

Transcript — Episode 5: Please Won't You Be My Neighborhood Store

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

Matt: Let's go INSIDE TRADER JOE'S.

[2 bells ring at a neighborhood Trader Joe's.]

Matt: Can you believe it? This is already episode five of our five part series. I'm Matt Sloan.

Tara: And I'm Tara Miller. Thank you for sharing this podcast series with us and for telling your friends about it, too.

Matt: I think this might be our most important episode. It's titled, "Please won't you be my neighborhood store."

Tara: We know that being a good neighbor and requires more than just taking good care of customers in the store. It also means being part of the community.

Volunteer: Something like 40% of the food in the United States is thrown in the trash. And there are people in need here. So the captain said, "Let's help you with it."

Matt: Later we'll answer some of the most asked questions we get from customers, and we'll peer into our crystal ball to get a glimpse the future of Trader Joe's.

[Scene moves outside. Birds chirp. Sound of distant traffic.]

Producer: Could you start, Adam?

Adam: Yeah. I've, uh, I've been with Trader Joe's 17 years now. I worked my way up through the stores and was offered to, uh, to this position, regional vice president in Illinois.

Tara: How many stores in your region now?

Adam: There are 21 in Illinois.

Jodi: Jodi McCollaugh. I oversee the Florida region. I have 18 stores there. Sharing Trader Joe's with the world. (laughs)

Adam: Yeah. The reaction is still fantastic. Chicago's very situated, uh, especially Chicago proper by neighborhoods. Coincidentally one of our values is a national chain of neighborhood stores. And so you still hear current customers are all the time saying, "MY Trader Joe's... at MY Trader Joe's" so we do our best to make the stores are a reflection of the neighborhood.

Jodi: Yeah, I mean, you might see an end cap of prune juice in the Florida market before you're going to see that in the Chicago market. (laugh)

Tara: But we do have the best prune juice.

Jodi: We really do. And you know, that's a great end cap. (laugh)

[Street noise. Pickup truck rumbles up, comes to stop.]

Matt: It's just after 9 o'clock in the morning on a Thursday. We're at Friends in Deed in Pasadena, California.

[Truck door slams.]

Tim: Hi, Andrew.

Andrew: Good morning. Good to see you.

Tim: I'm Tim Nistler. I'm the program director for the Friends In Deed food pantry. My buddy Andrew here is a volunteer. He picks up the neighborhood shares from a local Trader Joe's.

Tim: All right. Looks like a good load. What do you got?

Andrew: Well, we've got a huge load today. Lots of flowers, lots of bread, and then the usual variety of salads. We have meats. We have eggs, fruit, veggies, the usual kind of ratio, but lots of flowers.

Tim: Beautiful! That's beautiful!

Tara: Tim, can you tell us about what you get from Trader Joe's and how that impacts your program?

Tim: So, uh, we get, I guess you guys call them shares now. Meats, um, fruits and vegetables, especially desserts... things that are in the fresh section of the Trader Joe's stores.

Tara: There are more than 40,000 Trader Joe's Crew Members and Bryan Palbaum is one of them. He's also Trader Joe's President and COO.

Matt: Tell us about the neighborhood shares program. What is it?

Bryan: We have this product that maybe it's past the code date, maybe it's got a blemish, but it's perfectly good and wholesome for people to eat. We know there are, there's a lack of food for a lot of people. We came up with the idea to call this "shares," which means exactly what the term says. We want to share this with the neighborhoods within which our stores are located.

Tim: The folks that come here... They are, they're us, they are working, they're retired, they have grandkids, they have aunts, uncles, they have a baby brothers and sisters. They have dogs and cats. They're just like all of us. They just happen to need some assistance. And so what I've learned in the years I've been doing this is that they're lovely people.

Maurice: This place is a blessing to my home. Sometimes I run short, well, ALL the time I run short, but just having this place available in my neighborhood, it does wonders in my house.

Matt: Last year, Trader Joe's donated \$350 million dollars of product, which equates to approximately 70 million pounds of food or 58 million meals to combat hunger.

Tim: That's actually not hard to believe, knowing how Trader Joe's has come a long way in saying, "Hey, we want to help fight hunger. We want to eliminate food waste." All of that... Those numbers... That's a lot. It is surprising, but at the same time, they do some great work. And they really want to make sure that places like Friends In Deed can take that food and get it back out into the community. That's fantastic.

Volunteer: It's a great thing. Thank you so much, Trader Joe's.

Tim: I get to tell people, "Please, have some food."

Matt: Wow. And that's another reason we're so proud to be part of Trader Joe's.

Tara: And proud to be part of the neighborhoods where our stores live.

Matt: Throughout this five part series, some of our Crew Members and customers have been sharing *their* favorite products.

[Whistling Crew music begins.]

Mike: I love that lentil soup. It's, it's an elusive little beast these days.

Tara: So I'll give you a suggestion. One of my favorites right now is in the refrigerator case. It's a split pea soup. It's an organic vegan split pea soup.

Mike: Oh Wow. Cool.

Tara: It's in the refrigerator.

Katina: Your cereal bars. Um, that helps me in a pinch because I live out of my car because I teach fitness classes so I'm running around, so that really helps me. You have a lot of go-to stuff for me. The guacamole... that is the best snack that I suggest to all my clients.

Michelle: The spelt risotto with vegetables and chick peas is my new favorite thing. I went and bought like 2 of them last week, and I came back and I just bought 4. (laugh)

Matt: We started this podcast with the goal of answering some of the questions we often hear about Trader Joe's. We hope we've answered some of yours.

Tara: But there are two or three more we haven't gotten to yet.

Chloe: Hey, I'm Chloe. And I wanted to know... Whatever happened to the raspberry macaroon cake? I miss it so much.

Matt: We get this one a lot, but it's a democratic process. Right, Mitch Heeger?

Mitch: Recently one of my favorite products, our canned chicken noodle soup was discontinued...

Matt: After years!

Mitch: After years. And this was, you know, a big favorite in my house.

[Montage of people remembering some of their favorite discontinued products:]

Jon: Oh, I mean, my favorite stuff gets discontinued all the time. A long time ago, I just craved... and I used to love buying the pickled green beans that we sold, and those got dropped pretty quick.

Katina: For a minute, it was all of tapenade, but I think you guys brought that one back.

Jason: So I always go back to one of my favorite juices. It was called Sir Strawberry.

Lori: There're some that are seasonal, so I'm really sad when they go. But there was a light Greek salad that you guys used to have, and I miss it.

Randy: I've got one that I'm waiting to come back, and that's our cioppino, and that's a frozen item, frozen seafood item. There's a lot of people out there who keep checking for it to come back because the return date keeps getting extended.

Robert: We used to have a turkey sandwich that was, like, handmade. That was one that I truly miss. And then the other, we had our little hamburger sliders? Ohhh! Oh my gosh, I miss those. (laugh)

Sheena: I was really into that almond jalapeno dip, so I'm kinda waiting for that to come back.

Jay Jay: I think somebody the other day asked me for a pomegranate glaze, which – the funniest thing is – I still have a bottle in my cabinet that's expired three, four years now. I refuse to get rid of it, waiting for it to return.

Tara: My big discontinuation challenge is the tofu edamame nuggets. I don't even know why I liked them, because I'm not a vegetarian. I can eat other things, but they're so good. My children still ask for them.

Mitch: There've been a number of surprises...

Matt: That we thought would work, but didn't.

Mitch: (laugh) Yeah. I think when we explain that, you know, customers vote with their dollars, it does help them understand that they're a partner in this. Unfortunately not as many customers like that product as they did, and hopefully we'll find something else that would replace that.

[Light traffic in a parking lot]

Customer: I love ya, but what's with the parking lot?

[Someone in the background laughs.]

Tara: Let's have Jon Basalone take this one.

Jon: For us, sometimes we have to make decisions based on, "Well, this is the only way we can have a store in this neighborhood is in this turning this old armory into a Trader Joe's. This is the space that's available, and here's the parking that comes with it." We have, certainly we have minimums that need to work with. A lot of our parking lots in Southern California are just sort of older store sites that now are just incredibly inadequate for the business that we do. The way cities work, it also causes some issues for us, where the number of parking spaces is based on the square footage of your space, not how many customers you expect you're going to have. You know, that doesn't match up with us

because we run pretty small stores. So we're, we're not allowed to have as many spaces as we would like to have.

Customer: How can I get a Trader Joe's in MY neighborhood? That's what I want to know.

Matt: Now that's a good one for Bryan Palbaum. He works a lot on figuring out where to put new stores.

Bryan: We always appreciate the passion of some of the neighborhoods that do send in their requests, and they can be very creative at times. Always consider distribution, how far our warehouses are going to be from the stores in which we're opening makes sure that we can supply those stores on a regular basis. Population is really important. We certainly have certain numbers of households that we think we need to have that can support a successful Trader Joe's, and well when we get to those numbers, uh, and it makes sense, then we'll, we'll open a store.

Tami: So we're almost at the end of this five part series Inside Trader Joe's. But Trader Joe's of course, will go on. In fact, we're planning to keep growing. As of this recording, we have 475 stores.

Matt: We asked our chairman and CEO, Dan Bane, about the future.

Dan: Well, it's, it's bright. We're targeting to open 30 to 35 stores a year in the 48 states. And uh, you know, our only, the only thing that holds us back is having the right number of Captains and Mates to open up great stores. So we won't open a store just because we can, we want to open a store that's run by the right kind of people doing the right kinds of things, and that's really important to us.

Matt: So we really don't want to open up more stores unless they're really Trader Joe's stores.

[Birds chirping.]

Tara: Were you surprised by the reception that Trader Joe's got in Florida?

Jodi: Absolutely. Um, when we opened Pine Crest, for example, um, you know, that was the fourth store that we'd opened in the state, first store in Miami. We had no idea what was about to happen. (laugh)

Tara: When you open, you opened the doors to that store, literally when you opened the doors...

Jodi: We had a line wrapped around the building, all the, even wrapped around the building next door at the Burger King. We were actually... (laughs) We had cars getting towed blocks away. Um, the nickname was "Trader Tow's" for a short while because people just wanted to get in. They didn't care.

They were parking anywhere and everywhere so they could come in and see what Trader Joe's is all about.

Tara: We hope you'll rate this podcast on Apple Podcasts or wherever you find it. And if you missed any of the earlier episodes, please give 'em a listen. That's how you'll find out about our seven values, hear the Tasting Panel, whether we're planning to start selling online,...

Matt: Spoiler Alert... No.

Tara: ...how and where we discover our products, and really, so much more.

Matt: Well this has been fun, and now it's time to get back to our focus on wowing the customers in your neighborhood Trader Joe's store... every time you visit.

Tara: We hope to see you there.

[Pause.]

Customer: Really? That's the end?! I want more. You didn't even mention hummus.