted Caramel Hot Chocolate, which at least at our store is already flying off the shelves.

Matt: What is your coffee pick and your tea pick for upcoming holiday celebrations? What are you going to be serving up?

Leslie: I really love that new Rwanda Small Lot. I got to finally taste it recently. It's just come into our store and it's just got so much character to it. It's a lighter roast, but it's very, I think I'd call it kind of full bodied. It has a lot of interesting fruity notes to it. There's a little bit of blueberry in there is what the bag mentions and I really noticed that. I think my tea pick right now, well, one that's really exciting is the Maple Espresso. I do love everything with maple.

Matt: If you're calling from the Alabama Movie Theater store, the Trader Joe's there in Houston, I love that store so much.

Leslie: We're the Alabama Movie Theater store. We are a Houston institution. My friend Toni here did some extra research to prepare for today. Let me let you talk to Toni. Here you go.

*[Music ends. Passing the phone.]*

Toni: Hey there.

Matt: Toni, hello. It's Matt. Word on the street, as it were, is that you were a patron of the Alabama Movie Theater when they showed movies.

Toni: Not in 1939, Matt.

Matt: Oh, ok...apologies.

*[Upbeat music begins.]*

Toni: No, it started in like in the late 30's, the movie theater did, and they were showing like, *Man About Town* and all these old movies.

Matt: But those were new movies then, Toni.

Toni: When it kind of closed down or revamped it they played real current edgy kind of movies and I was lucky to see the *Rocky Horror Picture Show* here.

Matt: I can see the through line though. There's like some Busby Berkeley dance number.

Toni: After the theater closed Book Stop took over. I don't know if you knew that or not, but that started in like 19 about 1984. But then Trader Joe's came in and we made the floor all one level, instead of that swoopiness, like you have in the theater to walk down. But the one thing we kept, if you've been in here, the beautiful ceilings with all the art deco, which is just breathtaking. We had to keep the terrazzo tile that was in the front of the building entering in and also in the back, which is really unique. And the colors the store is, the same colors they had, the kind of creamy color and the turquoise is just beautiful. It's a happy store.

Matt: Thinking of happy stuff, what do you have in mind for holiday celebrations?

Toni: I'm excited. I walked in last Friday and I saw the big bottles, the big magnums, the 1.5 liters of our...

Matt: Wait for it....I'm waiting for it. What is it? The 1.5 liters of...

Toni: Oh my gosh. It's big bottles of champagne. The big bottles of Prosecco.

Matt: Oh, L'Éclat and Incanto.

Toni: And the new one, the big bottle of Rosé.

Matt: Yeah, those are fantastic. Those are so fun.

Toni: They're so fun, but they're going like hotcakes.

Matt: For breakfast.

Toni: It's a party in a bottle. And then what I'm excited about too, because there's always someone that comes in and says, "I can't drink anything with alcohol. You know, I want a wine that's non alcoholic." I'm excited to see about the new Sugar Plum Sparkling Beverage. Now that looks like fun.

Tara: That Sugar Plum Beverage, it's sweet, but it's not too sweet.

Toni: And it's great for kids too cause they want to drink like a mommy, daddy drink too, you know? So this is perfect. Anything with bubbles.

Matt: That's true. Absolutely.

Toni: Yeah and it looks pretty healthy too.

Matt: That might be a stretch, but you know, it's a celebration.

Tara & Toni: (laughs)

Matt: Leslie, Toni, Toni and Leslie. Thanks so much for the call. I feel updated, informed and in the know on what's happening in Houston anyway.

Toni & Leslie: Awesome. Thank you for including us. Hope you have happy holidays.

*[Music ends.]*

Tara: Now we can talk about candy and cookies. Matt, we have a special guest joining us.

*[Drum roll.]*

Matt: Drum roll, please.

Tara: Alison. Welcome back.

Alison: Thank you for having me back.

Matt: So Alison, you cover a lot of ground...

*[Music begins.]*

Matt: ... with regard to categories and products. So give us the list.

Alison: I kind of have all the sweet stuff. So I have baking, I have syrup, I have honey, I have preserves and nut butters.

Matt: Do you have sugar?

Alison: It's part of baking. Sweeteners, mixes, um, flowers.

Tara: Plus candy and cookies.

Alison: Plus candy and cookies, yes.

Tara: Dang girl!

Matt: Sugar and spice and everything nice.

Tara: But not spices.

Alison: But not spices, so just sugar and everything nice.

Tara: Just sugar and everything nice. I want to give our listeners a little backstory. Historically we've carried a cookie from Germany called Pfeffernüsse, very traditional German Christmas cookie. Can you explain the Pfeffernüsse story to me?

Alison: Yes. The vendor couldn't produce it because of a situation with the powdered sugar in their facility. We bid out to a few other vendors to try to find the same version and no one could do it. So we went to the same vendor who produced a similar cookie with a glaze on it that we thought was excellent. And it came in and the icing had a, the glaze had an issue where it wasn't setting and I have the timeline here of...

*[Papers rustling.]*

Matt: You just heard that it's an actual piece of paper.

Tara: Oh my gosh, it is a timeline.

Matt: So it goes from powdered sugar situation to a glaze incident to nowhere good.

Tara: To a Pfeffer fiasco.

Alison: A Pfeffer fiasco, some Pfeffer returns and Pfeffer crying (laughs) on my part.

Matt: What else is on your Pfeffer list? Let's just run through them.

Alison: Well, I've been enjoying using Pfeffer in like, in front of things now. Or I think it should just be like, if something goes wrong, now it got Pfeffered.

Room: (laughs)

Tara: None of us gets Pfeffered today.

Alison: Oh my gosh yes.

Tara: So the reason you're here is because you have a bit of a Pfeffer redemption story.

Alison: I do. We have developed a Pfeffernüsse Cookie Mix. It is a mix that you can make at home for yourself. The customers can mix up their own Pfeffer deliciousness.

Tara: (snort, giggle)

Matt: You got a snort on that one. That was pretty good.

Tara: I brought a box of this home last week. Oh my goodness, they are delicious. And so, so, so easy to make. You know, the hardest thing, I'll be honest with you, you're supposed to make 30 little balls of dough to bake and making 30 little balls of dough that are sort of equal in size was the most challenging piece of the entire process for me.

Matt: Did you make one giant one?

Tara: I love that this product exists and only exists because we were trying to fix a problem that we couldn't fix elsewhere. What else is on your holiday list?

Alison: Some of our favorites are coming back. The Dark Chocolate Shortbread Stars. That's one of my favorites.

Tara: That's one of everybody's favorites. It's like that one, year after year after year, people just love those cookies.

Alison: Definitely. We have the Stroopwafels, the large ones. We carry the mini during or as an everyday item. But during the holidays, we have the large ones in the cute tin. Great for your warm beverages, put them on top. That caramel gets all gooey. We have the Candy Cane Joe Joe's, definitely a customer favorite. Jingle Jangle's coming back.

Tara: It seems so silly, but just shaking that tin makes..I see people smiling in the store, just picking up the tin and sort of shaking a little bit. They smile and it...so that's, that's a good thing. Everybody needs a smile right now.

Alison: Very popular last year that flew off the shelves our Hot Cocoa Snowman are coming back.

Tara: The popularity of that product really took me by surprise.

Alison: People were really excited about just watching that little guy melt.

Tara: It's also one of those products that it's a great gift, right. It's not expensive.

Matt: And you get to drink candy.

Tara: Which is basically what it is.

Matt: Thinking of candy because...candy, you mentioned Peppermint Candy Cane Joe Joe's, but I love this Candy Cane Joe Joe's Dark Chocolate Bar. I love it more than Peppermint Bark because it's got that crispier crunchier texture and it's like almost a three ounce bar, 2.8 ounce bar, so it's not like I eat the whole pound of Peppermint Bark at one go.

Alison: That bar is extremely delicious and it's really beautiful too, visually, so it's very like, holiday, celebratory, exciting looking.

Matt: That would be great and easy to pass around to the neighbors.

Alison: Completely.

Matt: You could just, you know, ding dong ditch the neighbors and leave one of those.

Tara: That kind of defeats the purpose of ding dong ditch if you're leaving presents. That's like ding dong gift.

Matt: Alright ding dong gift. I like that even better.

Tara: That's a much better thing to advise children to do than ding dong ditch.

Alison: A kinder holiday version of ding dong ditch.

Tara: So the big single serve candy in my house every year is always the Dark Chocolate Orange.

Alison: Another individual item candy that I love and is one of our classic items are the Coins of the World. Our customers really love them. They're an individual portion and this year for the first time ever, there'll be a U.S. coin in there.

Tara: The Coins of the World, not only is the price great at a dollar 99 for that adorable little bag of coins, but it's a great, I mean, it's a great gift for kids. I know people who put them in stockings at Christmas time who used them as prizes for a dreidel game at Hanukkah celebrations. When you're a kid, actually chocolate is way better than money anyway. What about cookies?

Alison: Another classic that our customers love and is just such an amazing value is the Mini Gingerbread People. It's just such a big box, great for sharing or for yourself. And that classic gingerbread taste has the frosting for that sweetness. And obviously the cute little faces of the, (and again) you're eating the people! (laughs)

Tara: I hadn't anticipated this theme, but I had anticipated the conversation about little cookies shaped like little people. We have these adorable little people shaped, sort of people shaped cookies, strange, strange people, shaped cookies that are... What are they called Matt? What's the actual name on the box?

Matt: Cookie Mug Hangers.

Tara: Cookie Mug Hangers and that's what they do.

Matt: They're straddling your mug.

Tara: You hang them off the side of a mug and the part that's dipping into your hot beverage...

Matt: He's got one toe in the hot beverage.

Alison: This is one of my favorite new items. Certainly they're functional and delicious.

Matt: I've been looking and waiting for a functional cookie. Finally.

Tara: They serve the function of bringing pleasure. So they are always functional.

Matt: Man, if I only had something to hang on my mug.

Alison: Exactly.

Tara: And the other new product, the batons. Matt, talk about the batons.

Matt: Oh, this looks like a carousel. So it's the Baton Lover's Quartet, four of those amazing tall tubular cookies.

Alison: Baton cookies are some of our customer's favorites. And we thought a compilation of several flavors would be delicious.

Matt: Yeah, Cookies and Cream, Chocolatey Orange, Cocoa and Hazelnut. I mean, those are great.

Tara: One of the things that I love when I look at our holiday product packaging. Everything just takes on a whole different kind of wow. Even like the Pfeffernüsse Cookie Mix. It, it...

Matt: It's wearing a sweater.

Tara: It's wearing a sweater.

Alison: Our designers are incredibly talented and you don't have to be crafty. You literally just put everything in the basket and it looks amazing.

Matt: Drop a box on someone's porch and ring the doorbell. Done.

Tara: Ding dong gift.

Alison: It's a new tradition. (laughs)

Tara: We just, we literally just created a new holiday tradition. Ding dong gift.

Alison: It's perfect for social distancing.

Matt: And you don't have to talk to anybody.

Alison: Yeah. (giggles)

Tara: It's perfect for 2020. Don't have to talk to anybody. So speaking of 2020, what was different this year getting products into stores for the holidays and what was the same?

Alison: We planned very early. That was the same. We always have. Different this year is our vendors are finding challenges with COVID. In the facilities they're trying to social distance, you know, a lot of our suppliers are doing things by hand. And so if you have, for instance, a cookie that you have six drizzlers standing around drizzling, but you can't have those six, six feet apart. You can only have three drizzlers with that social distance.

Matt: That takes twice as long.

Alison: Raw materials were a challenge for some of our suppliers. Delays and then stuff we didn't even think about. Like for instance in the grocery category for our vanilla, a lot of the smaller plastic bottles and glass bottles are being used for hand sanitizer. So they are not as available for some of our vendors for our products.

Tara: As unpredictable as the work that you do can sometimes be, that's been taken to a whole different place this year.

Alison: Completely. There are always X factors. I mean, we do projections and, you know, which is a fancy word for guessing. And we, we take into account all the usual things that we look at... sales from last year, comments from our customers, discussions with our crew members...and we put all that into our work on how much we think we should order and how much we think our customers want so we don't have too much and we don't run out too quickly.

Tara: If we run out of something, in many cases, it will be because we simply could not possibly get more, that we might have wanted to get more.

Alison: Yeah, I mean, that's what happened with the Hot Cocoa Snowman last year, they were incredibly popular.

Tara: And what about you? What are your holidays looking like this year Alison?

Alison: Every year, since I was little, my extended family would get together...aunts and uncles and cousins and everything...and just kept getting bigger and bigger because now all my cousins have kids and unfortunately this year we can't do it. It's gonna look different this year, but I think as we were saying, really finding the things that bring you joy. That's what I'm gonna try to do. (laughs) Do all my favorite things and watch the favorite movies and put up the decorations and have some Zoom family Zoom calls.

Tara: Yeah.

Alison: I truly hope that the candy and cookies that we put out are a comfort to our customers and crew, and that everyone gets some time to relax and recharge and be with people they love if it's virtually or not.

Tara: That is a good way to end. Thank you.

*[Transition to Tamika in Charlotte. Holiday ringtone.]*

Matt: There's the bat phone again.

Tara: Or the Matt phone.

*[Answering phone.]*

Matt: Hello? It's Matt.

Tamika: Hey Matt, this is Tamika callin'. I heard you had a couple of questions for me.

Matt: Tamika, I do. Thank you so much for calling and you know, if memory serves, you're calling from Charlotte, North Carolina, is that right?

Tamika: Yes.

Matt: So question one. What's the weather like?

Tamika: Today is a little brisk outside, a little chilly, but the sun is shining and the skies are blue.

Matt: OK, next question. Are there any holiday dishes that you're really looking forward to serving and sharing with people?

Tamika: Oh yes, I have a long list of items that I love to share. And because I work here at Trader Joe's, everybody's always excited about what I'm going to bring to the table. So this year I will be bringing the Cauliflower Pancakes that cook up nice and crisp, and I will be putting a dollop of Truffle Dip on top of those this year with a little bit of Parmesan cheese and they're amazing.

Matt: Wow, is that like an appetizer kind of thing?

Tamika: Yeah, that's going to be our first appetizer. We'll start with that and then we will move into some cheese. You know, we always try to have a little bit to nibble on prior to dinner, but nothing too heavy so we're going to have our new Chardonnay Toscano.

Matt: I like your approach to nothing too heavy. Cause it's like not as heavy as lead.

Tara: (chuckles)

Matt: I would just go for appetizers and be happy with that.

Tara: Do you have a favorite Trader Joe's holiday product?

Tamika: Yes, I love our Maple Streusel Bread, which is awesome in our bread section.

Matt: Please give our best to the rest of the crew at 742 in Charlotte and thank you so much. Keep up the great stuff.

Tamika: Thank you guys so much.

*[Transition to Kris in Tucson. Holiday ringtone again.]*

Matt: Look at that, another call.

Tara: Right on cue.

*[Answers phone.]*

Matt: Hello, it's Matt.

Kris: Hey Matt, this is Kris from store 95 in Tucson. I wanted to call and talk to you about some of the awesome holiday things we have going on here.

Matt: So what are you looking forward to most in terms of some of the new products or maybe some of the returning more traditional products? What's on your shopping list?

Kris: We always look forward to the delicious cookies and candies and pastries and love to do things from around the world and different countries so the Panettone is always on the list. And of course, everyone loves the Almond Kringle. Can't have holidays without a Kringle or two. But this year I think the buzz is all about the Charcuterie boards.

Matt: So now why is that?

Kris: Well, I just think it's so popular. Our store captain Teresa came up with a great idea and we transformed one of our cold drink cases into a Charcuterie case. And so it has this really fun sign above it that says, "Charcuterie. Hard to say, but easy to build." And inside, not only do we have the olive oil wood boards, but we also have a nice selection of cheeses and salami. And then next to it is a display of crackers and nuts. And it is so neat.

Matt: And you could use like the smaller boards to almost make personal Charcuterie.

Kris: Exactly.

Tara: Which is kind of perfect for this year's holiday entertaining planning, right? For smaller groups and family groups and things like that where everyone might get their own serving instead of one big, huge board.

Kris: So many fun things that are coming that are non-edible, you know, like the olive wood boards, and I don't know if we can preview or peek into some of the other...

Matt: Go ahead, Kris, spill the beans.

Kris: I think there's other olive wood things coming like bowls and maybe a spoon or ladle.

Matt: Yeah, that's a really cool line of products from the producer of some Tunisian olive oil. Every year when they go through the orchards and they decommission, if you will, the older non-productive trees. They use that old growth wood to make turned wood bowls and boards and things like that. Really nice.

Kris: And then also there's supposed to be a giant candy cane coming that's chocolate filled and I'm already envisioning hanging the candy canes on the Celtic garland. And how cute would that be?

Matt: What are you looking forward to in your holiday celebrations? Is there something that you always do with family and friends?

Kris: We usually do get together with family. This year I don't think anyone's going to be traveling. So what we're already discussing is doing a family Zoom and having a holiday cocktail all together while we talk and kind of bring in the holidays together.

Matt: That sounds perfect. That sounds so, so nice. Kris, that's a wrap.

Kris: It's a wrap?

Matt: I think so.

Kris: I just wanna say happy holidays from Tucson, Arizona. And we hope that everyone enjoys the holidays. And try something new because that's what Trader Joe's is all about. Find a new favorite.

Tara: Find a new favorite. I love that. I'm going to steal it.

Matt: Thank you so much. Bye-bye.

Kris: Bye-bye.

*[Transition to close.]*

Tara: Matt, I have really loved these phone calls. I wish we could have spoken with a crew member from each one of our 514 stores.

*[Sentimental holiday music.]*

Matt: 514 and counting.

Tara: Right now though, let's take a moment to actually thank every crew member in every store. It's been quite a year.

Matt: And our crew has been and continues to be exceptional, quite exceptional, taking care of their customers and their neighborhoods during a really difficult time.

Tara: You know, during the early stages of this current crisis we're still in, Trader Joe's began offering 'Thank You' pay to all of the crew members in stores and you know, not to pat ourselves on the back or anything, but unlike most of the other stores that sell groceries, Trader Joe's is still offering that 'Thank You' pay to all of our crew members in stores.

Matt: And in addition to that, the crew member discount went from 10% to 20% and I know personally that's been an amazing help shopping for groceries.

Tara: At our house, huge.

Matt: Now we feel that it's obvious that our crew deserves the 'Thank You' pay and that 20% discount and we hope that your experience mirrors that. Now I think they're some of the best people that I know, and of course that's why they were hired in the first place. They really are great people and we want to wish them and their families, the very happiest of holiday seasons.

Tara: And the same to you, our customers, our listeners, you've shown tremendous patience and loyalty. And we are so very thankful for you. You clearly understand that in difficult times, we are all in this together.

Matt: So with that, we close out 2020 and this podcast by saying yet again...

Tara: Thanks for listening.

Matt: And thanks for listening.

Tara: Here's to 2021.

*[Music up and ends.]*