

Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript — Episode 100: The 17th Annual Customer Choice Awards

[Upbeat music begins.]

Matt: Hey, it's awards season.

Tara: I know, right? The Golden Globes kicked it off. Next up are the SAG Awards on March 1st.

Matt: You know, I could win that for all the sagging. But wait a minute, you forgot the most important awards of all.

Tara: I didn't forget. They are today.

[Award music begins.]

Matt: (echoey announcer voice) Welcome to the 17th Annual Trader Joe's Customer Choice Awards.

[Crowd applause.]

Tara: This is exciting, but I don't think we need to hype it, Matt.

Matt: (still in echoey announcer voice) Will the Chilean Lime Flavored Rolled Corn Tortilla Chips repeat as overall favorite product?

Tara: No, they won't, but there's a reason for that. We'll explain.

Matt: (still in echoey announcer voice) Will Timothée Chalamet win best actor?

Tara: Wrong awards show, Matt.

Matt: (back to normal voice) All right then. Let's go *Inside Trader Joe's*.

[Theme music begins accompanied with two bells at a neighborhood Trader Joe's.]

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

Matt: And I'm Matt Sloan, the culture and innovation guy, (echoey announcer voice) and occasional announcer at Trader Joe's.

Tara: Matt, I really think you missed your calling.

Matt: You know, whatever that calling was, I think it went to voicemail.

Tara: (laughs) Every year, we ask our customers to vote in 10 categories of Trader Joe's products, plus their overall favorite, and the tabulations are in.

Matt: And later, a truly self-indulgent moment, this podcast will win an award of its own.

Tara: I can tell you're looking forward to that.

Matt: Well, you know me. I mean, I love self-indulgence.

[Theme music ends. Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: First up, the New Category.

Matt: And by that, we mean new products.

Tara: That's exactly right. New products are something we really pride ourselves on, having great new products for you to find on every visit to your neighborhood Trader Joe's.

Matt: It's got to be the Ketchup Flavored Lattice Potato Chips or maybe the Hot Honey Popcorn.

Tara: Those are really good guesses. They came in at number five and number four.

Matt: How about the Garlic Butter Potato Chips?

Tara: Number three.

Matt: This is almost like we planned this. What was number two?

Tara: Number two, Sour Strawberry Belts.

Matt: Those are hard to beat.

Tara: The number one Favorite New Product in our 17th Annual Customer Choice Awards is...

[Timpani roll.]

Matt: What is it?

Tara: Protein Pancakes.

[Crowd applause.]

Matt: This is made with a recipe that includes cottage cheese...

[Crowd applause fades. Upbeat music begins.]

Matt: ...and egg whites and eggs and oat flour. They actually happen to be gluten-free, if that's interesting. And you can eat them right out of the package, heat them up in a microwave if you want. Twenty grams of protein in the four-pancake package, and everyone's angling on protein for this. Did they win the breakfast and the brunch category?

Tara: Actually, no. But since you mentioned that category...

[Rooster crowing.]

Tara: Oh, well done, Trader Joe's foley artist. Love that rooster crow.

[Music transition.]

Matt: Yeah. Rooster Crow, he was great. He really should win for his performance in the movie...

Tara: I think you're talking about Russell Crowe. Again, wrong award show.

[Timpani roll.]

Tara: Trader Joe's Customers' Favorite Breakfast and Brunch Product is...Hashbrowns.

[Crowd applause. Upbeat music begins.]

Matt: Everyone it seems, customers love these Hashbrowns, were constantly chasing after this.

Tara: They are so good. They're delicious. They're easy to make. They sit in your freezer until you're ready to make them and you're good to go. Other top-vote-getters were Chocolate Croissant, Dutch Griddle Cakes, Almond Croissants, and yes, the Protein Pancakes.

Matt: Again, okay, but hold on. Hashbrowns have been a repeat winner in breakfast and brunch, so we should explain what exactly happens when a product repeats year after year after year.

Tara: I'm happy you asked about that, Matt.

[Music transition.]

Tara: If a product has won its respective category five times, it doesn't have to be five times in a row, but a total of five times.

Matt: Okay.

Tara: That product enters the Hall of Fame. This year, Teeny Tiny Avocados and Spiced Cider are going into the Hall of Fame.

[Crowd applause.]

Tara: And when you enter the Hall of Fame, you're no longer eligible to receive votes in that category. We tell customers this every year, so they hopefully don't vote for that product. For example, Mandarin Orange Chicken, all-time greatest Hall of Fame product. It's no longer eligible for voting.

Matt: We'd like to expose as many products as possible to get people hip to new things. So if it was the same show every year, that could get a little old.

Tara: You mentioned the Chili Lime Flavored Rolled Corn Tortilla Chips...

Matt: Yes, I did.

Tara: ... as a potential winner...

Matt: Yep.

Tara: ... and I said they didn't win, but there's a good reason for that. It's because they're in the Hall of Fame.

Matt: That's right.

Tara: They won their category five years. And at that point, they are eternally going to be celebrated in the Hall of Fame forever.

Matt: Yes. Always.

Tara: If you go to [TraderJoe's.com](https://www.traderjoes.com) and you search for Hall of Fame, every product that's in the Hall of Fame has its own little statue or symbol. That's the Hall of Fame.

[Crowd applause.]

Tara: Let's get back to this year's winners.

Matt: Well, we've done breakfast and brunch. Now it's time for lunch and dinner.

[Timpani roll.]

Matt: The Customer Favorite for Lunch and Dinner is...Butter Chicken with Basmati Rice.

[Crowd applause. Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: That's a really reliable, excellent, easy entree. Love it. Other good choices in that category, it's really hard to choose here, but numbers two through five in that category are Steamed Pork and Ginger Soup Dumplings.

Matt: Okay.

Tara: Chicken Tikka Masala.

Matt: Hmm.

Tara: By that, we honestly don't know if customers meant the one in the freezer case...

Matt: Or the refrigerated one. Gosh.

Tara: ... or the refrigerated one. Because they're both delicious. Butternut Squash Mac and Cheese...

Matt: Okay.

Tara: ... which we know is only available seasonally. It's not a year-round product. And Steamed Chicken Soup Dumplings.

Matt: Wow. Soup dumplings.

Tara: Soup dumplings for the win. In both flavors, they both made the top five lunch and dinner.

Matt: Amazing.

Tara: Have you ever made a whole meal out of a package of soup dumplings? I have.

Matt: I have not.

Tara: Yeah. I've made that a whole meal and maybe I shouldn't admit to it but eaten all six in a package just by myself. Really good. It's a good dinner.

Matt: Suddenly, I'm hungry.

Tara: I know, right? And thirsty. Hey, let's announce our winner in the Beverage Category.

[Timpani roll.]

Matt: I'm a little confused about this one. I think it's because we've combined some products for tabulation, scorekeeping purposes.

Tara: Right. It's simple, really. We counted the three ciders together and all the apple juices together and the three sparkling lemonades together, and we combined the votes for the two tangerine juices.

Matt: I think the Trader Joe's drummer is getting a blister.

[Rimshot. Light upbeat music begins.]]

Tara: Yeah. I want to explain this a little bit because it sounds kind of messy.

Matt: Hence, my confusion.

Tara: The Customer Choice Awards voting happens on a form that you fill out. For each category, there is a blank space for you to put your favorite product. Sometimes we have multiple products with similar or almost identical names. If a customer puts in Apple Cider, we're not 100% sure which apple cider they're talking about. It could be the Sparkling Cider. It could be a Honeycrisp Cider. It could be the Spiced Cider. It could just be straight up Apple Cider. It could be any of the above. It could be all of the above. It could be one very specific one for you.

Matt: Which one won?

[Timpani roll.]

Tara: Hey, the Apple Ciders won.

[Crowd applause.]

Tara: That includes the 64 ounce Apple Cider, our Spiced Cider, and Trader Joe's Honeycrisp Apple Cider.

Matt: Sorry, Apple Juice, ciders took the day.

[Light upbeat music begins.]

Tara: But Apple Juices were number two.

Matt: Hmm. What?

Tara: Triple Ginger Brew did well. So did all those Sparkling Lemonades that I love and the Tangerine Juice.

Matt: Whew. Is it time for produce?

Tara: It is always time for produce.

Matt: Good.

[Timpani roll.]

Matt: The Customer Choice Award for Produce goes to...oh, they're so cute...Teeny Tiny Avocados.

[Crowd applause.]

Tara: Number two is Gone Bananas!

[Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: Wait.

Matt: That's...

Tara: What?

Matt: The frozen product?

Tara: I guess people like their bananas with chocolate.

Matt: What's interesting is we say, "What's your favorite produce product?"

Tara: Right.

Matt: Bananas are produce.

Tara: These just happen to be in the freezer case and covered with chocolate. So as a winner in the Produce Category, it is kind of bananas, but there you have it. The customers have spoken.

Matt: Hey, reflective of your votes, right?

Tara: Yep. Going through the list of the top five: Blueberries, Honeycrisp Apples, and Persian Cucumbers.

Matt: Wait a minute. I have a bit of a gripe here. If we combined all the apple juices together and apple ciders together, why didn't we combine all apples together?

Tara: Matt, people voted specifically for Honeycrisp Apples here. So there was specificity in the vote. If people had just put apples, then that's a different tally. But Honeycrisp Apples are so popular that they rise to the top all by themselves.

Matt: Okay. Okay. I'm not trying to cause trouble. I just take these awards very seriously.

Tara: Well, I think you need a snack.

Matt: Yeah. Yeah, I might be a little hangry.

Tara: I'm going to give you the four runners up in the Snack Category. Let's see if you can guess the winner.

Matt: Process of elimination?

[Music transition.]

Tara: Yep. Number five, World's Puffiest White Cheddar Corn Puffs.

Matt: Okay.

Tara: Number four, Patio Potato Chips.

Matt: Yeah, they're pretty good in the living room too.

Tara: Number three, Horseradish and Chive Ridge Cut Potato Chips.

Matt: Mm-hmm.

Tara: Number two, Organic Elote Corn Chip Dippers.

Matt: Okay. If we know that number one is not the Chili and Lime Flavored Rolled Corn Tortilla Chips because they're now in the Hall of Fame, hmm...

[Timpani roll.]

Matt: Could number one in the Snack Category be...Garlic Butter Potato Chips?

[Ding. Crowd applause.]

Tara: Very good guess.

Matt: It's right here on this piece of paper in front of me. See? It's right there.

[Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: Okay. Well, you cheated. What's next? Are you ready for the Appetizers Category?

Matt: What's the difference between snacks and appetizers?

Tara: What is the difference? Appetizers begin your dinner. Snacks spoil your dinner.

[Rimshot.]

Tara: Spoken like a true mom.

[Timpani roll.]

Tara: The Customer Choice Award for Favorite Appetizer is...Spinach and Artichoke Dip.

[Crowd applause.]

Matt: You know, I get it. I love it. But I love some of the other appetizers that got a lot of votes too.

[Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: Me too. The Jalapeño and Cream Cheese Wontons. They're amazing. The Vegetable Bird's Nest. We've had those for like two decades. Those...

Matt: I think they were saved by the advent and prevalence of air fryers.

Tara: Maybe you're right, but they're so good and they've been good for that entire time that they've lived in our freezer case. I love that product. Also, the Parmesan Pastry Pups.

Matt: A classic.

Tara: Those have been around for nearly as long, I think, as the Vegetable Bird's Nests. Rounding things out here is the Greek Spanakopita. And I want to call this out. We call that Greek Spanakopita and not just Spanakopita because it's actually from Greece.

Matt: The Spanakopita also won for most syllables in a performance.

Tara: Next up, say, "Cheese."

Matt: Cheese. It's my favorite category. I have a long list of favorites, but among them, the English Cheddar with Caramelized Onions. I love the Saint André Triple Crème Brie, the Syrah Soaked Toscano Cheese Spread.

Tara: Those are actually the runner ups. Or is it runners up?

Matt: Runners up?

Tara: Yeah, it's in the script. It's...(laughs)

Matt: Oh, what a great delivery.

Tara: (laughs) Thank you.

Matt: Yes.

Tara: I did the faraway look and everything. I did.

Matt: It's in the running, nonetheless.

Tara: Along with one other runner up, the Cheese Shopping Bag.

Matt: Whoa, but you can't eat that.

Tara: You cannot eat that. You've seen that cheese bag because your team designed the cheese bag.

Matt: Yeah.

Tara: It's pretty cool.

Matt: It's very cool.

Tara: It's pretty cool. It says...

Matt: I like the bag a lot.

Tara: ... "The Cheese Experience" on it.

Matt: That's right because cheese is an experience.

Tara: It is an experience.

[Timpani roll.]

Tara: The Customer Choice Award for Favorite Cheese is...Goat Cheese.

[Crowd applause.]

Matt: Which one? All of them?

Tara: Well-

Matt: Some of them?

[Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: I think we're in an apple cider situation.

Matt: We...

Tara: (laughs) I think that people said, "Goat Cheese." They didn't specify.

Matt: All right, so Goat Cheese and a Cheese Bag.

Tara: There you go. And you could get Goat Cheese and put it in a Cheese Bag. Let's move on to other products you can't eat. How about that?

Matt: Great.

Tara: How's that for a segue? Some of the products you can't eat fall into the Bath, Body, and Home Category.

Matt: Okay.

Tara: It's a category we kind of just created for the Customer Choice Awards, by the way.

Matt: Well, these things deserve an award. They deserve their own category because customers love these products.

[Timpani roll.]

Matt: Okay. This year's winner as the Customer Favorite in Bath, Body, and Home is...Brazil Nut Body Butter.

[Crowd applause.]

Tara: This is not a surprise, right?

Matt: It's really not a surprise.

[Light upbeat music begins.]

Tara: It's a perennial favorite. It started off as a super, super limited item. Every year we've increased how much of it we have in the store and customers really love it. But other popular products in the store that got a lot of votes and rounded out the top five were our Ultra Moisturizing Hand Cream.

Matt: A classic.

Tara: And then the Daily Facial Sunscreen, the SPF 40, that's a huge hit.

Matt: Mm-hmm.

Tara: The Coconut Body Butter, which I think might have been the first big-hit body butter that we had.

Matt: Yeah. Yeah, it was.

Tara: Right?

Matt: Yep.

Tara: Still a major, big, popular product. And then rounding out the top five is the Cedar Balsam Candle, which again is only available during the winter holiday season...

Matt: Yeah.

Tara: ... time of year. And it's a big favorite every year.

Matt: I don't mean to be difficult, but I'm wondering, is it the smaller, silver tin version or the larger, silverish, almost mercury glass-style container?

Tara: So I'm going to go back and say yet again, I think this is another apple cider situation.

Matt: Okay.

Tara: Or I could say it's a goat cheese situation. People said, "Cedar Balsam Candle." It could be either of those things. I love that scent no matter how you deliver it to me.

Matt: As long as it's a candle.

Tara: That might it.

Matt: That cedar balsam. All right. Are we there yet?

Tara: Almost.

Matt: We're getting close, right?

Tara: Almost. One more category and then we'll reveal this year's overall winner.

Matt: And then don't forget our self-indulgent award for our podcast.

Tara: I won't forget, but right now it's time for our Customer's Favorite Sweet Treat.

Matt: Now, they must have had a hard time choosing this one.

Tara: Yeah. I would imagine they had to try lots of them just to figure out their favorite in the moment.

Matt: Okay. So I'm thinking kind of like the Almond Kringle Pastry or Chocolate Hold The Cone! Mini Ice Cream Cones. Not to be confused with the Chocolate Chip Hold The Cone! Mini Ice Cream Cones or the Mint Chip Ice Cream.

Tara: Not to be confused. That is the rest of the top five. Here's number one.

Matt: Okay.

[Timpani roll.]

Matt: Sublime Ice Cream Sandwiches.

Tara: Delicious.

[Crowd applause.]

Tara: All the time. Every single time. They won last year also.

Matt: I had a feeling about that. I was going to ask.

Tara: They won the year before that also, but I don't believe they are Hall of Fame eligible yet.

[Light upbeat music begins.]

Matt: They're starting to smell like one though.

Tara: I think they're getting close, but I don't believe they've won five years. Congratulations, Sublime Ice Cream Sandwiches. Okay, Matt. I'm ready. Are you ready?

Matt: I was, as they say, born ready.

[Transition to upbeat awards music.]

Tara: It is time to unveil this year's overall winner in the 17th Annual Trader Joe's Customer Choice Awards.

Matt: I think we're going to need a bigger drum roll for this one.

[BIG timpani roll.]

Tara: Our Customer's Overall Favorite for 2026 is...

Matt: What?

Tara: Steamed Pork and Ginger Soup Dumplings.

[Crowd applause. Grand orchestra award music begins.]]

Matt: Well, the prediction markets were way, way off.

Tara: Have you eaten these dumplings recently?

Matt: I have eaten these dumplings.

Tara: So we talked about these dumplings earlier in this episode because they showed up as number two in the Lunch and Dinner Category. And they're fantastic. You don't have to do much. You cut off a corner of the outer package, and you pop them in the microwave for less than a minute for the whole package and they're done and they're perfect.

[Crowd applause.]

Matt: The broth inside, rich, consistently flavorful. I mean, it's really not a surprise that these are customers' favorite.

Tara: Let's mention the other top favorites in the Overall Category.

Matt: Okay. Also making the cut, Butternut Squash Mac and Cheese, Steamed Chicken Soup Dumplings, the counterpart to the pork dumplings, Sourdough Bread, kind of sounds like a cider situation to me, and Butter Chicken with Basmati Rice.

[Crowd applause.]

Matt: What a great showing for the Frozen Category.

Tara: And if you might remember that one also won in the Lunch and Dinner Category. This whole Customer Choice Awards experience, you see that our customers really have passion for the products that they love across categories, across the store, and honestly, across this awards show.

Matt: You know, that got me thinking a little bit about, so why do we even do these awards? I mean, if customers are that consistent, why have an awards show?

Tara: Oh, it's to keep my department really busy right after the holidays.

Matt: You know maybe that and our crew members get to make a lot of product recommendations all the time and this is an opportunity. It's really our chance to hear from you customers directly what's on your mind, what's on your favorite list. And we hope that everyone else will check out your favorites. They are your favorites for a reason.

Tara: Very well said. And hey, that's our podcast.

Matt: Yeah but wait a minute. We still have *our* award.

Tara: Oh, right.

Matt: And now the moment we've all...

[Buzzer.]

Matt: Well, the moment I've been waiting for.

[Fanfare music begins.]

Matt: Congratulations to this podcast because this is the 100th episode.

[Crowd applause.]

Tara: Crazy. And that's not even counting our ICYMI Mini Episodes or our Mini Wine Club Episodes.

Matt: Now, I know what you're thinking.

Tara: That this is the most self-indulgent thing we've ever done?

Matt: That, and that after 100 episodes, we are out of ideas for podcast topics and that there will be no more.

Tara: Au contraire, mon frère. We have been brainstorming.

Matt: And there are no bad ideas in a brainstorm.

Tara: Here are a few of the episodes you can look forward to in our next 100.

[Transition to upbeat music.]

Matt: How does Trader Joe's shrink avocados?

[Ding.]

Tara: Why you forget to bring your shopping bag in from the car.

[Ding.]

Matt: Or why you think that you're just here for one thing and you don't need a bag.

[Ding.]

Tara: Really bad ideas for Trader Joe's greeting cards.

[Ding.]

Matt: Like, "Congratulations, you found a parking spot."

Tara: Or, "Thinking of you, your favorite product has been discontinued."

[Ding.]

Matt: Tips from Tetris on how to fill your freezer.

[Ding.]

Tara: Shelves that empty the fastest.

[Ding.]

Matt: What your choice of nuts reveals about your personality.

[Ding.]

Tara: And finding the courage to try a new dip when you already have two that you love.

[Ding.]

Matt: You won't want to miss episodes like these.

[Transition to closing music.]

Tara: Better hit that free subscribe or follow button.

Matt: It is free and worth every penny.

Tara: Until next time, thanks for listening.

Matt: And thanks for listening to all 100 episodes.

Tara: If someone has, they should get an award.