

Transcript — Episode 9: Around the World in 80 Trader Joe's Products... Give or take.

Tara: From the Trader Joe's mothership in Monrovia, California, and from around the world.

Voices of Multiple Crew Members: Italy, Greece, New Zealand, The Republic of Georgia, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Thailand, The United States.

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

[Theme music begins.]

Tara: I'm Tara Miller, the Director of Words and Phrases and Clauses.

Matt: And I'm Matt Sloan, the Marketing Product guy. This episode is titled "Around the World in 80 Trader Joe's Products... Give or take."

Tara: At Trader Joe's, our Crew goes just about everywhere, literally circumnavigating the globe on a weekly basis to satiate your unrelenting desire for new food discoveries.

Matt: You may think that's overly dramatic, but it's not hyperbolic. Our Crew does have their fair share of adventures from around the world or around the corner as they search for new products. And on this episode, we'll ask them to tell you some of their better stories.

Tara: At Trader Joe's we really do discover cultures of the world through food.

[Theme music ends.]

Matt: When Joe Coulombe was really sort of shaping the idea that would become Trader Joe's, it was within the context of people are going to start flying around the world and seeing new things and eating new things and tasting tastes that they want to be able to taste when they're back home.

Tara: You may have been in France and had this terrific cheese, but you may not have made it to the Republic of Georgia and had these really interesting dumplings. That makes me want to travel even more.

Tara: So we're talking to Arlene and Jennie...

Jennie: Hi.

Tara: ...who are Product Innovators here at Trader Joe's.

Jennie: We are essentially the boots on the ground. We travel the world, and we find the WOW for our customers.

Tara: You kind of have the coolest job in the world.

Arlene: Yes, I know. I feel very blessed. Very blessed. Everyone tells me that.

Jennie: The immediate reaction is, "That is so cool."

Matt: You don't get, "Why did you discontinue jasmine green tea?" That's what I get.

Jennie: Oh, that's the second thing they say.

[Laughs]

Arlene: Yeah, one of the best parts is basically constantly experiencing that sense of discovery, like having something for the first time or seeing something for the first time. Like I really value experiences and I mean that's, that's what I want for our customers.

Matt: Product innovation sounds like a fancy way to describe the treasure hunt, like going into a Trader Joe's and finding something that you never knew existed, and all of a sudden it just might become your new favorite thing.

Jennie: We travel the world. We try to find things in different corners of the world that people can't get to.

Arlene: Yeah, it's, it's go, go, go.

Tara: How many countries have you visited? Do you know?

Arlene: Oh my goodness.

Tara: Can you give me a ballpark?

Arlene: Since the past two years? Goodness. Um, maybe like 15 to 20? I don't know, it feels like so many. Every time I put a list together, I'm like, "Wow!"

Jennie: All over Europe, Italy, Germany, France, Greece, New Zealand, Japan, Thailand, Mexico.

Arlene: Actually one of my friend's dad, every time I see him he loves to ask, so "Where did you go?"

Tara: In some lines of work they would, they would discover the culture through music, or through art. And we discover the culture through the food. What's your favorite trip that you've been on from a product development standpoint?

Arlene: There's a couple, but I would say one that is the most recent is Republic of Georgia. What was really interesting to me is that they use tons of wild herbs, and they have tons of dips and you know we love dips, and so I thought that that translated pretty well. They have dumplings!

Tara: So, dumplings like perogies? Or, dumplings more like...a typical Asian dumpling?

Arlene: They literally look like the soup dumplings, like the Chinese soup dumplings, but they're huge! They're like half of your hand.

Tara: Really?!

Arlene: And how you eat it, you flip it over and you take a little bit of a nib and suck all the soup out and slowly finish it. And you can toss the knob, because it can be a little bit doughy, or people like it if they like chewy kind of texture.

Tara: And they're filled with meat?

Arlene: Yeah, they're traditionally filled with meat, I think beef or like beef and lamb or just lamb, but nowadays you can find mushrooms, vegetable, cheese, potatoes, like all sorts of different fillings.

Tara: Jennie, you recently went to New Zealand. Any products that you that came in from that experience?

Jennie: Yeah, actually, one that I am super excited about. It's coming out this holiday season. It's the Essential Oils and Diffuser gift set. It includes a really innovative and different type of

diffuser. It's wool balls strung together, and wool is actually a really great carrier of essential oils.

Matt: That's why the sheep always smell so great.

[Laughter in the room]

Matt: Everyone who's ever been to a petting zoo would be like, "No, no they don't."

Tara: But maybe if they had essential oils, then they might.

Jennie: Yeah, you're onto something.

Tara: I've seen lots of battery operated or electric diffusers, and you put a few drops of oil with water and... but this requires none of that.

Matt: You just set it out and it just works?

Jennie: Yeah. You put a few drops on the balls, and you can mix and match the different essential oils, which I like to do.

Matt: Make your own blend.

Jennie: Yeah.

Tara: That's a holiday-only product, and when it's gone; it's gone. And it's a one shot, at least for this year.

Jennie: Exactly. Yep.

Tara: It's already gone to work in my house. So it's really nice. Really good stuff. Love the lemon.

[Airport noises]

Tara: Any airport stories that are shareable? Any fun travel stories that you think are worthy of sharing?

Arlene: So many, but I don't know if they're appropriate. *(Laughs)*

Jennie: I do have one. It was not an airport story, but Arlene and Lori and I were in Bangkok. And if you've ever been in Bangkok, you know that there are these motorized scooters everywhere, and you have to pay attention or else something's going to happen, and I, I had a little run in with a scooter.

[Motorized scooter noise]

Jennie: I'm okay obviously because I'm here but... The funniest part about it was I looked back and the driver had this ear-to-ear grin on his face. Almost as if...

Tara: You made his quota for the day? Yikes! OK, so the lesson is for that, that one night in Bangkok, look both ways.

Jennie: Look both ways, kids.

Matt: Murray Head.

Tara: I knew you'd get the reference.

Matt: Had to do it...Murray Head. Do you have any Eureka moments? You're standing at a street market in Bangkok before you get hit by the scooter and something strikes you as like, "Oh yes, this is gonna be great."

Arlene: The trip we did last year when we went to Israel around November, that was probably one of the highlight trips as well.

Jennie: We had something called a sabich, and it's basically a pita sandwich. So you have half of a pita, and there's roasted eggplant, cabbage, pickled turnips, some hummus, and this thing called amba sauce, which is a pickled mango sauce. And the combination of all these flavors is just kind of like an explosion in your mouth. As soon as we had that, we knew we had to bring it in for Trader Joe's. And it is, it's on the way. It'll be coming. So I'm super excited.

Matt: So it's like a, like a freshly made sandwich.

Jennie: Yeah. It'll be in the Fresh section alongside the other wraps and salads.

Matt: It's not like "Bring Your Own Pita" or anything? It's all ready to go.

Jennie: *(Laughs)* Yeah.

Tara: B.Y.O.P.

Matt: Yeah, you know me.

[Laughter in the room]

Matt: I can't... stop it!

Tara: Here's an update. Since we talked with Jennie and Arlene, they've headed out on another adventure.

Jennie & Arlene: Hey Tara and Matt. It's Jennie. This is Arlene. And we're here in Seoul, South Korea.

Tara: Hey, Jennie and Arlene!

Arlene: So we're walking through the streets and there's a ton of vendors here, um, food vendors. So we're going to try this first vendor. It's... they're selling tteokbokkie. Did I say that right, Jennie?

Jennie: That was perfect, Arlene.

Arlene: All right, good. Um, so what it is, is it's a rice cake that's kinda mochi-like, very similar to our gnocchi actually. And we know our customers love those. Um, and it's in this red sauce. (um) very spicy red sauce. I believe their gochujang in it. It's so delicious. It's something I crave all the time.

Jennie: Yes, it's chewy, spicy. It's super delicious.

Arlene: What's not to love?

Jennie: Yeah.

[Factory noise]

Jennie: Right now we're at the soap factory that makes our Macaron Soaps that we're going to carry during the holidays. This is actually made for us from a third generation, family-owned company.

Arlene: Yeah, from what they told us, his grandparents started out with an herb farm, and that's kinda how they slowly got into fragrances, natural fragrances.

[Disco music, people talking...]

Arlene: So it's actually really difficult to not walk into these personal care slash beauty stores because they are on every corner. Right, Jenny, don't you think?

Jennie: Yeah, there's more of these beauty shops than coffee shops, clothing shops, restaurants. It's pretty remarkable how many of these there are, one after another after another.

Arlene: Yeah. So we're checking out one of 'em today. When you walk in, it's just rows and rows of face sheet masks, which has really done well.

Jennie: So we're just, we're seeing what other ideas we can get.

Arlene: Yeah, there's Collagen. Um, we're seeing Vitamin C, peptide...

Jennie: Snail.

Arlene: Snail, yes! Snail mask.

Jennie: *(laughs)*

Arlene: Delicious.

[Plane interior noise]

Arlene: So our trip has come to an end and although we're super sad, we're also really excited to go back home and share with everyone what we've discovered.

Jennie: Yeah. We'll see you guys real soon. 안녕

Tara: Okay, travel safely! We'll look forward to sampling some of the great stuff you found in Korea.

Tara: Matt, you used to work in product innovation.

Matt: It was a lot of back to the drawing board. It was a lot of tasting panels where the tasting panel said this isn't good enough.

[Footsteps walking down hallway. Voices echo-y.]

Tara: We're going to take you to another top-secret Trader Joe's Tasting Panel.

Matt: I think one of the biggest challenges for this very small crack team that we call the Product Innovators is to convey to those on the Tasting Panel that what they're doing makes sense and is worth pursuing, because a lot of this stuff can just seem wacky.

[Door opens, murmur of small group of people.]

Jennie: So, today I'm re-paneling these edible spoons. It's an edible spoon. It eats and tastes kind of like a plain cracker. It has a really neutral flavor. It goes well with pretty much about anything. I was able to eat a whole bowl of our Organic Red Pepper and Tomato Soup, and it stayed crunchy 'til the end. And it was really satisfying to have sort of that carb crunchiness in the last few bites of soup. The feedback from the last panel was, we wanted to replace the butter in it to make it Vegan. We've done that. We have sunflower oil now. It's replaced the butter. It was at \$4.99 for 12 spoons. We thought the price point was a little bit too high, so we got it down to \$3.99 for 12 spoons. These I can say are truly sustainable.

[Room laughter]

Jennie: And I think, and I think that our customers would really get excited about this.

Female Voice: Where are they coming from again, Jen?

Jennie: They're coming from Puerto Rico.

Another Voice: Do you know what the packaging looks like?

Jennie: This would be the packaging. It's a recyclable pouch. Number one, recyclability. Great questions, guys. Who would like to see this come in at \$3.99?

Tara: (whispers) Okay. That passes. The edible spoons are approved.

Jennie: Thank you.

Developer 2: I'm melting ice cream, so I'll go next. The next item was inspired by our Neapolitan Joe Joe's at \$2.99. So it's a phenomenal success. Therefore, wanted to make a Neapolitan Joe Joe ice cream. It starts with a base of strawberry and vanilla ice cream. There's a chocolate fudge swirl throughout. There's some fudge pieces, and finally our Neapolitan Joe Joe's. It's 12 percent butterfat, 49 percent overrun, which is in line with our seasonal ice creams. I'm proposing it in a pint as opposed to a quart, just because this gives our customers the opportunity to try different flavors and still buy their favorite everyday items. It would retail for \$2.99. Comps on pints of ice cream start at \$3.99 and go up, and this flavor would be entirely unique to Trader Joe's.

Voice: Would it be a seasonal item?

Developer 2: It would be seasonal. This cookie launched in end of July, so we'd probably time it with the cookie launch.

Matt: Avert your eyes, everyone. I'm going in.

[Room laughter]

Matt: Good grief! Just like a mess of flavors.

Developer 2: If there are no other comments, would you like to see this come in?

Tara: (whispers) Another product approved. That's delicious ice cream. We'll duck out now, and go talk to the folks on our wine Crew about their travels around the world.

Chris: I'm Chris Condit. So, what I do is I oversee all the wines that we carry in Trader Joe's. So I manage the category.

Pat: I'm Pat Andress. I am the wine Product Developer for the Trader Joe's company.

Matt: A lot of times people associate visiting wine regions with a vacation. Obviously you guys have to go there for work. It's tough work, but someone's got to do it. But if someone were going to ask you about where to take a wine tasting trip, where would you point them?

Chris: If you haven't been to France and Italy, of course you have to go to France and Italy. France is ridiculous. I mean, every part of France is amazing. So you have to do the trip to Bordeaux, you have to go through Burgundy, which really puts small wineries, small family operations in perspective. I mean there are parcels of land that had been subdivided amongst families for generations. It's like, "I own these three square feet, and those grapes are really precious." I mean, it's amazing.

Pat: I like Spain.

Chris: I don't think I've ever had a bad Spanish red wine.

Pat: Portugal, which I recently was over there investigating some quality wines. And, uh, Italy is one of my favorite spots. I haven't gone yet, but I've heard great things about South Africa. But the wines are expensive. They're very proud of 'em.

Chris: You should definitely go to the tip of the South Island of New Zealand to the Marlborough region. Fly into Blenheim. It's beautiful. It's essentially a mono-varietal area, but the wines are...wines are terrific.

Matt: Why is New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc so good?

Chris: A combination of factors. And I'm not, I'm not a scientist, so I'm not sure I'm going to get it all right, but... It's the cool climate. It's right on the coast, runs right up the...right up the Blenheim Valley there, Marlborough. It's the soil. It's the amount of sunlight. Some theories say, and I don't know if it's, if that's supported, but there's a hole in the ozone layer over that part of the world, which freckles the grapes, gives them a little bit of a sunburn. They say that might impart some of the flavor. So they get this, this high acid, high aromatic grapefruit lemonade flavor out of those wines and consistently.

Matt: It sounds like you're recommending sort of the archetypal quixotic, you know, like it's Don Quixote like just go, and there's so much to see, and it sounds like the good news is there's great wine all around the world.

Pat: Any port in the storm is my part.

Matt: This is a shipwreck tale that we're... *(chuckles)*

Chris: Any port in the storm... I hope that makes the final cut.

Tara: Of course, many of the Trader Joe's products you love are made right here in the good ol' US of A.

[Factory noise]

Tara: I'm at a long time Trader Joe's vendor in Southern California. This company has been creating products for Trader Joe's for decades actually, and they make a lot of tortillas for us and some other things as well.

Anthony: We are a family business. My grandfather started the business. A second generation took it over, and ran it for a number of years. Recently we've begun to transition to a third generation.

Tara: So that's you.

Anthony: That's me.

Tara: Anthony, can you show us what's over here?

Anthony: It's a great process because it really demonstrates what we're doing differently. So the hand stretched tortilla... It's fluffy, right? Whereas the conventional tortilla is flat. Here they'll place a dough ball, an individual will place a dough ball on the belt, and then some trained individuals will actually hand stretch the tortilla into the round, flat shape.

Tara: But if you're making tortillas from scratch at home, you're stretching them by hand and so they get that fluffier texture, right?

Anthony: That's... that's the way. And this one in particular is our best selling... Grandfather started 30 years and still to this day it's in Trader Joe's, and still to this day it's probably, one of our best selling SKU's, right? I, I don't, I would argue that maybe it's one of the best at Trader Joe's, but that's my... *(laughs)*

Tara: If we've sold it for 30 years, it must be doing okay.

Anthony: Thank you. My grandfather started it, and this is still my father and his siblings that continued it, and thankfully there's something for my family to continue to help grow. My son does work here on summers. He helps box product into the master cases, or my daughter who's 9 shreds paper or does office work. She's got to be a little bit safer than, than on the factory floor with heavy equipment moving by. But yeah, I think, I think they will be involved, and I hope and if not just my children, maybe my, my nieces or nephews. I've got employees have been here for generations now, right? Their grandfather started with my grandfather. They've continued on, and I've hired some of the new ones and it's, a center of, of the area or the community.

Tara: So Anthony, we've been talking a lot about Trader Joe's products that come from around the world. It's been really nice to be here with you, kind of around the corner.

Anthony: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[Noisy area... People milling about, overhead music]

Tara: So we're in a group of lots and lots of Trader Joe's captains right now.

Ben: Hi, this is Ben Bradbury, captain from Daly City, California.

Tara: If you're having a bunch of people over to watch a football game, or a customer comes to you with that question, what do you serve or what do you tell that customer?

Ben: You're either going with the Organic Tortilla Rounds or Organic Tortilla Triangles. If you need to add a little color, you got to go Sprouted Blue. And then the Organic Chip Dippers. Gotta love 'em, yeah.

Jamie: My name is Jamie. I'm from Atlanta, Georgia.

Tara: Well, what's, what's a big seller in Buckhead? What? What moves a lot through your store?

Jamie: Oh, we are the cauliflower store. We have so many customers that love our Cauliflower Gnocchi, Cauliflower Pizza. Pretty much if it has cauliflower in it... We actually have an entire freezer case dedicated to our cauliflower products. I think we sold about, gosh, I don't know how many units of that Cauliflower Gnocchi last week, but it is definitely popular.

Tara: Hey, thanks for joining us on this trip around the world. We have a favor to ask.

Matt: If you would, click on that free subscribe button. We're planning on more Inside Trader Joe's episodes, and that way you'll know when they come out. Subscribing is free and it's worth every penny.

Tara: On our next episode, I hit the road. I'll take you to the new Trader Joe's on the lower east side of Manhattan, and to the other Trader Joe's mother ship in Boston to talk to with our Crew there.. by the way, most of them, huge Red Sox fans... about lots of things, including plans to open more neighborhood stores very soon.

Tara: Thanks for listening...

Matt: And thanks for listening.