

Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript — Episode 113: Trader Joe's Goes Viral

[Fast upbeat music begins.]

Matt: I've been thinking, and there are just some things I do not understand.

Tara: Like those people who can eat only one or two chicken soup dumplings and not the whole package?

Matt: No, that's impossible. I'm thinking about viral social media.

Tara: You mean like Balloon Boy?

Matt: Yes, Balloon Boy or that person in London who posts a picture of an egg and then breaks some kind of world record for social media likes.

Tara: That actually worked?

Matt: Yeah, 32 million likes. I don't understand what makes something go viral.

Tara: Listen, I think all of those people are trying way too hard, because all you really have to do is post a great hack using a Trader Joe's product.

Matt: Oh, like using Trader Joe's Organic Maple Butter to make a flavored latte?

Tara: Yes.

Matt: Or using focaccia to make a sandwich.

Tara: Of course, these have already been done and actually Kathleen is going to join us today to share a bunch more with us.

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

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

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

Matt: I'm Matt Sloan, the culture and innovation guy at Trader Joe's. Hey, is Kathleen ready?

Kathleen: Yes, I have lots of hacks that have gone, or will go, viral.

Tara: We might create some viral moments here.

Matt: All right, I'm glad I got my flu shot.

Tara: Kathleen, as listeners of this podcast know, you are the person who is primarily responsible for recipe development on [traderjoes.com](https://www.traderjoes.com).

Kathleen: Yes.

Tara: Which is pretty darn cool.

Kathleen: The coolest.

Tara: Let's talk about a few things that have taken the internet by storm in the last several months.

[Theme music fades out and light upbeat music begins.]

Matt: Are we talking only about Trader Joe's related topics or the larger worldwide world web world of stuff that broke the internet?

Tara: That was like a W-W-W-W.

Matt: W-W-W-W.W-W-W-W.

Tara: Wow. (laughs) Things that won't make it to the final edit. I think we're talking about Trader Joe's specific things, because there's so much of it. If you make a great post that includes a really cool way to use a Trader Joe's product, you're going to "blow up" on social media.

Kathleen: I think you're giving away the secret recipe to going viral.

Tara: Is it a recipe or is it a hack? It's just like with making food. Is it a recipe or is it a hack?

Matt: I think it's dependent upon the number of ingredients and steps.

Tara: Okay.

Matt: There's some tipping point, right?

Tara: You sent me some really cool things. The first one involves coffee.

Kathleen: Baristas beware; Trader Joe's customers are making their fancy lattes at home.

Tara: You need fancy equipment to make these fancy lattes?

Kathleen: No.

Tara: Okay.

Kathleen: Take yourself to Trader Joe's, the spreads section, the jams, the preserves. Customers are taking their favorite spreads, jams, some seasonal butters like the Pumpkin Butter that was here for fall or the Maple Butter that was available. Instead of using a special coffee syrup that you'd have to buy at a specialty store for a ton of money, customers are using these to flavor their coffees.

Matt: Oh, so this is the grape jelly latte that everyone's talking about.

Tara: What? You're making that up.

Matt: I'm trying to go viral. Okay?

Tara: (laughs)

Kathleen: Honestly though.

Tara: Someone's going to try that.

Matt: I hope so.

Kathleen: A PB&J latte?

Matt: A PB&J latte kids, let's do this.

Tara: You left out an important...

Matt: Great with a glass of milk.

Kathleen: Well, what's interesting is so many of these lattes are very milk heavy, so it's really...

Tara: All lattes are very milk heavy.

Kathleen: Well, it's just shocking to watch.

Tara: You just don't see it.

Kathleen: Yes, it's shocking to watch.

Tara: When you get a latte at a coffee shop, there is a shot or maybe two of espresso at the bottom of that latte. The rest of it is milk, basically.

Kathleen: That's a wonderful canvas for all these different flavors of jams, spreads, all these neat flavors that are getting into these coffee drinks.

Matt: Hmmm.

[Music transition.]

Tara: This fall we've seen the pumpkin butter latte happen, which is just a riff on a pumpkin spice latte, but it uses our pumpkin butter instead of a pumpkin flavored syrup.

Kathleen: What's extra cool about using the pumpkin butter is you get to do the fun swirl in the glass that you're using. If you're doing an iced coffee, you swirl it, so the flavor just keeps getting into your drink as you continue to sip. It's not all at the bottom or it's not all through your straw in the first drink.

Matt: What's the degree of difficulty on this swirl? I'm intrigued. I can picture it, but it sounds difficult. It sounds hard to do.

Kathleen: It seems a lot of people can do it on the internet, so I feel like the learning curve is there for everybody.

Tara: The internet doesn't line that.

Matt: It's true, or not.

Tara: (laughs) Is a latte using our new Granola Butter, have you seen that one?

Kathleen: I have not.

Tara: But I bet that would be good, right?

Kathleen: Akin to Matt's PB&J idea?

Matt: Yeah.

Kathleen: Granola Butter?

Tara: Or Cookie Butter would be great. If you take our Cookie Butter and you put some in a little bowl and microwave it for just a few seconds, it gets liquidy enough.

Matt: That's helpful because I was wondering how does that get blended?

Tara: It works. Yeah, maybe put some in a little ramekin and heat it for eight seconds or so in the microwave. It does get to a consistency where you can pour it.

Kathleen: Or do a fancy drizzle at the end. That's another...

Tara: Or drizzle the inside of the glass the same way.

Matt: Maybe on top of some foam. Maybe we could do some foam.

Kathleen: Some cold foam.

Tara: We got some cold foams all the time. This is a cool thing. I've seen people making them in mason jars, in a frother.

Matt: Finally, something to do with all those mason jars everybody got.

Tara: I use them for overnight oats all the time.

Matt: Well, that's good. I'm glad you do.

Tara: That's my thing.

Kathleen: You could probably use the exact same ingredients for your fancy latte as for your overnight oats. You're finding dual purpose, so much value in these spreads. What a morning full of Granola Butter.

Tara: I'm looking forward to finding more of these on the always truthful internet. People still want the fancy coffees, but they don't want to spend a lot of money on a fancy coffee drink every day. At Trader Joe's, you can make yourself a fancy coffee for a fraction of the price it would cost if you went out and had someone else make it for you.

Matt: It's a lot of time to whip one of these things up, but if you're using a cold brew concentrate or a ready to drink coffee, then time saved.

Kathleen: And like we said, money as well.

Matt: Yeah.

[Music transition.]

Tara: The next one was employing our focaccia that's found in the bakery section of our store.

Kathleen: I'm obsessed with this. I don't think it's a hack. We're using bread for bread here, but people are really excited to make a big old sandwich using our focaccia bread.

Tara: What are they doing with it?

Kathleen: Focaccia in its nature is thick, it's fluffy. You could eat it as a snack, but in this purpose you are slicing it in half through, so you have two...

Matt: Giant pieces of bread.

Kathleen: Two giant thinner pieces of bread.

Tara: Slicing it long ways?

Kathleen: Long ways, yes.

Tara: So that you get two halves that are both the same length of the original bread?

Kathleen: Correct.

Matt: If you lay the focaccia on the cutting board and you cut parallel to the cutting board and the counter on which it sits, watching where all hands and fingers are at all times.

Tara: Yes. Thank you. We're trying to explain a visual thing. You slice the focaccia in half, lengthwise?

Kathleen: Yes.

Matt: What do you think the magic is here? That we've learned that we can slice focaccia or just how pillowy and delicious it is for sandwiches?

Kathleen: Once you make this sandwich and you see how gigantic it is, how filled of stuff it is.

Matt: How many people does this giant sandwich serve?

Kathleen: On the internet, it's one hungry person.

Matt: One hungry guy.

Kathleen: However, it seems like this is a very shareable sandwich.

Tara: Okay. What are we putting inside of it? Anything?

Kathleen: I would say, yes, you can. However, the internet has told me that the general things that you're adding to it are a layer of pesto on the bottom. We have a few different ones, so choose your favorite pesto. Nice thick layer on the bottom of your sandwich. Then you add arugula, some more greens. This is a healthy sandwich maybe. Wait.

Matt: We are.

Kathleen: Deli meats. All of your favorite deli meats. The prosciutto, the salami, the mortadella.

Tara: We're going Italian style deli sandwich.

Kathleen: But also don't let this description limit you. This sandwich is going to be whatever you want it to be by the time you get to Trader Joe's to get the stuff.

Tara: It's just really opening up a new possibility for what you might do with this big slab of focaccia that people love already, but this is just a new way to use it.

Kathleen: It also just seems intuitive that when you get this piece of bread, this is what you would want to do with it.

Matt: Make a giant sandwich.

Tara: I think after making the gigantic sandwich, I would put it in a panini press or just on a griddle and heat it up a little bit because I like a crunchy, warmer sandwich. There has to be some cheese involved and maybe some hot peppers or something.

Kathleen: Yes and yes. It is burrata, so you know this sandwich is elegant.

Tara: Okay.

Matt: And messy.

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: Elegantly messy. I want to hack this too because this makes me think of small focaccia style sandwiches. Have you had those sandwich starters?

Tara: Mm-hmm.

Kathleen: Oh, yeah.

Matt: Those are like little focaccia guys.

Tara: Yeah. They're just like flatter focaccia.

Matt: Yeah, and they're already sliced.

Tara: Yeah, that's true.

Matt: You just make a tiny one while you're waiting for the gigantic focaccia sandwich.

Kathleen: An appetizer sandwich.

Matt: Yeah. Exactly. A warmup.

Tara: You're hacking the hacks here.

[Music transition.]

Tara: I've been seeing this on the internet for like a year and usually these things, they peak and then you never hear about them again. What people are doing with our frozen gyoza dumplings seems to still be at the peak a year later.

Kathleen: Well, that's because our dumplings are amazing.

Tara: They are.

Kathleen: We have such an array of dumplings and gyoza in the frozen section. I can eat a lot of dumplings standalone.

Tara: Same, same.

Kathleen: But if you put them in a sauce, you serve them over rice, now you're serving more than just one and you're really taking them further than you might otherwise.

Tara: Do you know about this, Matt?

Matt: Is this the gyoza lasagna?

Tara: No.

Matt: I thought we were here to go viral.

Kathleen: We talked about this.

Tara: You're just making this up as you go. Do you have an idea for what would make a gyoza lasagna?

Matt: Yeah, I do.

Tara: What would it be?

Matt: Well, I'd probably have a brothy thing instead of a tomato sauce.

Tara: Okay.

Matt: Almost like a consommé. You start with bone broth, and you might want to thicken that up and then maybe sauté a bunch of leeks and onions and then just pour the whole thing together and bake it off. Hopefully something happens where you can serve it and it's not just a hot pan of soup, which would be okay too.

Tara: It sounds like a hot pan of soup.

Matt: Hot pan of soup.

Kathleen: It definitely does. I think that's a ladle situation, not a spatula.

Tara: (laughs) It sounds like a hot pan of soup, but a lasagna involves layering.

Matt: Of gyoza.

Tara: You're just putting piles of gyoza on top of each other and baking them?

Matt: Yeah, think of the cross section. This thing's going to look great.

Tara: All right. I'm not sure I'm convinced, but I am convinced about the dumpling bake that has gone viral. I think if you search Trader Joe's dumpling bake anywhere on the internet, you're going to get a whole bunch of very similar recipes involving a sauce from Trader Joe's, a specific version of dumpling. Some people use chicken, some people use veggie, some people use pork, some people use shrimp.

Matt: Is anyone throwing a bunch of spinach? I think this is screaming for spinach or some other greens.

Tara: Yeah, yes. There's absolutely spinach or bok choy.

Matt: Yeah, bok choy, cabbage, something like that would be delicious.

Tara: Usually, a curry and soyaki, right?

Kathleen: Yeah. Coconut milk, Thai red curry sauce, minced garlic, crunchy chili onion to serve, so generally...

Matt: There's so much flavor going on. It sounds like overload flavor.

Tara: Have you not had this?

Matt: I don't think I've had this. I've been busy on the gyoza lasagna front.

Tara: (laughs) We should bake one up one afternoon just for fun, and by we, I mean you. (laughs)

Kathleen: I can do that. Serve it over rice and then because you really want to capture all the brothiness.

Matt: Okay.

Tara: Yeah.

Kathleen: Put it over rice so you get all that flavor and then...

Tara: It's a meal.

Kathleen: ... it's a meal.

Matt: Torch the top or put it under the broiler or does it just depend?

Tara: You can at the end.

Kathleen: Generally, people are not doing that. One less thing to do. The whole thing gets covered when it bakes, so the dumplings steam. Then when you remove it, everything is just soft and warm.

Matt: Oh, I like a good gratinée kind of top, like a little scorching situation.

Kathleen: To each their own, Matt.

Matt: All right.

Kathleen: Post that version.

Matt: Well, and I'll just go viral with it.

Tara: He's desperate here. Can you tell?

Matt: The scorch. The next one involves a breakfast sandwich using a very specific product.

Kathleen: Dutch Griddle Cakes.

Tara: Which are like thick, fluffy pancakes.

Kathleen: Yes. They're in our frozen section. They're thick and you're like, "Is it a pancake? Is it a bread?"

Tara: Both.

[Music transition.]

Matt: They're somewhere between pancake and crumpet. They're both light and substantial at the same time.

Tara: I want to be fair. There is a fast food chain that has a breakfast sandwich that uses a similar construction.

Kathleen: Ah!

Tara: Using the Dutch Griddle Cake pancakey things as a bread and then puts the fillings inside.

Matt: We're using two?

Tara: Oh, yeah.

Matt: Or are we using three? We're going for a triple-decker?

Kathleen: Using two. One is the top and one is the bottom of the sandwich.

Matt: That's helpful.

Kathleen: Not slicing them in half.

Matt: Because then there would be four. I'm keeping up, folks.

Kathleen: If you're holding the sandwich and you bite into it's not falling apart.

Matt: Helpful as well. Great.

Tara: Shout out to Store 534 in Rochester, New York. Actually submitted a recipe with this idea for the store recipe contest.

Kathleen: Yes, the image they submitted with their recipe was just someone having their lunch at Trader Joe's in the break room.

Tara: Their version of it looked so delicious and also like something I would never be able to get my mouth around, because it was two griddle cakes and one of our egg bites and cheese and chicken breakfast sausage patties. It's so tall and I thought you have to be a Yeti to get your mouth on that.

Matt: A regular Dagwood situation.

Tara: Yeah, fantastic looking.

[Music transition.]

Kathleen: Cool thing about Trader Joe's packs that go viral is that our products are so cool that they're inspiring people to use them in creative different ways. People are just eating these and going, "Oh, I could do something else with them."

Tara: For example?

Kathleen: Our Cheddar Rocket Crackers in the snack section, delicious.

Matt: So snacky.

Kathleen: But if you crush them up, you can actually use them as a breading for chicken cutlets or for fish or something in place of breadcrumbs.

Matt: Wow. I guess a cracker crumb crust is not a new idea, but a cheddar rocket crumb crust, I had not yet thought of that.

Tara: When I first moved to Los Angeles in the 1990s, there was a restaurant nearby that made tortilla crusted chicken breast, and I had never seen that before. It was very new to me at the time. I thought that was the coolest thing because it was breaded chicken, but it was

breaded with crushed tortilla chips. Now I want to go home, and I want to make cheddar rocket crusted chicken breast. That just sounds so good.

Kathleen: Yeah. If you already have them because they're already a snack you like, dual purpose.

Matt: Yeah, go for it.

Kathleen: Pretty cool.

Tara: Hey, that idea came to us from Store 209 in Woodland Hills, California. They are a previous winner of the store recipe contest.

[Music transition.]

Kathleen: Here's one that's just wild and I love it. This one is also a submission from our store recipe contest.

Tara: Oh, cool.

Kathleen: It uses our Norwegian Sourdough Rye Chips.

Tara: Oh.

Kathleen: Which are so yummy.

Tara: They really are.

Kathleen: So delicious. You're probably eating them either by themselves or with little cream cheese and salmon. While someone was taking a bite, they went, "Oh, you know how else this would be good? As a crust for a cheesecake."

Tara: Huh.

Matt: A savory cheesecake?

Kathleen: Store 163 in Kent, Washington, they used it as the crust for a Manhattan inspired cheesecake, the cocktail.

Tara: Really?

Kathleen: Take your rye whiskey, translate it to rye cracker crust, and we're on our way to a cheesecake, so cool.

Tara: Huh. This sounds very strange and weird and potentially delicious.

Matt: It's right down the line of the salty sweet fascination that folks have nowadays though, because that is a salty snack in the best way.

Kathleen: Mm-hmm.

Matt: It's going to be a real crunchy, salty crust.

Tara: Yeah.

[Music transition.]

Matt: In keeping with our social media driven frame of mind, let's go for some speed scrolling, a speed round of other amazing ideas that maybe are or should be or will be going viral. What have you got?

[Clock ticking.]

Kathleen: Our Lobster Bisque Soup. Use it as a pasta sauce.

[Ding.]

Matt: Nice.

Tara: Just as is?

Kathleen: As is. Our sheet cakes. We have a bunch of them throughout the year. Use those to make a multi-tiered cake.

Tara: Like a layer cake?

[Ding.]

Kathleen: Like a layer cake. Takes 10 minutes, flavor them with whatever you want, and happy birthday to you.

Tara: Okay, great.

Kathleen: Spicy Salmon Bowl.

Tara: Oh.

Kathleen: Take the lightly smoked salmon, mix it up with some mayo and sriracha, Spicy Salmon Bowl.

[Ding.]

Matt: Easy.

Kathleen: Way to go. How about potato tots in a cupcake tin or muffin tin?

Matt: Okay.

Kathleen: You bake them...

Tara: Yeah.

Kathleen: ...then you squish them down with a cup bottom. Now you have a little bit of...

Matt: Potato crusts.

[Ding.]

Kathleen: Yes. You can stuff whatever the heck you want.

Tara: You're talking like cheese and bacon and sour cream and chives and all that stuff?

Kathleen: That's what I'm talking about.

Tara: Okay, but you could put chili.

Matt: A baked potato bar, meaning the accoutrement, the toppings for a baked potato?

Kathleen: I would go to that bar.

Matt: Me too.

Tara: I would go to that bar. That would be fun.

Kathleen: Or a pizza filled potato tot cup. You're turning the potato tots into a cup, fill them and find what you want to fill them with.

Matt: That's fun.

Tara: I saw one the other day that I thought was really cool. It was a hack, making a chicken pot pie out of, I think it was three ingredients from Trader Joe's.

Matt: Our Chicken Pot Pie.

Tara: No.

Matt: Oh, sorry.

Tara: It was the rotisserie chicken that we have in our refrigerated case.

Matt: The shredded chicken.

Tara: The shredded one.

Matt: Okay.

Tara: Unexpected Cheddar and Broccoli Soup, and our biscuits in a tube. You just combine the chicken and the soup, and you put the biscuits on top and you bake the whole thing.

Matt: It's like a cheddar chicken cobbler.

Tara: Yum.

Matt: Lots of soups being used to other purposes here. I like this. Soups aren't just for slurping.

Tara: Soups always serve a higher purpose. I'm just saying.

Matt: I like soup.

Kathleen: Words to live by.

Tara: Kathleen, thank you as always for joining us. I'm starving now, and I will blame you entirely.

Kathleen: I blame the internet.

Matt: As we should.

[Transition to closing music.]

Tara: You know, one thing I want to point out is that Trader Joe's doesn't actually work with online influencers or creators or really anyone outside Trader Joe's.

Matt: So all those viral photos and the videos and the recipes and the hacks that we see on the socials, they're really just from folks out there who love Trader Joe's stuff.

Tara: Well, I can't speak to their motivations actually, but they do seem to love Trader Joe's.

Matt: And they just know that posting about their favorite Trader Joe's things, their favorite Trader Joe's products, it'll just get attention?

Tara: Yeah, probably. And then those things take off and then suddenly there are hundreds of videos of people making the viral dumpling bake. And honestly, I have no idea where any of these ideas came from in the first place.

Matt: Well, I don't either, but I do know it all makes me hungry and I want to try that dumpling bake.

Tara: And speaking of going viral, we hope you'll like and share this podcast. To make sure you get more episodes, 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.

[Music ends.]