

Inside Trader Joe's Podcast Transcript — Episode 85: Customer Choice Awards 2025

[Upbeat music begins.]

Matt: So Tara, what's new in the Trader Joe's Customer Choice Awards this year?

Tara: Matt, I'm so glad you asked. We have a new category.

Matt: What?

Tara: A new category.

Matt: Well, what is it?

Tara: The New Category.

Matt: Yes, the new category?

Tara: That's right. That's what it is.

Matt: What is?

Tara: The New Category.

Matt: So when customers voted for the new category, what did they vote for?

Tara: Oh, we're going to find out because we're about to reveal the winners of the 16th Trader Joe's Customer Choice Awards, including our customer's favorite new products.

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

Tara: And sync.

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

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

Matt: (echoey announcer voice) And I'm Matt Sloan, your countdown host, counting down those winners.

Tara: You can just be yourself, Matt.

Matt: Oh, good.

Tara: But hey, speaking of countdowns, we are going to share our customer's top five overall favorite products later in the podcast. But let's start with some other categories first.

Matt: Let's begin at the beginning, breakfast and brunch.

[Theme music ends. Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: I love me some breakfast, but I tend to eat breakfast on the later side.

Matt: Is the difference between brunch as compared to breakfast really just that time of day, or are there specific dishes?

Tara: Well, I mean, I guess it depends, but breakfast and brunch makes it a little bit bigger and gives people a little more options. If you had to guess what our customer's favorite breakfast and brunch product was in the whole store, what would you guess?

Matt: I'd probably choose something so basic and maybe actually something very much in the news these days. I might guess eggs.

[Buzzer.]

Tara: And you would be wrong.

Matt: And I'm comfortable with that.

Tara: Eggs did not even (egg cracking on the side of a bowl) crack the top five (laughs), sorry, pun was not intended it just came out of my mouth and there it was, which is fascinating to me. I can't even imagine having a brunch without eggs.

[Music ends. Timpani roll.]

Tara: The number one breakfast and brunch product as voted by our customers. It is Hashbrowns.

[Crowd applause.]

Matt: Hashbrowns?

Tara: And you might think hashbrowns, meh, whatever.

[Upbeat music begins.]

Tara: But people love our Hashbrowns. Hashbrowns got 300% more votes than any other product in that category.

Matt: Well, that's not nothing. And by hashbrowns of course, we must be talking about those Hashbrown, I mean, patty is I guess the term that we would use?

Tara: Yeah. And actually in the episode that we just aired, the Snacky Hacks episode, our crew member friend Tracy gave us a great hashbrown hack. You got to go back and listen to that other episode.

Matt: So potatoes, everyone's favorite root vegetable in hashbrown form, the 16th Trader Joe's Customer Choice Award winner for breakfast and brunch. Amazing.

Tara: Okay. We have so many fun categories. One of the things people talk about when they talk about Trader Joe's is our appetizers, our frozen appetizers in particular, the entire top five in our appetizers category is from our freezer section.

Matt: And often if you're having appetizers, you're probably having other things and you're most certainly having company. Time is of the essence here, right?

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: Got to be quick. Got to be easy.

Tara: Yep.

Matt: And those frozen appetizers are both of those things.

Tara: The appetizer that came in in the number one spot, something that you actually would pair with other things. Instead of just being suspenseful here...

[Music ends. Timpani roll.]

Tara: The number one appetizer as voted by our customers is the Creamy Spinach and Artichoke Dip.

[Crowd applause.]

Matt: Decades, we have had this product.

Tara: Yeah. And it's cool.

[Light upbeat music begins.]

Matt: I guess we put a couple of vegetables in there just to make ourselves feel better about this creamy dip.

Tara: You can heat it in the oven, and it comes out wonderfully. But you can also heat it in the microwave if you're in more of a time crunch situation, you don't want to spend the time. It doesn't get that brown sort of caramelized top when you put it in the microwave, but it really does taste good.

Matt: I have heard talk of people using the microwave prep to get it warm enough to be spreadable and then spreading it on a flatbread kind of thing, popping that in the oven, maybe a little bit of a broiler action to kind of brown that top. It's as much a topping or spread as it is a dip, but I think most people just dip away at this.

Tara: I think that you just made a hack.

Matt: Hot dip hack.

Tara: Hot Dip Hacks with Matt.

Matt: And dip is something I'm accustomed to hearing.

[Music transition.]

Tara: (laughs) Before we go any further, I think it's time to pay tribute to the Trader Joe's Product Hall of Fame.

Matt: Is this kind of like our in memoriam segment?

Tara: No, these products are very much still with us, but we decided a few years ago to retire some products to the Hall of Fame, products that have won in their respective categories five times.

Matt: I mean, really one of the purposes of the Customer Choice Awards is to pass along recommendations so that everyone can try the favorites. I mean, if we had the same winners over and over...

Tara: And over and over and over five times.

Matt: Well then, the awards wouldn't call attention to any things we haven't already saluted.

[Music transition.]

Tara: So now we'd like to put the spotlight on our Hall of Fame products individually. They are (ding) Dark Chocolate Peanut Butter Cups.

Matt: (ding) Peanut Butter Filled Pretzel Nuggets.

Tara: (ding) Mandarin Orange Chicken.

Matt: (ding) Soy Chorizo.

Tara: And Unexpected Cheddar. (ding) We still love you, Product Hall of Famers. You are and always will be the OGs of the Customer Choice Awards. And yes, I just said OGs. (laughs) I say OGs all the time.

Matt: Like, "Oh gee whiz?"

Tara: I say, "Oh, geez."

Matt: Geez.

Tara: Yeah. Speaking of OGs, I think it's time for cheese. This is writing itself today.

[Music transition.]

Matt: Well, we know what didn't win.

Tara: Unexpected Cheddar because as we just said, Unexpected Cheddar has been retired to the Product Hall of Fame. So Matt, you can do the honors. What is the winner for favorite cheese?

[Music ends. Timpani roll.]

Matt: It's not just the favorite, it's the GOAT, the greatest of all time. Wait a minute, let's see. Yeah, in this case it looks like GOAT actually really just means goat.

Tara: Oh. (laughs)

Matt: Goat Cheese is the favorite cheese this year.

[Crowd applause.]

Tara: We sell really, really, really yummy goat cheese.

Matt: We do, and I'm curious maybe even flummoxed...

[Upbeat music begins.]

Matt: ...by the absence of specificity, I mean which goat cheese?

Tara: You got to say specificity again. (laughs)

Matt: Specificity, specifically, but I'm a little concerned about this absence of a specific cheese. I mean, which one?

Tara: I don't know. But when I buy goat cheese at Trader Joe's, I buy so many. I buy the blueberry one, at the holiday season I buy the cranberry one. I buy the crumbles sometimes just to put on a salad. I buy just a plain goat cheese sometimes. So maybe customers are just like, "Yeah, you guys have great goat cheese."

Matt: I think you're onto something. I think what is meant by goat cheese is fresh goat cheese. Chèvre, that spreadable somewhat crumbly cheese, not necessarily goat Gouda.

Tara: You know what's interesting about the cheese category?

Matt: That it was cheesy?

Tara: One of the top 10 winners in our initial counting of votes for the cheese category included a product that we had to take it out because it's not cheese.

Matt: What the heck is it?

Tara: It's a reusable cloth bag that is called the Cheese Experience.

Matt: I know the bag well. I love this bag.

Tara: I love this bag too. And I love that our customers voted for it in the cheese category.

Matt: I mean, our customers are hip. And in the spirit of full disclosure, I'd like to take this opportunity and own up to a typographical error that we committed on this Cheese Experience bag.

Tara: There's a typo on the bag?

Matt: There is. And when we said, "Je' m appelle Comté," by that we meant, "My name as Comté." Well, we put the apostrophe and a space in incorrect places. And for that we are very sorry and we're working on fixing the next round of bags. And yet please understand that this first round of typographically incorrect cheese bags, well, they are collector's items.

Tara: So wait, would that be the French correction that we have to make? (laughs)

Matt: I think of it as if you can't fix it, feature it. But you know what? I like your Hackman.

Tara: (laughing) I just completely cracked myself up. I can't breathe. I just cracked myself...

[Music transition.]

Matt: Okay, it's time for my favorite category. And this is strange because I can't eat any of these things.

Tara: Ahhh, Bath, Body & Home.

Matt: I'm wearing my Daily Facial Sunscreen SPF 40 and the Leave-in Conditioner and of course my Vanilla Lip Mask. (lip pop)

Tara: I can smell your Lavender Hand Sanitizer Spray.

Matt: One of these certainly must be the winner.

Tara: Nope.

[Music ends. Timpani roll.]

Tara: The 16th Customer Choice Awards Favorite Bath, Body & Home product is perhaps not surprising, Brazil Nut Body Butter.

[Crowd applause.]

Matt: That is not surprising.

[Light upbeat music begins.]

Tara: It's currently not even in stores. So when the voting happened, it's not even available for purchase and that's how much people love it. It's still top of mind.

Matt: This has not really been intended to be an everyday kind of product, but I'm wondering if we need to reconsider our approach.

Tara: Well, I don't know. I think that's outside of our purview in this moment, but we are planning to return it to stores in like May or June of this year.

Matt: Keep those eyes peeled.

Tara: Yep. And listen, if we had all of these products that everybody loves every single day in every store, we wouldn't have any room for innovation or bringing in new products.

Matt: We would just have no room.

[Music transition.]

Tara: Our next category, New Products.

Matt: Should we do that Abbott and Costello bit again?

Tara: Who?

Matt: First base.

Tara: Let's skip the schtick for once because this is a really important category. If one of the primary purposes of the Customer Choice Awards is to allow customers to recommend products to other customers, this is actually the category where we find out about new products that are really catching on. All of these were introduced during 2024, some of them near the end of the year, they're very, very new.

[Music ends. Timpani roll.]

Tara: The favorite new product as voted by our customers is Cashel Blue Cheese Irish Potato Chips.

[Crowd applause.]

Matt: Now these chips, they were limited.

[Upbeat music begins.]

Matt: And they came into stores in late November and we knew that these were delicious, but I think we were a little caught off guard by just how popular these were right out of the gate.

Tara: I think so because blue cheese can be polarizing to people, right? We love blue cheese, and our customers don't always love it as much as we do.

Matt: They are from an Irish chip making factory using Irish grown potatoes and an Irish made blue cheese. And those sound both alluring and maybe not for everybody.

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: But I've heard overwhelmingly positive feedback about these chips, which is really, really good because we love this chip maker.

Tara: Yes, we do. So much so actually we have another chip coming soon from this same chip maker. I happen to have a bag right here.

Matt: These chips taste like a wonderful baked potato with garlic and butter on them.

Tara: (bag crinkling) Easy to open bag. That's a win. (opening bag) Oh my god, those smell really good. So these are ridge cut potato chips.

Matt: (chip crunching) That's the sound of us eating again on microphones.

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: And the garlic is, I think, interesting because it's not like a raw garlic kind of flavor. It's like a roasted garlic flavor. So it's a little bit sweet. The sweetness is also rounded out by that lactic dairy butter sweetness. I think variants of butter potato chips is something worth pursuing.

Tara: That's really good. All right.

[Music transition.]

Tara: There's a few more products that I want to mention in the New Products Category because these are all new products, and these are things that customers might not have had a chance to discover on their own yet. Things like the Garlic Gondolas, which is like a sort of like a cross between a pizza and a calzone. Really delicious. Just pizza dough with garlic butter. We have a garlic butter theme happening.

Matt: Interesting to note, not really a surprise, so glad that they're here in stores and on this list, Strawberry Hold The Cone!

Tara: So good. The Crispy Potato & Poblano Pepper Tacos. If you're in Southern California, you're very familiar with crispy potato tacos. These are really delicious.

Matt: And it's kind of a curious thing for me to think about like an already made frozen taco.

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: And these are really good.

Tara: Another one of my favorite products from last year that made this list were the Sugared Rice Cracker Stars. And those were a limited buy and there may still be some in stores right now, but I think they're mostly gone. But there is a heart shaped version coming in. So that's kind of exciting and fun. And this product also got quite a good number of votes from customers. It's kind of like riding out our top five, top 10 new products for the year.

Matt: For sure and we're always looking for new.

Tara: And we have to keep moving forward because we have a number of categories to still cover. I would like for us to go to Lunch and Dinner.

[Music ends. Timpani roll.]

Tara: This year, the winner of Lunch and Dinner...

Matt: Butter Chicken with Basmati Rice.

[Crowd applause.]

Tara: So it's literally a winner winner chicken dinner.

Matt: It is.

Tara: Again, this category is chock-full of products from our frozen aisle.

[Light upbeat music begins.]

Tara: And I think what our customers are telling us here is they're thinking, "What can I make quickly? What can I make that's going to be really satisfying that's not going to require a ton of effort or time on my part?"

Matt: I'm having déjà vu all over again. Haven't we done a show where we talk about Butter Chicken versus Tikka Masala?

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: Because number two on the list for Lunch and Dinner, Chicken Tikka Masala.

Tara: Similar enough that people can get confused but different enough that it makes sense to have both of them.

Matt: So easy and delicious.

Tara: Absolutely. All right, where do you want to go?

Matt: I'd like to go with a category, a topic near and dear to my heart. Let's look at Produce.

Tara: Okay.

[Music transition.]

Tara: I've worked for Trader Joe's for almost 23 years and our produce section when I started was so small. And when you walk into a Trader Joe's now, there's so much of it. There's stacks of individual bananas and oranges and apples and all kinds of salads and kits and prepared veggies. I love our produce section.

[Music ends. Timpani roll.]

Matt: The 16th Customer Choice Award winner for Produce... Teeny Tiny Avocados.

[Crowd applause.]

Tara: Love that.

Matt: And I think this is also an example of if you can't fix it, feature it.

[Upbeat music begins.]

Matt: I mean, these are small and these are perfectly portioned in my point of view.

Tara: Wow. That was a lot of Ps.

Matt: Popping with Ps.

Tara: Wow. And by perfectly portioned, I think what we're talking about is they're individually sized, right? It's like the old personal pan pizza. It's a personal sized avocado. It's one serving for one person.

Matt: And the pit. We can't stop saying P words, but the pit is also perfectly proportionlet because it's not giant. No big pits here, people.

Tara: You said proportionlet.

Matt: Proportionate.

Tara: Proportionlet.

Matt: Did I say proportionlet? Which is a little proportion.

Tara: (laughs) For a little avocado.

Matt: Exactly.

Tara: Yeah. Teeny Tiny Avocados. I think that's a great win. We saw a need and we worked with our suppliers to find a way to fill that need.

Matt: Thinking about avocados of course makes me think about guacamole, which then of course makes me think about our Snack Category.

Tara: We have snacks for every occasion, Matt. We really do.

Matt: We do. All times of day, all occasions. All levels of intensity of deliciousness.

[Music ends. Timpani roll.]

Tara: The winner of the 16th Customer Choice Awards for Favorite Snack...Trader Joe's Chili & Lime Flavored Rolled Corn Tortilla Chips.

[Crowd applause.]

Matt: And the good news here is I think we're able to stay in stock for the most part now.

Tara: I think we are. And here's some news.

[Light upbeat music begins.]

Tara: This is the fifth win for the Chili & Lime Rolled Corn Tortilla Chips. Do you know what that means?

Matt: I know what that means. I think I do.

Tara: Yes.

[Upbeat announcement music.]

Tara: We have a new entrant into the Hall of Fame. Can we get a round of applause?

[Crowd applause.]

Matt: I am so excited for this, with all due respect, because next year we get to talk about something else.

[Light upbeat music begins.]

Tara: Right, no, it's true. That's the thing. The Customer Choice Awards should be a celebration of people's favorites, yes. But also a way for people to maybe learn about some product they've never tried before. All right, we're going to move on. We got a few things left to cover before we are done.

[Music transition.]

Matt: Salty Snacks. How about a drink? Beverages.

Tara: So here's the thing, we got a bunch of votes for a product. It's not the winner, but it kind of surprised me. And that was the French Market Sparkling Lemonade. We've had these for decades. They're really good sparkling lemonade. They're not too sweet, they're not too bubbly. The French Market Sparkling Lemonade came up at number two on this list, but the other flavors like the Limeade and the Berry, they all came up in the top 10. Shout out to the French Market Sparkling Drinks.

Matt: That's really fun to see.

Tara: Yeah.

Matt: All right, so who's our winner?

Tara: All right.

[Music ends. Timpani roll.]

Tara: Our winner is actually a product that's not available in most stores right now because it only comes in sort of the fourth quarter of the calendar year. It's the Spiced Cider.

[Crowd applause.]

Tara: Unfortunately, Spiced Cider is not actually available in most of our stores right now because it's an end of the year product and we're at the beginning of the year, but it will be back later in 2025.

[Light upbeat music begins.]

Matt: So, that's fortunate.

Tara: It's a fall classic at Trader Joe's. And so we know when it shows up in stores that fall is about to arrive.

Matt: Dual purpose functionality. It is a symbol, a signal of the season and in and of itself it is absolutely delicious too. I love this product.

Tara: You talked about dual functionality. This is a product that I think is equally delicious, either hot or cold. You can warm it up on the stove and have a little warm apple cider for a crisp fall evening. Or you can drink it cold over ice with a little cinnamon swizzle stick in there and it's just as delicious.

Matt: I think if you were making a holiday punch bowl and you had a bundt pan, and extra space in the freezer, I would make a giant spiced cider ring of ice and drop that in the holiday punch bowl.

Tara: Oh my gosh.

Matt: So that the ice is just cider. It doesn't dilute the punch.

Tara: Wow.

Matt: That packs a punch.

Tara: You just blew my mind a little bit. You know what else is going to blow your mind? The Sweet Treats Category.

Matt: Are we not Treat Headquarters?

Tara: The product that won this category...

[Music ends. Timpani roll.]

Tara: ...it's so good. It's so consistent. It's so beloved. We've had it for so long.

Matt: It's so mysterious to me, I mean like what...

Tara: It is the Sublime Ice Cream Sandwiches.

[Crowd applause.]

Tara: They're the best ice cream sandwiches I've ever had in my entire life.

[Upbeat music begins.]

Matt: A classic.

Tara: Perfect. Delicious. Every single time. We actually have a really cool video about how they're made on our YouTube channel. It's kind of mesmerizing to watch them being made over and over and over again. I've watched it maybe too many times.

Matt: Now, in the spirit of candor, we didn't invent this. The producer with whom we work, I believe, has perfected it.

Tara: Yeah, a chocolate chip cookie ice cream sandwich is not something we invented. Absolutely not.

Matt: But dang it, ours is great.

Tara: I think we have the best one you can buy.

Matt: Dare I say...sublime.

Tara: Oh.

[Music transition.]

Tara: Okay, Matt, we have reached the moment we've all been waiting for.

Matt: The Brazil Nut Body Butter is walking down the red carpet.

Tara: No, it's time for us to reveal the overall favorite Trader Joe's product in the 16th Customer Choice Awards.

Matt: But first, let's count down the others in the top five.

Tara: Okay. If this were an award show on TV, this is when the other nominees would be on camera trying to look gracious and supportive.

[Award Show music begins.]

Matt: All right, zoom in on number five (ding) Vegetable Fried Rice.

Tara: Number four (ding) Kimbap.

Matt: Number three (ding) Butternut Squash Mac and Cheese.

Tara: Number two (ding) Steamed Pork and Ginger Soup Dumplings.

Matt: Okay, are the Trader Joe's Jingle Singers ready?

[Music ends. Singers clearing their throats.]

Singers: ♪ Mi, mi, mi, mi, mi, mi, mi. ♪

Matt: All right, here we go.

Singers: ♪ Number one. ♪

[Timpani roll.]

Matt: The Overall Favorite Product is... Hey, did I ever tell you about last week when...

Tara: Hey, later. The suspense is killing me.

Matt: Chili & Lime Flavored Rolled Corn Tortilla Chips.

[Crowd applause. Award Show music begins.]

Tara: Returning champion.

Matt: What a mouthful.

Tara: Wow. And they are so delicious. And now they have been retired to the Hall of Fame, and they will never be able to appear at the top of this list again. They're retiring from the Customer Choice Awards contention. They're not retiring from our shelves.

Matt: We will still sell them as long as you want to buy them.

Tara: I cannot wait to hear what happens next year. I'm already excited for 2026.

Matt: (echoey announcer voice, crowd applause) And that concludes the 16th Trader Joe's Customer Choice Awards. Drive safely and we'll see you next year.

[Closing music begins.]

Tara: With lots of other episodes before then, hit that free subscribe or follow button to make sure you get them.

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

Tara: Thanks for listening.

Matt: And thanks for listening.

[Closing music ends.]

Matt: Oh man, there's going to be a long line at the valet.