

Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript — Episode 64: Summer Shopping List

[Urgent breaking news sounder/theme.]

Matt: This just in, we have breaking hummus news.

Tara: We are replacing the Roasted Red Pepper Hummus. The old version was discontinued.

Matt: We have team coverage in our Summer Shopping List edition of the podcast.

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

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

[Theme music begins and 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 marketing product guy.

Tara: For those keeping score at home, there will be 13...

[Two products fall off of the shelf and crash.]

Tara: ...11 new products in this episode, and seven returning products.

Matt: Of course, there are lots of other products that we won't get to on this podcast, so take a walk down the aisle of your neighborhood Trader Joe's and see what we missed.

Tara: And we have a new version of a returning favorite, the Roasted Red Pepper Hummus.

[Theme music ends. Light upbeat music begins.]

Tara: Why did we go for a new version here, Matt?

Matt: One of the relentless themes of our business framed up in a word, kaizen - ever better, ever improving. And the idea of a roasted red pepper hummus is pretty basic these days actually. And looking at customer reaction to the version we were offering and what were

frankly declining sales, we thought we could do better. So we thought we'd go back to the hummus drawing board and work on a new version.

Tara: It's different from the previous version in that, that version was just a creamy hummus.

Matt: Sort of a homogenized, blended thing.

Tara: And this version, it is topped with, kind of a, like a roasted red pepper relish of sorts on the top, it smells so good. If you like roasted red peppers, that is. You wanna try it, Matt?

Matt: Sure.

Tara: I don't know if you're a roasted red pepper fan.

Matt: And you know, topped hummus is not a brand new thing. We certainly didn't invent it. You can dig through the layers, you can stir them like an upside down version of fruit on the bottom, but it's pepper on top hummus. I have to say, it kind of looks fancy.

Tara: I have to say, it is absolutely delicious.

[Small transition.]

Tara: This time of year, we are all about frozen desserts. And I don't mean frozen desserts that you then have to heat up somewhere or thaw. I'm talking about things that you eat frozen.

Matt: Got it.

Tara: And we have a bunch of stuff, so let's start with the returning products, cuz I think these are exciting for people to see come back. The first one is the Tangerine Cream Bars and it's kind of like a classic summer dessert.

Matt: Very much so, with a twist.

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: A tangerine twist.

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: So instead of orange juice, tangerine juice.

Tara: Right. With a creamy, creamy ice creamy like center on a stick. Okay, what's next? What's next coming back?

Matt: Ube Mochi, of course. Ube products, the purple sweet potato that people just can't seem to get enough of, perfectly presented here in mochi. Mochi ice cream that is wrapped with mochi. Mochi is pounded sweet glutinous rice that gives that really nice springy chewy texture.

Tara: We talk about them being made with glutinous rice. There is no gluten...

Matt: Mmm, good point.

Tara: ...in the products, right? So it's glutinous, meaning sticky, but not glutenous, meaning containing gluten.

Matt: The ube flavor in this mochi is sweet. It's a subtle flavor. It's a captivatingly, just can't describe it, kind of taste that maybe that's in part why people love it so much. It's not like chocolate, it's not like vanilla. It's this really interesting thing unto itself, ube.

Tara: Probably end of June I think, is when this one will arrive back in the freezer, so beyond the lookout for that.

[Small music transition.]

Tara: We have a new ice cream. S'mores Ice Cream: graham cracker flavored ice cream with marshmallow, and chocolatey swirls.

Matt: Getting this kind of ice cream just where we wanted it to be was a lot of trial and error. It's not so much a deconstructed s'more as it is a mixed up ice cream that is absolutely s'more-like in its flavors.

Tara: And if I'm remembering correctly, in one of the tasting panel iterations, this actually was more of a Sweet Cream Ice Cream with Graham Cracker pieces in it, and the graham cracker pieces just got so soggy that it didn't work. You didn't get that flavor. You weren't getting the benefit of any kind of crunch because they didn't hold their texture and making it into a graham cracker flavored ice cream, that flavor really comes through. I just took a bite and you get graham cracker first and foremost, which is exactly what happens when you eat s'mores. This is really delicious and worth noting at this time, that our organic sugar cones are also coming back into stores for the summer. I think they came back, sort of, in early May.

[Small music transition.]

Matt: It's great to have a classic sugar cone. There are several types of ice cream cones in the world: sugar cones, cake cones, waffle cones. Who knows when or how sugar cones or ice cream cones were even invented. There are competing origin stories that both happen in the United States around 1900, 1903 or 1904. One of them is oriented around the St. Louis World's Fair, however, whoever came up with an ice cream cone, thank you, thank you. Talk about solving a problem, what to do with all this great ice cream. We'll put it on this wonderful cone. I like a sugar cone as compared to say a cake cone. Purportedly cake cones have the

flat bottom, so you could set it down in between bites. I don't know anyone who sets an ice cream down in between bites, but nice try.

Tara: You just did that all off the cuff. I see no notes about sugar cones or any kind of cones in front of you, and that information just lives in your head and that I find incredibly fascinating.

Matt: It's, uh, among the things that keep me up at night.

Tara: Okay, so I want to get through these frozen desserts because...

Matt: Before they melt!

Tara: ...before they melt.

[Music transition.]

Tara: We have Strawberry Lemonade Ice Bars.

Matt: When we say we travel the world, we really do. These actually are made for us in Italy, and this came about because we found a fantastic frozen novelty maker/manufacture in Italy, and we were trying different flavors, trying to come up with things for summer, and this just seemed like a natural.

[Ripping open package.]

Tara: The flavors on this bar are so good. I am imagining a really hot summer day, and this is gonna hit the spot. I'm gonna take this off the stick, I'm gonna put it in a blender, and I'm gonna add a little vodka or maybe a little tequila. And I'm imagining that this becomes a strawberry lemonade margarita. Oh my goodness!

Matt: Now I'm thinking, cuz these are from Italy...

[Background noise of a busy crowd in Italy.]

Matt: ...maybe I'm walking toward the Trevi Fountain and it's crowded and it's hot, and I need to get a little bit of refreshment before I can take a selfie in front of that fountain and sort of elbow my way in. This is what I would reach for.

Tara: They're expected in stores around the end of June also. There's six bars in a box.

Matt: Okay.

Tara: Each bar, 45 calories.

Matt: Really?

Tara: Man, this was a good way to top off our discussion on frozen desserts.

[Music ends.]

Matt: And next.

[Light upbeat music begins.]

Tara: Cookies, and this is a returning product. This is the Strawberry Lemonade Joe-Joe's. These premiered in our stores last summer.

Matt: So you got the biscuit, the cookie is lemon.

Tara: Yep. And the filling is strawberry.

Matt: And when presented this kind of sandwich cookie, the obvious question is, how does one go about eating it? There are two distinct camps here.

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: Crunch the whole thing.

Tara: No.

Matt: Just indiscriminately, just munch away or deconstruct, pull apart, layer by layer.

Tara: I'm a twist apart and eat the cream and then eat one cookie at a time.

Matt: Wow.

Tara: Scrape the cream off with my teeth.

Matt: Ah.

Tara: Yeah, and you?

Matt: Sometimes I might go for a multi-stack, like you'd eat a thing of pancakes and just take two or three of those and unhinge my jaw and go to town.

Tara: We have Strawberry Lemonade Ice Bars in the freezer. We have Strawberry Lemonade Joe-Joe's in the cookie section. It's good stuff. You wanna stick with the strawberry theme here?

Matt: Let's take strawberries for 500.

Tara: Okay, we're taking...

[Ding.]

Tara: We're taking strawberries for 500. This is actually another returning product. These are the Strawberry and Jalapeño Crisps Crackers. So they're kind of relatives of the Fig and Olive Crisps and the Raisin and Rosemary Crisps that we sell in our stores. You having a summertime gathering outdoors and you want a cracker to go with dips or cheeses? These are incredibly good crackers. They're really crunchy, they're really crispy, they've got a little chew.

Matt: When these are made, they make really long, but somewhat tiny, somewhat diametrically opposed ideas, loaves of bread, and then they slice them into the crisps. So they do look like little bread pieces.

Tara: They do.

Matt: They're really cute. We have lots of these crisps.

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: They're incredibly popular.

[Pulling apart plastic bag to open.]

Tara: Oh, instantly when you open the bag, you get strawberry, which is really...

Matt: Which is really a nice thing to smell.

Tara: ...great. (loud crunching) It's really loud crunching.

Matt: And you can smell jalapeño.

Tara: It really works.

Matt: It works.

Tara: I'm glad these are back.

[Small transition, music transition.]

Tara: I'm gonna make a sharp turn into the pet category, okay?

Matt: Okay, operators are standing by.

Tara: Alright, we (laughs) my dogs are so grateful for all the treats that Trader Joe's has in store because they benefit.

Matt: How might they show that appreciation?

Tara: Are you kidding me? They wag their tails. They come up and they snuggle with me on the couch. And would they have done those things anyway? Perhaps. But I feel like they really do appreciate these treats.

Matt: Okay.

Tara: These are called Crab Paws. There's a little play on dog paws and crab claws and all those things happening there. They have actual crab in them.

Matt: Like a crab cake for dogs.

Tara: We got to test these out. I have one dog who's kind of picky. These she came back and basically sat down next to me and asked for more.

Matt: That's a great sign.

Tara: Crab Paws, Soft Baked Crab Flavored Dog Treats. This is a limited availability thing. We cycle the dog treats in and out as well because we don't have room to have all of them all the time.

Matt: And as a business that is not central, that is not core to our food and drink for human beings business, we've taken an approach with that pet section, to really focus on those treats. It's difficult for us to offer all the various diets and life stage foods for pets so treats have found great favor with customers and their pets. It's a treat focused business for us.

[Music ends. Transition to Alex.]

Tara: Okay, our friend Alex is back with us straight from the Trader Joe's kitchen, which is a very busy place.

[Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: He has taken three of the products on our shopping list and made something hopefully delicious.

Matt: Three-product challenge from Product Developer Alex.

Alex: Thanks for having me again.

Tara: I kind of gave Alex a little *Chopped* assignment.

Alex: Three items here. The first one is the Organic Pasta Quintet. It's a combination of five very interesting and fun pasta shapes. We also have the Lemon Pesto Sauce. This is an awesome sauce. It's made with tons of lemon, lemon rind, and almonds instead of pine nuts. So it's got a great balanced, slightly sweet, bitter, kind of nutty taste. And then new Pearl Mozzarella which, in my opinion, is like the most perfect shape. You can put tons of it in there. You get a great amount of mozzarella in every bite of whatever you make. It's great for adding

onto skewers with little tomatoes, maybe some basil. And I made a very simple, fresh, bright, pasta salad using those three ingredients. I added a little bit of mint just for added brightness, but I kept it very simple today. This recipe can be adapted many different ways and I think that our customers can add whatever they may like to spice it up. If I was making this at home and I wasn't sticking to the items in my challenge basket so to speak, I probably would've added a little bit of tomato, maybe some cooked chicken, but I made a very refreshing summer pasta salad.

Tara: It smells so good. That pesto, that Lemon Pesto Sauce, you described it really well. I mean, it has tons of lemon in it.

Matt: Alex, this is a bit of like an Italian holiday because that Lemon Pesto Sauce is made in Italy. The pasta is made in Italy. I'm curious about the pasta because with five different shapes, oftentimes, different shapes of pasta have different cooking times. My recollection through tasting panel work is that these different shapes were selected to cook in the same amount of time, equally well.

Tara: Matt, let's noodle around and see what's in this bag.

[Plastic bag crumpling.]

Tara: Got a shell. We've got like a little mini fusilli.

Matt: We have, like, rims.

Tara: We've got, sort of macaroni.

Alex: And then there's the vesuvi.

Tara: Say what?

Matt: Vesuvi?

Alex: Vesuvio, I think. The volcano shape.

Tara: The little mini fusilli.

Matt: Or like a DNA.

Tara: It's like a double helix kind of.

Tara: I only see four.

Matt: One looks sort of radiatori looking.

Tara: That's, so that's like this one. And, oh, I guess that's different than this one, so there's five. Yeah.

Matt: It's sort of a collection of sauce holding, capturing shapes and they seem to be really nicely coated. How would you characterize this Lemon Pesto Sauce on a scale of like peanut butter to water? How thick is this?

Alex: It's definitely a peanut butter consistency. It's fairly thick. I left the tiniest ever so small amount of pasta water on the pasta when I made this just to loosen up a tiny bit, I also added a tablespoon of olive oil and it mixed in very well.

Tara: Yeah. And I, you know, we learned from our friend Kathleen not too long ago that pasta water really is the miracle ingredient in all things.

Alex: Yep. Listeners, save some pasta water and throw it in your next pasta dish. It changes it.

Tara: The pasta salad is really great. I will replicate this at home. I just like, the flavors are really good. I will take your advice and add the tomato, some like sliced cherry tomatoes would be really great in it.

Alex: Yeah, whatever you want. I added mint today just because it's an herb that we had on hand and it's a very fresh, clean tasting herb. But basil would work just as well. Parsley, whatever you have, throw it in there. Make a nice fresh salad.

Matt: Anything. Something spicy could be really fun.

Alex: I'd go really heavy on pepper.

Matt: And so the texture's nice. It's not crunchy, but there are absolutely pieces of almonds roughly ground up, coarsely ground, I should say, almonds, and the lemon flavor is great in this context cuz I think of here we often consider lemon almost for dessert flavors. And it's nice to have a savory meal flavor built around lemon. I'm liking that very much. These mozzarella pearls; these are small so one ounce is the classic serving size of cheese. There are 11 pearls in an ounce of cheese. That gives you an idea they're actually pearl-like in size, so that's kind of fun. No prep is needed on these, right Alex? Well, what did you do? Just open it up and dump 'em out.

Alex: I drained them out of the water and poured in about as much as looked good to me. Honestly, I didn't measure it. For me personally, more cheese, better, but whatever works for you.

Tara: All of these ingredients are arriving at your neighborhood Trader Joe's this summer. So the Mozzarella Pearls, they should be there about now. The Lemon Pesto Sauce and the Organic Pasta Quintet, they'll be arriving sometime between now and the end of June. I think this assortment of pasta might be my all-time favorite for pasta salad.

Alex: Perfect for it.

Tara: Because it's not boring. I imagine people at a gathering would be like, "What is happening in this bowl? Like there's all kinds of weird pasta shapes here. You must have had five bags of pasta." But instead it's all in one bag.

Matt: And I think the flavor of that fresh mozzarella, mild as it is, is perfect as a pairing with the Lemon Pesto Sauce. Any other stronger flavored cheese you might get a lot of competing things that may be more dissonant than anything and not harmonious. So well done, Alex.

Alex: Thank you.

[Music ends. Transition.]

Matt: And when it's midnight at the oasis while you send your camel to bed.

Tara: Huh?

Matt: Maria Muldaur, #6 on the charts, 1974.

Tara: Okay.

[Light upbeat music begins.]

Matt: But when it's midnight on the farm, how do you get delicious Midnight Moo chocolate milk? You might milk your cow. Midnight Moo is actually back at your Trader Joe's. You do have a chance to make delicious chocolate milk with it.

Tara: Organic Midnight Moo Chocolate Syrup; have you ever seen a teenager just stand in front of the refrigerator and squeeze it into their mouth? Because I have.

Matt: We had an unstable, at best, supply situation with this, so we had to go really back to the Chocolate Sauce Midnight Moo drawing board. It's still organic, it's a great product. It is effectively that iconic chocolate syrup. Great over ice cream, wonderful with chocolate milk. You can do lots of things. You can drizzle over cakes and desserts, and it's just a great thing to have back, and I think it's gonna find lots of customers happy.

Tara: That should be arriving back in stores sometime towards the end of June, hopefully.

Matt: I'm expecting there's some number of people listening who will say, "Finally."

Tara: Yeah.

[Music ends. Transition.]

Tara: We have a few products coming into our, what we call our HABA and household sections of the store,...

[Light upbeat music begins.]

Tara: ...so health and beauty aids and household goods. They do sound delicious but we're not gonna recommend that anybody eat any of these products. The first one that I'm super excited about because it's a new iteration of a hand cream that we've had in a bunch of different scents over time is a Guava Ultra Moisturizing Hand Cream. It has a really fresh, fruity scent, but it's not an overwhelmingly fruity thing happening. And I love these creams because they just don't leave your hands greasy, but they do moisturize really well.

Matt: This is the scent that's based on pink guava, so were you to use this and walk into a room, I would bet that someone would say, "Gee, you smell terrific. What is that scent?"

Tara: It should show up in stores sometime in early July. The other two products that we wanna talk about in this category are both candles. The returning candle is the Mango Tangerine, which is one of our perennial favorites, and it comes back in the springtime, late spring, early summer. Just for a limited amount of time, and that way we can cycle in a bunch of different scents because we don't have room to sell 10 candles at a time. We just don't have space. And we have a new one coming in this summer that is the result of a contest that we held earlier this year.

Matt: That is right.

[Music transition.]

Tara: Asking customers to choose what they would like our next candle scent to be. There were five options. We couldn't just say, "name a scent," right? It had to be something we knew was feasible to accomplish.

Matt: That would've been really fun and effectively not possible to do.

Tara: The runaway victor of that candle scent contest was Eucalyptus.

Matt: Runaway victor sounds like my next video game that I'm gonna launch.

Tara: I will say that a lot of the folks here in the office did not think that Eucalyptus was going to be the runaway winner. It should arrive in stores sometime in July. It will say on the candle tin itself that this is the contest winner.

Matt: Oh, cool.

Tara: So you'll see it.

[Music ends.]

Tara: We're in the home stretch here, Matt. We got four more things we wanna talk about.

Matt: Four more things.

Tara: Okay, where do you wanna go first?

[Light music begins.]

Matt: Well, I spy here with my eye something that I know you, you are a tremendous fan of this variation on our Crunchy Chili Onion product. This is the Crunchy Jalapeño Lime and Onion. I'm excited to see this come back.

Tara: I fell in love with it immediately when we introduced it last year. If you're familiar with the Crunchy Chili Onion, it really is a jalapeño lime focus take on that and...

Matt: So, so good.

Tara: I got lucky and I got a few extra jars at the end of last year, so I had some for a while. I put it on scrambled eggs, I put it in rice or cauliflower rice. It just adds the flavor. You know, cauliflower rice is one of those things that I've come to really love. But it really does need some help flavor-wise,...

Matt: Does it ever.

Tara: ...cuz it doesn't deliver much, right? But it gladly accepts and absorbs the flavors of anything that you put into it. So you can really make it taste like whatever makes you happy.

Matt: So it's riced cauliflower as the tabula rasa of the kitchen, your blank canvas, the white buffalo.

Tara: Really tastes good with this Crunchy Jalapeño Lime and Onion.

Matt: I like this on tacos. I'm thinking of a fish taco right this moment, but almost any kind of taco. I would take effectively what is like the starting point for coleslaw, like chopped up cabbage, shredded cabbage, I would mix a couple spoons of this Crunchy Jalapeño Lime and Onion with maybe a little splash of apple cider vinegar or rice vinegar, dress that cabbage, put that into a taco. Man, even just as a salad. This could sound wacky to some people, but on fruit, if you have a perfectly ripe Tuscan melon, that thing that kind of looks like a cantaloupe, a little bit of this drizzled on top.

Tara: Really good stuff. Let's go to another condiment: Sri Lankan Organic Mango Chutney. There's a lot going on here. It is really mango forward. You get mango, mango, mango first, and sometimes in a mango chutney you get a lot of ginger up front. This one actually doesn't even have ginger in it. It's not a ginger mango chutney. It is a mango chutney. It's got some heat in it.

Matt: Mm-hmm.

Tara: But the first ingredient is organic mango and it's made in Sri Lanka from an old Sri Lankan recipe.

Matt: Ingredients as listed on a product label. Those ingredients, they're listed in order of predominance by weight. There is more mango by weight than any other thing in this chutney. So it is like, it's like the most intense mango preserve that is spiced and seasoned and delicious. And this, I would qualify this as a bit of a sleeper in terms of catching people off guard. Most people are sort of, "Eh, maybe ho hum, sure, Mango Chutney, great." This is incredible. Put it on everything.

Tara: I'm gonna try this on vanilla ice cream. I'm just gonna see.

Matt: Oh yeah. It'll be great.

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: Absolutely great because it'll just bring this whole new, and then you won't feel so bad. It's like, "Ice cream for dinner?" I am having it with chutney. Thank you.

Tara: Right. It's very sophisticated.

Matt: Boom. Yes!

Tara: Yes (chuckles). If you walk into your neighborhood Trader Joe's tomorrow, you should see that.

Matt: It's a little jar. It's easy to miss. Don't make that mistake. Cruise down that aisle. Take your time. You know what? Ask a crew member, "Hey, I heard about that Mango Chutney." You should seek this out. I'm excited for people to try this.

Tara: You know what else I'm excited for people to try?

[Music transition.]

Matt: What's that?

Tara: We have another pasta coming in for summer.

Matt: Can't get enough pasta.

[Upbeat music.]

Tara: This is another organic pasta coming from Italy, and it's a cool shape. It's called Mafalda Corta. They're maybe an inch long or so.

Matt: Hmm.

Tara: But they look like miniature lasagna noodles. They have little ruffles on the edges.

Matt: They do. A little ruffle, yeah.

Tara: But they're short and they're not terribly wide.

Matt: It's like the surrency with the fringe on top, but this is that little tiny, it's like lasagna, like they're not scraps. It's like the edge of lasagna.

Tara: Yeah. This would look good in a baked dish. This would look good in a pasta salad.

Matt: So, you know, short cuts and long cuts. This is a short cut. Long cuts are things like spaghetti, linguini, fettuccini. Short cuts are things like penne rigate, fusilli. In general, in this country, or at least in our stores, customers seem to like those short cuts. That's why we went with this shorter version of Mafalda, the Mafalda Corta. This pasta's made with a bronze dye. It means the extruder through which the semolina dough is passed has some roughness to it. And if you look at this pasta up close, it's not perfectly smooth. And it's just an amazing way to get the sauce to literally stick to the pasta. Why so many organic pastas? What the heck is going on? This is interesting. Our country has some tariffs, some taxes for certain types of products to come into, to be imported into the United States. Regular conventional pasta has tariffs, has taxes. Organic pasta has had different tariff schedule. That's what they call these fee schedules, and so it has a lower tariff barrier. We're able to provide a stronger, more compelling value on organic pasta as compared to the marketplace. That's a good reason why we have so many organic pastas.

Tara: And our organic pastas are a fantastic value.

Matt: Unbelievable.

Tara: And they're so good. The Mafalda Corta you should be able to buy it at your neighborhood Trader Joe's right now. Excited about it.

[Music ends.]

Tara: Matt, we are down to our last product.

Matt: And then there was one.

Tara: And then there was one.

[Timpani roll.]

Tara: Bring us home, Matt.

Matt: And that item is from our candy category, a chocolate treat. Here we go...Trader Joe's Dark Chocolate Pineapple Sticks.

[Light upbeat music begins.]

Matt: You got all kinds of textural contrasts here. The slight snap of that chocolate coating, the really interestingly squishy and fun fruit jelly-like pineapple center. The pineapple flavor on

this thing is unbelievable. This is a really fun candy. This is kind of a variation on things like Chocolate Orange Sticks, Chocolate Raspberry Sticks. We've had a Chocolate Watermelon Stick.

Tara: Yep. I opened the bag yesterday because I was really curious about how these tasted and it took all of my willpower to close the bag and not eat them all before we started this recording today.

Matt: This is a fun, fun thing.

Tara: It will be launching in stores in the candy aisle in like the beginning of July. They are a limited seasonally available item, so when you see them grab them because they may not be there the next time you come into the store.

[Transition to close. Closing music begins.]

Tara: Wow, what a list! I really love the summer products from Trader Joe's.

Matt: I just, I can't wait to kick back, sip some iced tea and just watch the lawn grow.

Tara: (laughs) Feel free to leave us a rating or review on your favorite podcast app.

Matt: Or complain about our chewing noises.

Tara: And hit that free follow or subscribe button.

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

Tara: Until next time, thanks for listening.

Matt: Have a great summer and thanks for listening.