

## Transcript — Episode 7: “We’re Nuts About Wine & Cheese!”

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

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

[Store Bells & Theme Music]

Matt: I'm Matt Sloan. I work with a great bunch of Crew Members on product-related projects.

Tara: I'm Tara Miller. I'm the Director of Words and Phrases and Clauses.

Tara: Let's call this one... We're nuts about wine and cheese.

Matt: And if you are too, this is the episode for you.

Tara (off mic): You heard the first five episodes, so it's just, just a very casual...

Matt: Marcy Kopelman, our Vice President of Merchandising here at Trader Joe's... Marcy heads up the Crew working on products. So finding the products, ordering the products, making sure that the products get to your store.

Marcy: If I'm at a cocktail party or an airplane, I will never tell anybody what I do because I don't want to hear about discontinuing their favorite product... (laughs) No...

Tara: Marcy, one of the things we want to talk to you about is cheese. You were for a while, the person responsible for cheese before you were the vice president of the department, is that right?

Marcy: Yes, that's right. I was category manager for cheese twice.

Tara: Twice!

Marcy: Two different times.

Tara: We import cheese from, from France, of course.

Marcy: From around the world, from Italy, from France, from Spain, from Holland, from Germany

Tara: From New Zealand

Marcy: From New Zealand. One of my favorite Cheddars that we sell is this English Coastal Cheddar, and every time I eat that cheese I am really transported back to the time I went to see that supplier.

Matt: If you were to drive from London West, you would go to Stonehenge and then you make a left and you go south to the Dorset coast, and it's just this beautiful place. And what you would see once you got out of the car after the drive to stretch your legs is grass, and that coastal Cheddar cheese is really about the grass. It's about the pasture that those cows are raised on, the pasture that feeds those cows and what the cows do with that grass. They turn it into this beautiful milk. It's made into an amazing Cheddar. It's aged and aging in the climate...

Marcy: It's got like a little bit of nice crystallization to it.

Tara: Sure. Because it's a little, it's aged a little more than an average mild Cheddar.

Marcy: It's a, it's a bigger Cheddar.

Tara: Yeah.

Marcy: Our cheeses really break out into two different categories. We've got the package cheeses like slice cheeses and shredded cheeses that we sell a lot of for sandwiches and for cooking. And then we have all of the more artisanal cheeses and I, I would say of all the cheeses we're really well known for having a wide selection of Cheddar and, and soft-ripened like Brie.

Tara: If you like Brie, and you're just... your basic Double Cream Brie. What else might you like?

Marcy: I like to buy the Traditional Brie. The Traditional Brie is also known more as that stinky cheese, the cheeses that you would get in France. The soft ripened cheeses you'd get in France traditionally would be raw, and we can't sell raw milk cheeses here that haven't been aged for over 60 days. But the Traditional Brie has that raw flavor. It has that, that runny texture.

Matt: Once upon a time and it might even still be true, Trader Joe's sold more pounds of French Brie than any other retailer in the United States. Even when we were a tiny, tiny company.

Tara: We buy cheese from around the world. Does it come to Trader Joe's all cut and wrapped in those little packages and we just send it to the store?

Marcy: No, and that's where we're really different from, from a lot of other retailers and that we are buying cheese in bulk, so we could be buying it in 50 pound wheels or 40 pound blocks and then we are bringing it into our own facilities, and we are cutting it and wrapping it ourselves. And what that does is it really, it's a, it's a much fresher product, and it also saves a lot of money.

Tara: What does it look like in that facility?

Marcy: There'll be two different rooms. So one room they're unwrapping all the cheese so that the cardboard doesn't enter into the room where the cheese is being cut and they're unwrapping it as well, and then you go into this big room and... There are long tables where people are in some cases manually cutting the cheese.

Matt: I am totally refraining from talking about cutting the cheese. You two are both talking about cutting the cheese.

Marcy: Let's say the equipment cuts the cheese.

[Room laughter]

Tara: It's like a like a, a scientific clean room. I mean you are suited up from head to foot. You're wearing gloves, you're wearing a hair covering, you're wearing coverings on your feet, you're wearing like a, what do you, what do you call it?

Marcy: A smock.

Tara: Like a smock kind of thing.

Matt: Like Cher in Silkwood. I'm sorry, that's all I can think of in this conversation.

Tara: But I mean it, it's sterile. It's perfectly done, right? Sometimes it's not, it doesn't look so pretty all the time because it's, some of it is wrapped by hand. Some of those more sort of fragile cheeses are even wrapped by hand.

Marcy: Yes. Some of them are also in terms of how sterile the environment is, cheeses that have the mold spores on them, whether it's a soft ripened cheeses or blue cheese or oftentimes cut in other rooms so that they don't affect the rest of the cheeses.

Tara: So talk about mold spores...

Marcy: They're natural. They're supposed to be there, and they're supposed to be enjoyed.

Tara: Can you tell us what the spotlight cheese program is?

Marcy: What we realized is that not every cheese was meant for everyday consumption, that certain cheeses would be better if they just came in for a short period of time and put them out there under a spotlight and really told the story. We may not be able to sell a Chipotle Toscano Cheese year round, but we think for a 30 day period we can, we can sell a lot of it.

Tara: Okay. Nuts.

Matt: Pat and Chris will tell some stories from the wine department in a few minutes, but first... nuts.

Marcy: Nuts.

Tara: Let's talk about nuts. Sometimes if I'm in another supermarket, I'll pass through the aisle that has nuts in bags. Those bags are covered with dust. Those bags are sitting there for awhile. Um, that doesn't happen at Trader Joe's.

Marcy: Yeah.

Tara: I am always fascinated with how quickly nuts go through our system. I guess there's a better way to put it.

Marcy: We sell a lot of nuts. Almonds, walnuts, cashews, even some of our check mixes which are, which are mainly nut based, have huge volume, and our nut suppliers love us. We probably buy different than many retailers in that we, every year there's a, there's a new crop. There are multiple crops depending on the countries involved, but something like almonds or pistachios is pretty much one crop, one domestic crop a year, which is where the most of those nuts come from. And we contract out. So as the new crop hits, we negotiate with suppliers. We have incredible value based on the ways that we buy, and so we constantly turn them.

Matt: These aren't going to get any better with age. And so the faster we sell them, the better they are to eat.

Tara: We have a bunch of products in the, in the nut section of the store that are, that we call "just a handful."

Marcy: Yes. They're hugely popular with people. It's the portion control and it's, it's the portability factor. If you're on a diet, and you're limited to a certain amount of calories, rather than eating the whole bag, you can only eat that little ounce.

Tara: Yeah, that's generally what we buy in our house is the handfuls because they go in lunchboxes, backpacks and things like that.

Marcy: Our best-selling nut is raw almonds and then almonds in general. So if you salt it, if you don't salt it, if you put half the salt on it, whatever you do with an almond, that's going to be the top seller. And then walnuts. The halves and pieces are our highest volume walnut. Cashews. Half salt is our best selling cashew. It's really almonds, walnuts, cashews, and then pistachios.

Tara: What's the weirdest nut we've ever sold?

Back & forth between all 3: (comments trying to remember)

Marcy: How can I forget the name of that one?

Matt: How CAN you forget it? How can I forget the name of that one?

Marcy: It was in that... Hikers Trek Mix. We were just talking about it. What was that one called?

[Game show bell]

Matt: Sacha Inchi?

Marcy: Yes.

Matt: That would be an idea that no one wanted... because they tasted them.

[Abundant laughter]

[Office noises, phones ringing, typing, people answering phones...]

Tara: We're talking to Nikki in our customer relations department here at the Trader Joe's headquarters.

Tara: So Nikki, what's happening in customer relations today? What are you hearing from people?

Nikki: Well, Tara, I have a good one. Actually a woman just called. She was on the side of the freeway here in Southern California. I think she may have been on the 110 freeway she mentioned, and she got a flat tire.

Tara: Oh no.

Nikki: Yeah. And she's, you know, she's already having a really bad day. She has a car full of kids. She's on the side of the road. And lo and behold, one of our Crew Members pulled up, her name's Lydia, and she just pulled up right behind Beverly. She came to the side of the car and she said, "What can I do to help?"

Tara: Wait, did Lydia change the tire?

Nikki: (chuckles) No, no, I'd be... You know, it wouldn't surprise me if Lydia did.

Tara: OK.

Nikki: Without hesitation our Crew Member, Lydia, requested assistance at their location. She wanted to make sure that the kids were okay and offered them juice and Beverly was, she was just blown away.

Tara: That's a really fantastic story. I mean, it could have been anybody, but the fact that it was a Trader Joe's Crew Member and the customer really wanted us to know that our Crew Member did something really great outside of the store... That's a pretty cool story.

Nikki: Lydia, she was wearing her wearing her Trader Joe's shirt. So she said, "Hey, do you work for Trader Joe's?" And Lydia said, "Yeah, I do. I love working for Trader Joe's." So she was a little Trader Joe's angel that night.

Matt: I'm here with Pat Andress.

Pat: Great to be here, Matt.

Matt: Our product developer focused on wine and Chris Condit ...(flubs name) KRA-GRAH...

Chris: Hi, I'm Chris KRA-GRAH...

Matt: And Chris Condit category manager for the wine business at Trader Joe's.

Matt: In the wine section in our store, we have some brands that you'll recognize and we have some brands that say Trader Joe's, and we have other brands that you might not recognize, brands that you've maybe never seen before or are only found in Trader Joe's stores.

Chris: We love it, we think it's great value, we see what kind of labels the winery has available or we have available that aren't out in the world. And then you end up with these labels that folks haven't heard of. So it's not a big national brand and it's not Trader Joe's, but it's a control label.

Matt: That's an interesting word, control.

Chris: It sounded better than made up label, phony label, label you've never heard of... Label that's not with the big distributors.

Matt: Yeah I mean, control is... Maxwell Smart worked for them, so it's got to be smart, right?

Chris: If you lower the cone of silence, we can talk about it.

Matt: Yeah, got it.

Chris: So we have our reserve program. We came up with these various tiers for the reserve program. The entry point is the Petite Reserve, and the "Petite" refers the price. It's a small price, under \$10, for what we think are wonderful wines. You know we find a beautiful Chardonnay out of Lodi. We find a great Zinfandel out of Sonoma Valley or whatever it is. Reserve tier is our 9.99 retail price point. And those tend to be really pretty serious wines from pretty serious places. Wines that will cost significantly more if you were to buy them under the winery's brand.

We have a couple higher tiers... So the grand reserve is our 12.99 price point. And then we find what we think are literally the best wines in our store. Just amazing wines. We have a top tier. We call it the Platinum Reserve. We retail those for 14.99. They're few and far between because we really reserve that for wines that we think are incredible. And we sell wines for 50, 60, 80, a hundred dollars a bottle. We would argue that our Platinum Reserve wine at 14.99 -- when we have them are -- literally the best wines in the store, regardless of any price point.

Matt: We've been selling wine for a really long time.

Pat: From the beginning,

Pat: Our original Fearless Flyer was named the Insider's Report and it was exclusively wine.

Matt: So we're looking at the first Trader Joe's Insider's Wine Report. We dug through the archives. We have a somewhat crumbling mimeographed copy, and this looks like this came out at some point in 1968.

Pat: When Joe started writing the Insider's Report.

Matt: So here it is. Here's the opening message. "Welcome to the first edition of Trader Joe's Insider's Wine Report. If you know someone connected with any of the wineries discussed in these reports, please do not repeat any of our comments, good or bad, to them. We are trying to tell it like it is. And many of these winemakers are our good friends."

Matt: The fourth edition opens with this. "One winery threatened to sue after the third edition. So let's see what happens after this fourth one."

[Chuckles in the room]

Matt: Pat, what do you say to people when they say, "Hey pat, I'm going up to Napa." What are your recommendations?

Pat: There are some great little wineries for picnics. I like Kuleto, which is isolated up on the top of a mountain top. The number one visited winery currently in Napa Valley is the castle, Castello di Amorosa, which translates into "Castle of Love." It is literally an actual replica of a 13th or 14th century Tuscan Castle... drawbridge, torture chambers, church, four stories underground.

Matt: You can bring the whole family.

[Room laughter]

Pat: You can.

Matt: Look, kids! It's the rack!

Pat: ...which they have. And an iron maiden.

Matt: Absolutely. The thing, not the band.

Pat: The hot seat.

Pat: It's a must see.

SFX: Cork popping, pouring into glass

Pat: It's a grownup's Disneyland.

Tara: At Trader Joe's, we are nuts about wine and cheese.

Matt: Would it be nutty to give this podcast a rating on Apple Podcasts or wherever you get them?

Tara: Have you looked at the calendar?

[Fun holiday music starts.]

Matt: Ho. Ho. Ho.

Tara: Not yet.

[Music is unplugged, slows to a stop.]

Tara: But soon, Matt. Soon.

Matt: In our next edition of Inside Trader Joe's we'll celebrate the holidays a little early so that you can hear about some of the cool products that are in our stores only during the holiday season.

Tara: So hit the free subscribe button on Apple Podcasts, wherever you get your podcasts. We'll get that episode out to you soon. Until then, thanks for listening!

Matt: And thanks for listening!