

Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript — Episode 95: Invasion of the Trader Joe's Gummies

[Eerie music begins.]

Matt: Hey, did you ever see *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*? I mean the version with Donald Sutherland?

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: Do you remember that weird sound that he made?

Tara: Yeah, I loved that movie, but that scream, that was horrifying. Wait, why do you ask?

Matt: Well, first it's Halloween time, and second, because at my house, when I bring home a bag of Trader Joe's Halloween Gummies, or actually any of our gummies, the gummies disappear quickly. It's kind of like *Invasion of the Gummy Snatchers*.

Tara: And do you make that sound when you catch them?

Matt: I mean, if I ever do, I will.

Tara: We have Category Manager Alison here, to tell us everything we could ever possibly want to know about gummies.

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 and phrases and clauses.

Matt: And I'm Matt Sloan, the culture and innovation guy at Trader Joe's.

Tara: Alison, welcome back to *Inside Trader Joe's*.

Alison: Thank you for having me.

Tara: There's no reason to be paranoid, but it does seem like we are being invaded by gummies.

Matt: They're everywhere. I mean, they are everywhere.

Tara: Why? Why so many gummies?

Alison: They're becoming more popular. I have a few theories. I think some of it has to do with technology.

Tara: Really?

Alison: Well, you can get more into gummies. There's a lot more use with health benefits and for melatonin and all that kind of Jimmy Jam, but also-

Tara: Okay, but we're not doing that.

Alison: No, no, we're not doing that (laughs).

Tara: We're selling candy.

Alison: But flavors are better. Technology's better with shapes. And you can get more intricate and more layers that are more fun and interesting.

[Music transition to light upbeat music.]

Alison: There's sushi gummy out there.

Tara: I would say even the colors are better.

Matt: I'm just going to let that settle for a moment.

Alison: Sushi gummies?

Matt: Looks like? Tastes like?

Alison: Looks like.

Tara: Tastes like would be very, very weird.

Alison: No. I mean, there might be some that tastes like out there because they do crazy things with flavors now, but there are gummies that look like sushi, and it's very intricately put together. It's really fun. I've seen gummy tacos. I've seen gummy noodles.

Matt: Gummy burgers.

Alison: Yes, gummy burgers.

Matt: Little burgers.

Tara: Yes.

Matt: Might look like little patties from an underwater snack shack you might visit maybe.

Tara: I think even the colors have improved dramatically.

Matt: I think there's something going on with the texture. People like this chewy thing. It's maybe why mochi is gaining in popularity. It's maybe why boba was a thing, maybe it's still a thing. The texture feels like something that's different.

Alison: I think a word for the texture that maybe doesn't sound so appetizing, but I think perfectly describes it, is elasticity.

Tara: Mm-hmm.

Alison: That kind of more elastic, chewy texture. And that's how we know it's a gummy, where a jelly bean is not a gummy because it has the hard candy shell on the outside and it doesn't have that elasticity. It's more like a fruit gel or something. You just bite into it.

Matt: Well, you heard it here first folks.

Tara: Jelly beans, not gummies.

Matt: Not gummies.

Tara: There's a little game that could be played. Is it a gummy?

[Music transition.]

Tara: Taking a really current popular product on our shelves, the Strawberry Sour Belts.

Alison: Yes.

Tara: To me, those are gummy.

Alison: Those are gummy to me as well.

Tara: But they're not technically gummies, right? Are they?

Alison: We don't call them gummies on the package. I would put them in the gummy family, again because I think that elasticity, that kind of texture is there.

Matt: Are those belts, gummies?

Alison: I think if you made the sour belts five times as thick as they are, it would be more gummy.

Matt: Sour like the center cut. It would be like a filet mignon.

Alison: Yeah, exactly.

Tara: You sent us a video yesterday of the Strawberry Sour Belts being put into their container, and I think I watched it 10 times. I said it was mesmerizing, and I meant it.

Alison: It's very aerobatic. Not aromatic.

Tara: Acrobatic?

Alison: Acrobatic. (laughs) Oh my God. Too many gummies. I'm eating too many gummies.

Matt: First syllable sounds like.

Tara: It sounds like. Yeah, we figured it out. Did you watch the video, the little snippet?

Matt: I did, many times. And to me it looked like if you had five children and it was bedtime for all of them at the same time and you were tucking them into bed, tucking them into bed, add infinitum.

Tara: (laughs)

Alison: Yeah, it looked like an old Looney Tunes video or something. Yeah, pretty cool.

Matt: Yeah. I shared it with folks.

Alison: Good.

Tara: I was talking to a friend just last week; she just could not stop raving about the Sour Strawberry Belts. She's like, "When are they coming back?" I said, "Oh, they're back."

Alison: Yeah.

Tara: The joy on her face when I told her.

Alison: We gave them out to everyone in the office. And then I had gotten some more and asked a few people, "Oh, do you want another one?" "Don't give me that. I will just eat the whole thing. Don't put that on my desk."

Tara: (laughs) That's a good problem for us to have.

Alison: Yes.

Matt: You have a strategy. You are the category manager for candy. And candy is of course chocolate bars or peanut butter cups, those things that people love, but it's other stuff too. And you have been known to wax strategically about plans to expand subcategories within candy. And gummies, we have so many gummies right now because people love gummies. What brought that about?

Alison: Again, with the advancements in gummies, the range has expanded. I think there are new gummies with different flavors or different colors, different textures using pectin. And so the gummies can be vegan.

Tara: So tell us about that because you might not have any idea what's in a gummy. It's candy, it's sweet, it's delicious. But most gummies traditionally are made with...

Alison: Gelatin.

Tara: Which comes from?

Alison: Animals.

Tara: Okay.

Alison: I think originally gum Arabic was used in the original, when the gummies were invented in the 1920s, and that's why they're called gummies...gum Arabic. Because of technology and advancements changed over to gelatin. And then I don't know the exact date when pectin started to be used, but it is more advanced. In fact, one of our suppliers use gelatin and pectin. And then a few years ago they went to all pectin. They're a full vegan company now,

and their gummies are amazing, delicious and gummies are generally very allergen friendly, not being made in a facility with a lot of shellfish and nuts and things like that so...

Matt: "Hey, Tony, you want to lay off the shrimp for a minute and get back on the gummies?"

Alison: (laughs) Yeah, no mustard. There's not a lot of...

Tara: I'm going back to sushi gummies and thinking maybe...

Alison: Yeah.

Matt: A wasabi shrimp gummy would be cool looking.

Alison: Yeah, there are definitely a lot of crazy flavors out there. There's a lot more spicy gummies. With everyone getting more fun and innovative, especially us with candy in general, but in the gummy world, there's a lot more people want to try and experiment with. Mango gummies with the spice on it, and gummies infused with things. There's gummies infused with alcohol. There's gummies, you know...

Matt: All the vices come together.

Alison: So you can put anything in a gummy.

[Music transition.]

Tara: The one that we talked about recently on our Fall Shopping List Episode was the apple, what is it called?

Matt: The Juicy Apple Gummies.

Alison: Juicy Apple.

Tara: The Juicy Apple Gummies. That one I think is so great because we used to have something called Gummy Tummies, and we haven't had them for a number of years. But there are still a lot of Trader Joe's customers who are like, "Bring back the Gummy Tummies." And this is sort of the closest we've come.

Alison: I have met those people.

Tara: (laughs)

Alison: Whenever I tell people what I do, they have their opinions about the candy category. And I've had more than a few people say, "Gummy Tummies, what happened?"

Tara: Yeah.

Alison: So yes, we brought them back, and the Juicy Apple Gummies, and they've been very popular as far as I've seen and heard. So that's great. Yeah.

Tara: They're delicious. It feels like this new era of excitement about gummies at Trader Joe's started with Scandinavian Swimmers. Suddenly it's like everybody wants the Scandinavian Swimmers and we have the Sour Scandinavian Swimmers. But it feels like all the

other gummies that have come since we're kind of inspired by the success of the Scandinavian Swimmers and not the success of a Gummy Bear.

Alison: No?

Matt: Unless...I'm going to be contrarian. Here's a surprise. Unless you're a Milk Chocolate Covered Gummy Bear. And then it's like Milk Chocolate Covered Gummy Bears, are you kidding me?

Alison: Yes.

Matt: And people are snapping them up like crazy.

Alison: Yes, they're very back and very popular. Yep.

Tara: I'm not saying that that gummy bears are not a big thing, because our little teeny Tiny Gummy Bears are fantastic. I love them. The milk chocolate ones are great.

Alison: The Scandinavian Swimmers are definitely something special and hit a nerve with our customers. And I don't know if that's a negative.

Tara: They hit a good nerve. The happy nerve.

Alison: The gummy nerve with our customers. And we have had several iterations and there are the Xs & Os on the Valentine's Day and the Scandinavian Tidings at the holidays. That same texture, but different flavors and shapes. And we have the Sour Scandinavian Swimmers. Sour is really big right now. And in fact, our Sour Scandinavian Swimmers now consistently outsell our regular Scandinavian Swimmers, which is incredible. I mean, it's a big feat. That texture is very... The eating experience is really amazing and you don't have to chew as hard. And our customers love them.

Tara: We actually have a great video on our website and on our YouTube channel of the Scandinavian Swimmers being made.

[Music transition.]

Alison: My favorite part of that facility is when they mix them and it's like that ginormous vat of... It's like a swimming pool. It's like a swimming pool...

Matt: Congratulations.

Tara: Pun not intended and well received. Thank you very much.

Alison: ... of just millions of gummies being mixed together. So that's so fun. The way gummies are made is the base is heated and mixed together with the flavors and the colors and the gelatin and the sugar and all that. They have these trays of cornstarch. So if you imagine the texture of cornstarch, if you put your finger in, it's going to stay exactly what your finger looks like or a handprint or whatever. And so they have these, if you think of a pop socket thing.

Matt: Ostensibly it's like metal, maybe.

Alison: Yes. Yeah. Or whatever it is.

Matt: And it's in the shape of the gummy, and it's the positive space of the gummy. And it makes a negative space impression in the cornstarch.

Alison: Perfectly said yes.

Matt: And then nobody sneeze because you would mess up the mold.

Tara: And other things.

Matt: Okay. Sorry. No one is sneezing over the gummies.

Alison: Yes. We double check that over there.

Matt: Let's just clarify that. It's the whole reason to have this episode, is to make that point. So you make an impression in a tray full of cornstarch powder, then you very carefully... It's like hot lava gummy liquid.

Alison: Squirt them in there. So then it cools and then they just dump out the trays and then shake the gummies so all the excess cornstarch comes off and then they reuse that cornstarch. And then if there's sour stuff on the outside or chocolate on the outside, that's when they add it after that's been...

Matt: And I think you see that in the video that you mentioned, right?

Tara: You do. I'm going to make sure that we put a link to that video in the show notes for this episode because it's really cool.

Alison: I've never seen gummies in an industrial facility made any other way.

Matt: Any other way?

Alison: Yeah.

Matt: Wow. That is really neat.

[Music transition.]

Matt: Well, I'd like to introduce a controversial topic under the heading of foamy gummies. Most obviously expressed as a fried egg gummy. And there's a lot of feelings about foamy gummies or even more particularly about those fried egg gummies.

Tara: Really?

Matt: A lot of love, a lot of not liking, a lot of commentary.

Alison: The egg gummies, but even gummies that are all foam like that in different shapes or even half foam. And there are definitely a lot of feelings. Foam feelings.

Matt: Foam feelings. I think the fried egg gummy is probably the funniest gummy.

Alison: Yeah.

Matt: Like as a joke.

[Music transition.]

Matt: I don't know that it's my favorite gummy to eat. I will admit that. I don't mind them sprinkled in.

Tara: I like the foamy gummies as part of a collection of other gummies. I don't generally want a whole bag of the foamy gummies, but I do know people who love the foamy gummies. And the bacon and egg thing, that's a huge hit with them because it's, "Oh, I want all of that." But there is the bacon one that kind of balances it.

Alison: Well, and they're in our gaggle of gummies as well.

Tara: Yes.

Alison: So that all...

Matt: I know someone in my household likes to gaggle but will leave all the eggs...

Alison: (laughs)

Matt: ...behind, and then you got to bat cleanup and you're like, "Okay, all eggs."

Alison: It's like the Ry-Krisps.

Matt: Yeah. They're the best thing in the mix.

Alison: (laughs)

Tara: Are they really?

Alison: I feel like people leave all the Ry-Krisps.

Matt: Oh, man. The Ry-Krisps.

Tara: Well, it's funny because...

Matt: I'd like a swimming pool of Ry-Krisps.

Alison: (laughs) That'd be so painful.

Tara: Right?

Alison: Yes. And I do agree. I think the balance... But Europeans love the foamy.

Tara: How do the foamy gummies become foamy?

Alison: During the mixing phase there's some aeration added.

Tara: Seems so simple.

Matt: Yeah, I mean it's just making whipped cream or anything else. Just whipping it up.

Alison: Yep.

Matt: My favorite gummy was in the relatively short-lived holiday chaos mix. The sneakers.

Alison: Oh, yes.

Matt: Mismatched sneakers, which also had a foamy element, the sole and the toe cap of the sneaker. Those were really funny gummies.

[Music transition.]

Matt: You had mentioned spicy gummies and other things. What are some sub-genres of gummy that you think are interesting that maybe you're looking into?

Alison: There is gummies that are covered in other candies. That is very popular right now.

Matt: Yeah, I think that's very interesting. Then you get the interplay of a little crunchy, sugary texture.

Tara: So wait a minute. You said when we started that jelly beans are not gummies because they have a hard candy shell on the outside. But now you just said that there are gummies with other candies on the outside that are gummies.

Alison: I think I would throw that into a chocolate-covered gummy.

Tara: Because I really think jellybeans, it's a different texture. Even once you get into the chewy part, it's a different texture than a gummy. So you don't consider...

Alison: I don't consider fruit snacks gummies.

Matt: Oh, why?

Tara: Nor do I consider them fruit.

Matt: Why aren't they gummies?

Alison: I think they do have a different texture. They're fully sweetened by fruit juice.

Matt: What if we did a sour belt that was like three yards long? A giant tape measure.

Tara: Three yards long?

Matt: Yeah, it needs to be just ridiculous.

Alison: Ridiculous long.

Tara: And how would you package that?

Matt: On a giant roll like we're selling tape.

Tara: That's a cool idea.

Alison: That is a cool idea. I wonder if we could do that. I think that's another reason why, again, just different formats have become our [inaudible] like giant gummy bears and...

Matt: And gummy rats. Those were always a bummer.

Tara: So we had an experience with a giant gummy bear.

[Music transition.]

Tara: When my kids were really little one of them got one as a prize at a fair or something. It was a giant, maybe 12 inches high gummy bear.

Matt: Like a five-pounder?

Tara: Yeah. It was huge. And we drove home and it's like, "How am I going to eat this?"

Matt: With a knife and fork.

Tara: Yeah, he took a bite out of one side of it. Six months later I found it...

Alison: (gasps)

Tara: ...in the back of the car. It was a minivan, third row, nobody's back there most of the time, where it had melted into everything because we all forgot about it.

Alison: Nightmare.

Matt: And you just thought the van smelled great.

Alison: That's a gummy nightmare.

Tara: It was a gummy nightmare. Yeah.

Alison: Oh, I'm sorry.

Tara: Go.

Alison: I just thought of something. The other thing that is new in gummy technology is peelable gummies.

Tara: Wait. What?

Matt: I've seen these. I've experienced these where it's like it's a little tiny piece of fruit and you maddeningly peel the outer peel like a mango, and you eat the inside.

Alison: Yeah. It's not easy. But you haven't had these?

Tara: No.

Alison: Oh, my goodness, they are everywhere. But then when you peel it, there's like a unicorn inside or different shapes. Very interesting. And we haven't had any yet, but it is definitely a trending thing. I've never seen...

Matt: It's like string cheese, but gummies.

Alison: Yeah.

Matt: I used to eat the string cheese instead of stringing it, some people peel it...

Alison: Yeah, you eat the outside and it gets... It's very sticky and your hands get all gooey. It's not an easy just peel off and you pop it in your mouth. You're really invested in this peeling (laughs).

Tara: It's a super novelty kind of thing.

Alison: I first saw it more than a year ago and I was like (pfft).(laughs)... And then...(laughs)

Matt: Tell us how you really felt.

Alison: (laughs) How's that sound in the mic? For the ASMR people, it's expanded.

Tara: That's fascinating.

Matt: It's like a mystery.

Alison: Yeah. I've seen gummy kits, where you can...

Matt: Gummy kits?

Tara: You can make your own?

Alison: Yeah, where you make your own pizza. You have a little gummy crust and you have a little gummy pepperoni or whatever.

Matt: A snacktivity.

Alison: Yeah. It's a space where you can do really fun things.

Tara: Do you have a favorite gummy at Trader Joe's?

Alison: I love a classic Swimmer. They're so good.

Matt: Which color though? Is there a Swimmer that you avoid where you're like, "Man, not that orange guy."

Tara: Oh, the orange one's good.

Matt: Maybe you don't like the red lobster.

Alison: I think the red's my favorite.

Tara: Well, the lobsters get their own product every year, that we have just the lobsters, because that's the one that people seem to respond to the most.

Alison: I really love the flavors of the Xs & Os. The shape. It's great and cute, but I really like the flavors of the Xs & Os, I would say. And I think the Beach Day Gummies with the little sunglasses and flip-flops and stuff. Again, the shapes are cute and everything, but I really think the flavors are good. And they're very different product from the Swimmer's style.

Tara: More like a classic gummy, like the texture.

Alison: Yeah.

Tara: How about you, Matt? Do you have a favorite?

[Music transition.]

Matt: I really like the Gaggle of Gummies. I do like Swimmers. I like the orange Swimmer.

Tara: I like the orange Swimmer.

Alison: I mean, I have seen smoothie gummies, and you know it's...anything can go in a gummy.

Tara: Okay, so more to come.

Alison: Thanksgiving gummies or gravy gummy and stuffing gummy and turkey gummy.

Tara: Are there savory gummies?

Matt: French onion?

Tara: It might be gross. I don't know.

Alison: Yeah, I don't know if it's like the texture with what your brain thinks you're going to have and it's like the wires are just... Everything would just explode. (laughs) I don't know. They're still good. We could try it. I can have samples tomorrow. Let's do it.

Tara: That's the thing you probably could.

Alison: I could.

Tara: Like, "Hey, I have this crazy idea. Can you make it happen?"

Matt: Clam chowder gummy.

Tara: Ew. That just does...

Alison: Pair with oyster crackers.

Matt: See?

Tara: (laughs)

Alison: No. I mean that's the most fun part about this job is getting inspiration from anywhere and everywhere. And then...

[Music transition.]

Matt: Cola bottles are a classic gummy. What if it was soda fountain, soda shop gummies?

Alison: That'd be fun. We should definitely do something like that.

Matt: Yeah, like an orange cream soda or a cola or root beer.

Alison: I've definitely had a orange cream soda gummy somewhere at some point.

Tara: I would like just a classic cream soda gummy. That would be kind of cool.

Alison: That'd be interesting.

Tara: Vanilla cream soda, delish.

Alison: Or like a cherry cola.

Tara: Yeah. Oh, here we go.

Matt: Grape soda.

Alison: Done.

Matt: As much fun as all these gummies are, none of this is by accident. It all comes through actual strategizing and working with manufacturers, gummy makers, around the world to come up with really great things that you can find at your store. And it's amazing to me all the effort that goes into something that I probably take for granted because I just want to have a nice snack.

Tara: So we're going to continue to innovate in the gummy space, really.

Alison: I plan to.

Tara: This has been fantastic. We've covered the world of gummies and we're covering the world with gummies.

Alison: Yes (laughs).

Tara: Okay.

Alison: I love that.

Tara: I think back a number of years in our candy section was primarily chocolate with a couple of other things. Maybe it's still primarily chocolate, but...

Alison: It is, yeah.

Tara: It's like there's an invasion of the gummies, right? But it's an invasion that we all seem to really like a lot.

Alison: Yeah.

Matt: We've brought it on ourselves.

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: Which is how most monster movies really begin.

[Transition to closing.]

Tara: Let that be a warning to all.

[Closing music begins.]

Tara: And we're also warning, you'll get more episodes of *Inside Trader Joe's* if you hit that free subscribe or follow button if you dare.

Matt: It *is* free and worth every penny.

Tara: Until next time, thanks for listening.

Matt: And thanks for listening.

Alison: And...BOO!. Hahaha (evil laugh, booming thunder).

Tara: Well said, Alison.

Matt: Although your evil laugh...needs some work.

Tara: (laughs)