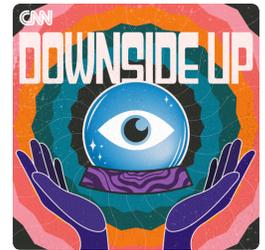


Downside Up

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What would the world look like without flavor?



Speakers

Sarah Lohman, Chris Cillizza, Anton Ego, from Ratatouille, Dr. Paul Freedman, Clip from "Soylent Green", , David Grimm, Dr. Margot Demello

00:00:03

Sarah Lohman

If we were living in a world where human beings didn't experience flavor. I mean, on one hand, if we go super meta, we can say, "Would we be here? Would we be successful?"

00:00:12

Chris Cillizza

There's a scene from 2007's Disney Pixar film Ratatouille that perfectly encapsulates the idea of comfort food. It's the climax of the film. The cut throat food critic Anton Ego is served what's considered a peasant dish that.

00:00:26

Anton Ego, from Ratatouille

Ratatouille? They must be joking.

00:00:30

Chris Cillizza

And as he takes a bite, he's transported to a moment in his childhood. He's just scraped his knee riding his bike, and he tearfully turns to his mom for comfort. She sets down a bowl of ratatouille in front of him, and he instantly finds solace in the dish.

00:00:51

Sarah Lohman

We need a memory of what food is good for us and what food is bad for us.

00:00:57

Anton Ego, from Ratatouille

Everyone has their own personal ratatouille. For me, it's my grandma's spaghetti and meatballs. Every time I went and got my hair cut, she would be making meatballs at her house when we went over there afterwards. It was always a giant pot bubbling full with lots of meatballs and lots of red spaghetti sauce. Delicious!

00:01:17

Dr. Paul Freedman

If you have that kind of world, then you wouldn't have socializing over food. You wouldn't have dates where you met for a meal. Life would be so impoverished.

00:01:27

Chris Cillizza

What if you woke up tomorrow morning, though, and you couldn't even taste your favorite food anymore? What if you couldn't experience flavor at all? I'm Chris Cillizza and you're listening to the very first episode of Downside Up, a new podcast from CNN that looks for answers to some of the weirdest What If questions of our time. This week, we're wondering what would the world be like without flavor? How have taste and flavor made us who we are? Plus, one of our guests gets put in the trivia hot seat. So join us as we turn our taste buds downside up.

00:02:06

Chris Cillizza

This is Sarah Lohman, a food historian who wrote "Eight Flavors: The Untold Story of American Cuisine." And before we can understand what our world would be like without flavor, there are a few things I need Sarah to clear up for me. All right, Sarah, I want to start, well, at least for me, basic. Let's define some terms. What is taste versus what is flavor?

00:02:29

Sarah Lohman

A lot of times we talk about our experience, our mouthful experience. I don't know if that's the term we...Flavor and taste, we use them interchangeably when they're really not. So taste is part of flavor. But when it comes to taste, it's generally accepted that we have a very limited number of basic tastes. So that is going to include sweet, sour, salty, bitter and savory or umami. And we're also considering fatty at this point, too. We have to look for physical receptors on the tongue, essentially for something to count as like a basic taste.

00:03:07

Sarah Lohman

So we've got our six basic tastes and those contribute to flavor. But flavor is also smell of which we can smell tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of different scents. Temperature also contributes to flavor, like think about a bowl of ice cream fresh out of the freezer versus if it's a little bit melty, it's a different experience. Texture too. Think of a potato chip crispy right out of the bag or like when you forget to close the bag tight in the next day, it's a little soggy. And all of these different sort of sensory examples, these are all put together in our frontal lobe, which is also our memory center. So that's why it's so intertwined, too.

00:03:46

Chris Cillizza

So taste is the basic response our tongues have to certain chemicals. The flavor is something richer.

00:03:52

Sarah Lohman

Flavor is extremely complex and definitely experienced differently by different people. The best way, I think, especially for our listeners to experience this, is to take like a flaming hot Cheeto, a barbecue potato chip, something like that, plug your nose and then take a bite. So when you take a bite, you might experience crunchy, you might experience some chemical irritation if it's like a spicy, you know, capsaicin, you might experience salty, you might experience savory. But then when you sort of unplug your nose, then you actually get the flavor of something, the flavor of the flaming hot Cheeto, the pepper, the spices, all the other components to it. So its smell is really important to our sense of flavor, whereas without it we're experiencing taste and maybe some physical sensation.

00:04:43

Chris Cillizza

For me, that's a sandwich called the Chicken Madness in a place called Wise Millers in Georgetown, right by where I went to college. It's a huge chicken breast chopped up with peppers, onions, cheese. It's incredible. And I ate one probably every day of the three and a half years of college that I knew it existed. I still go back there and bring my kids so they can enjoy it too, and I can have another one. We eat it right outside the store. It is simply the best sandwich I've ever eaten and it brings back such great memories, not just of how good the food is, but of the times I had college too. You mentioned all these senses that flavor is tied into. Is memory one of them, too?

00:05:19

Sarah Lohman

Yes. Memory is absolutely a way that we interpret flavor. And I think that your story's an excellent example. Part of it is because all of the sensory information that's coming in is processed in our memory center. And that's why, too, smells tends to be one of the biggest trigger for memory. I don't know if you've ever, you know, smelled something and thought...

00:05:39

Chris Cillizza

Oh, totally

00:05:39

Sarah Lohman

...of a time or place or a person, right? So and that's a component of flavor. So all of that is getting processed together. A lot of comfort foods have to do with nostalgia. They have to do with memory, often comfort foods, we associate it with our idea of home, wherever that may be or whoever that might be with.

00:05:56

Chris Cillizza

And if we have foods that give us comfort, well, then we also have foods that we just can't stand, like cauliflower.

00:06:04

Sarah Lohman

I think just about everybody has what's known as a flavor aversion. And a flavor aversion for a lot of people might be like coconut rum. For me, unfortunately, it's chocolate cake. For my dad, it's toasted coconut. These are foods that we consumed or beverages that we consumed, and then afterwards got very ill. Now, was it chocolate cake's or coconut rum's fault? It probably was coconut rum's fault, to be honest. The chocolate cake that I had the experience with, my mom entered a baking competition. And so she was making a lot of chocolate cake. And then I don't know if I got food poisoning or I just happened to have the stomach flu afterwards. But it doesn't matter because now my brain permanently associates chocolate cake or coconut rum or tequila with being ill. And so when people say, "Oh, I can't eat that," or "I can't drink tequila anymore," usually that's a bad night in college.

00:06:57

Sarah Lohman

But there's also something happening in our brain that our brain says, "That's poison. We can't eat that." And it's another thing over time slowly you can sort of get over, but the sort of physical and emotional aversion you have to it, that's our brain learning and remembering our experience with that food before. So it was certainly a lot different if we were hunting, gathering, experiencing different foods, tasting new foods, and the brain is remembering this as opposed to tequila or coconut rum. But basically it's the same principle.

00:07:27

Chris Cillizza

In terms of pure survival. What kept us from constantly eating things that were poisonous, or... Was that taste? Was that just trial and error? Was it flavors?

00:07:39

Sarah Lohman

It's a little trial and error, and it's a lot of taste. It's believed, at least at the moment, that taste is informing our ability to understand what food is good and nutritious for us and what is not. In general, poisonous foods taste bitter. Sweet indicates the presence of carbohydrates, which we need to survive. That's our fuel. Salty as well indicates the presence of salt, and we need salt in our bodies. Even savory's indicating usually that there's protein there. So the good ones feel like little rewards. The taste itself delivers a little chemical rewards that makes us want to keep eating those things. Whereas this is bitter, then we know that this isn't something that's not good for us, sort of on a deep level.

00:08:25

Chris Cillizza

There's a clear evolutionary explanation for taste. Without it, prehistoric humans might have just kept eating poisonous berries by the handful. And...well, no more prehistoric humans. Which means no more history. Which means no more great podcast. But do we need flavor? Cows seem pretty happy just eating grass. Koalas are content with their eucalyptus. Cats biologically can't taste sweet things and well they seem like they're doing fine. So what would our lives be like without flavor?

00:08:54

Sarah Lohman

If we were living in a world where human beings didn't experience flavor, on one hand, if we go super meta, we can say, "Would we be here? Would we be successful?" I mean, that being said, food would be really boring because we wouldn't have the same interest and passion in eating. It might have texture, maybe. We'd probably just be drinking like Soylent, just like some food, some fuel for our body that makes us go.

00:09:17

Chris Cillizza

If you've never heard of Soylent, well, consider yourself lucky. It's a sci-fi film from the seventies where everyone eats flavored wafers and spoiler alert..

00:09:27

Clip from "Soylent Green"

Soylent Green is people!

00:09:31

Chris Cillizza

A few years ago, some Silicon Valley startup thought it'd be cute to use that name for their meal replacement drinks. And Sarah's right. If that's what eating was like, it'd be pretty boring.

00:09:41

Sarah Lohman

But I think that there are people who can answer that question better because in the past three years, we've experienced something very unusual, in that because of Covid-19, a huge percentage of the population has lost their ability to experience flavor. And a lot of people say they've lost their sense of taste, which again, is probably not what they have lost. You can taste salty, you can taste sweet, but you can't experience the flavor of something. So I would be curious to talk to people who have actually gone through or are going through that experience and see how their relationship to the world changed. I think that they'd be able to say better than I would.

00:10:20

Dr. Paul Freedman

I had a cold. Maybe I could taste 10% of things. What was eerie was that when I put something in my mouth, I could taste it, but then it went away immediately. I really appreciated, by its absence, how much of our sense of taste is a kind of series of overtones and like meditating on the flavor.

00:10:42

Chris Cillizza

This is Dr. Paul Friedman, a Yale professor and author of "Food: The History of Taste." And I should clarify, Dr. Friedman didn't lose the sense of taste due to Covid-19. This was another type of cold that he had had in 2010. But this was someone whose life's work had been studying the history of taste and food, and suddenly he couldn't experience either.

00:11:01

Dr. Paul Freedman

So there I was in Belgium, we had reservations at rather fancy places. I couldn't tell the difference between ordinary and really good. And what was really disappointing was that French fries and beer, I couldn't taste the difference at all. And Belgium is famous for both.

00:11:19

Chris Cillizza

Dr. Friedman's work on food stretches all the way back to prehistoric humans. And one of his most interesting ideas to me is that flavor is an evolutionary advantage because it offered us humans a choice. While most animals just naturally eat whatever is in their environment, humans actually seek out new flavors.

00:11:39

Dr. Paul Freedman

I think that the common sense notion is that taste is formed by environment. Might you live on the seacoast? You're going to like fish. You live in a society like the Southwestern Native Americans before contact with Europeans where corn is your staple, you're going to like corn. And up to a point, that's true. So there are many examples of people who live quite near the ocean and who don't really like fish. So the Danes, until recently, really preferred meat, butter, dairy products, cheese and a very small repertoire of fish. To this day, England, which has just thousands of miles of coastline, cod, plaice, salmon, there are really only three or four fish that people like. On the other hand, Madrid, a city that is in the center of Spain. That's one of the best places to have seafood.

00:12:32

Chris Cillizza

And as we discovered those new foods, some of our meals became ceremonial. I just think of my life, right? My kids live. So much of how we gather is organized around food. When did that start to become a thing? When were these celebratory feast meals historically? Like when did all that begin?

00:12:49

Dr. Paul Freedman

I think it goes back as far as, really, humanity, So insofar as we can put together through archeological evidence how prehistoric people lived, they had a lot of celebrations and they hunted in communities. They were not solitary eaters. So the first real kinds of feasts that we have written records of are from places like ancient Egypt and ancient Babylonia. And they're a lot like modern banquets, pretty hierarchical. The person, the emperor, or Pharaoh, or ruler or wealthy person of the village gave hospitality. And as is the case now, this was both generous and also a way of cementing loyalty.

00:13:36

Chris Cillizza

It's fascinating that even in ancient history, people used access to food flavors and feasts as a means to divide and categorize each other into classes. Think of how we use the phrase "They have a sense of taste" today as a way of saying that someone is sophisticated. Especially in America, most people have all sorts of cuisine within a short driving distance, even if you just stick to fast food.

00:13:57

Dr. Paul Freedman

So if you think of a traditional, say, peasant society, they ate better than we sometimes think. They're not starving all the time, but their diet was monotonous, so they might only eat meat maybe once a week or even less frequently. What well-off people in developed countries or well-off people in non-developed countries, for that matter, experience now is they can sort of have more or less anything or like a variety of things that they like all the time. And some immigrants, particularly from Italy in the 19th century, but also Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, describing the plenitude of food in the United States, say "it's like a holiday. Every day I eat meat four times a week." And their relatives in the village back home often didn't believe them. They just say, "You're lying. That's impossible. People don't get to live like that."

00:14:56

Chris Cillizza

Like a holiday every day. Huh. That puts the three slices of pizza I had for lunch in a little bit different perspective. Coming up after the break, Sara Lohman and Dr. Paul Freedman help us understand what our world would be like without flavor.

00:15:10

Sarah Lohman

So with black pepper, that is the first tradecraft that we were able to establish after the Revolutionary War. That's actually part of what started this big war, that they have this monopoly on our trade.

00:15:21

Chris Cillizza

We'll also play a little trivia and a warning...It's about to get spicy.

00:15:39

Welcome back to Downside Up. I'm Chris Cillizza. And today I'm trying to understand what our world would look like if humans could not experience flavor.

00:15:47

Dr. Paul Freedman

If didn't have a sense of taste or if we regarded food as simply fuel...or to follow some science fiction, when I was growing up, the expectation was that in the future we'd just live by pills and we wouldn't have to fuss with food. If you had that kind of world, then you wouldn't have socializing over food, you wouldn't have dates. Life would be so impoverished. What would take its place? I mean, we socialize over sports and religious events and personal events. You'd have the birthday, but you wouldn't have the birthday cake. It's hard for me to imagine, or insofar as I can imagine it, it doesn't sound very pleasant.

00:16:28

Chris Cillizza

So much of our daily habits would change. Look, I spend most of my morning at work thinking about where I'm going to get lunch. But if we step back and look at it from a big picture perspective, our ability to explore our world in search for new flavors has had a major effect on our civilization. In grade school, you may have heard about something called the spice trade, but if you're like me, you may not remember all that much about it. It's okay. Here's our chance to get a refresher course from a Yale historian, in this case Paul Freedman.

00:16:58

Dr. Paul Freedman

My job primarily is as a historian of the Middle Ages, so roughly 300 to 1500 A.D. And medieval cuisine in Europe was very highly spiced, at least the high end cuisine. People loved the taste of pepper, cinnamon. We have about 150 cookbooks that survive from the 13th to 15th centuries, and 80% of the recipes call for some kind of spice. Things like cinnamon are not just in desserts the way we're familiar with them. The spices are mixed. If anything, the cuisine of medieval Europe resembles that of like maybe Morocco now.

00:17:40

Dr. Paul Freedman

The spices came from far away. So far away, indeed, that they didn't really know where India was. And the whole point of expeditions like that of Columbus or Da Gama, what used to be called explorations, but let's just call them colonizing missions, these changed the course of history. They're the most cataclysmic event in world history, at least of the last 2000 years. And they were motivated by gold and silver, but even more by the desire to find a direct route to the spices of India and thereby to get spices cheaper. And indeed, when the news came that da Gama had reached India by an all water route, the price of spices in Venice collapsed because the Venetians had been the monopolists.

00:18:28

Chris Cillizza

Expand more on that, because I think that's totally fascinating that spice and the search for spice and the desire for spice was one of the main drivers of this exploration, colonization.

00:18:40

Dr. Paul Freedman

Yeah. I mean, it might seem frivolous, but history is made not just by strategic things like petroleum or wheat or, you know, tungsten to make weapons. It's driven by preferences, by fads, by taste. So another example besides spices from a little later is sugar. Human beings do not need sugar to survive. The Roman Empire did fine on honey alone, but once people in Europe had sugar available, they're fanatically devoted to it. So at the time of Queen Elizabeth, the average English person ate no more than a pound or two of sugar a year. By 1900, it had gone up to more like 100 pounds a year. The average American now consumes 120, 130 pounds of sugar a year. That taste, and that's simply a taste, there's no biological necessity for it, fueled globalization in the 17th and 18th century, and particularly slavery.

00:19:43

Chris Cillizza

So that's a little tough to process. Europeans were so addicted to sugar that they enslaved hundreds of thousands of Africans and forced them to work on sugar plantations in the Caribbean and eventually in the American South. We think about wars being fought over things like land or resources like oil. But some global events are as simple as, "we think this tastes good and we'll do whatever we can to make sure we can have it." And if you want it, you'll have to buy it. If human beings couldn't have experienced flavor, would we have explored the world in that same way? Just as one example of how this works, let's look at the history of black pepper, one of the earliest spices we see in recorded history.

00:20:23

Dr. Paul Freedman

So it's very popular in the Roman Empire. They have recently found, dug up port cities along the Red Sea in Egypt that serve as trading cities taking advantage of the monsoon winds to go to India and to buy black pepper in particular. So Roman cuisine, insofar as we can reconstruct it, is sharp and kind of bitter. And so they love black pepper.

00:20:51

Chris Cillizza

As we've talked about, that search for new spices and cheaper trade winds up sparking global exploration and colonization. In fact, when Europeans first reached the Americas, it was part of their search for, yes, spices. Christopher Columbus thought he could find a shorter trade route.

00:21:08

Dr. Paul Freedman

In the case of Columbus, it sort of leaves off of spices because although in his letters back home, he claimed to have found all sorts of spices, the new world was quite poor, in there are no cloves, no nutmeg. There's no black pepper. The one spice that the new world had is chilies.

00:21:27

Chris Cillizza

So over the course of centuries, Europeans colonized and conquered the Americas and created a new captive market for their global spice trade. As we've seen in the lead up to the American Revolution, European monarchies wound up charging huge markups and taxes for goods like tea and yes, black pepper. And black pepper would actually play a small role in colonial American history. Here's American food historian Sarah Lohman again.

00:21:53

Dr. Paul Freedman

So with black pepper, that is the first trade route that we were able to establish after the Revolutionary War. And that's important because when America was a British colony, we had to buy everything through England. That's actually part of what started this big war, that they have this monopoly on our trade. We as a country didn't even know where things like black pepper came from. We had no idea where it was brown. We didn't know where Britain was getting it. And the story goes that there were these traders in Salem, Massachusetts, which in the late 18th century is a big port, that were basically sending out scouts to try to figure it out because black pepper, you know, salt and pepper, this is the most basic sort of profitable spice in our kitchen. They found out that it was coming from Sumatra and Indonesia. We started to trade. And in Sumatra, in Indonesia, the trade there was dominated by the British, but they were basically creating this colonial enslaver landscape. And the way that American traders were able to take this trade away from the British was literally by just being nice to the different groups who were growing pepper, the Indigenous peoples there, paying them a fair amount of money for their product, not stealing their women or abusing their children and just appreciating the differences.

00:23:07

Chris Cillizza

So this surprised me. Americans were able to take over the British black pepper trade just by being...nice?

00:23:14

Dr. Paul Freedman

It's so, in a way, unfortunately bizarre to read these journals of these captains basically being like, "Yeah, these people are really different, but they're super nice. And we made a really good trade and we had a really nice meal and it'll be nice to see them again next year." That's a paraphrase, of course. But you so often, especially in journals from that time, read a lot of xenophobia, especially considering how we're treating indigenous peoples in our own country at that time. And so to have these guys that are capitalists, they're out there to make money. But do that realize the best way to do that is just to be a kind and understanding person is kind of mind blowing.

00:23:54

Chris Cillizza

And so over a span of a few thousand years, black pepper went from being a spice traded by the Roman Empire to a driver of global exploration, to a colonial American commodity, to something we just take for granted will be in a shaker in every diner in the country. In her book, Sarah examines seven other flavors that have shaped the history of American cuisine as new waves of immigrants entered the United States. Sometimes flavors would be used as a source of xenophobia. For example, in the middle of the 20th century, media reports often accused Chinese food of causing headaches because of MSG, a controversial additive that enhances the flavors of salty, savory foods. It's found in all sorts of food, including Doritos. Yum. But there were also immigrant success stories associated with new flavors. Like the story of sriracha.

00:24:42

Dr. Paul Freedman

The logo, the bright red clear bottle where you can see the hot sauce, the green top. That's a huge part of it. The bottle and the sauce was designed by a man named David Tran, who was a Vietnamese immigrant, and he came shortly after the Vietnam War as a refugee. His family was ethnically Chinese, which is one of the groups that were really targeted after the Vietnam War by the new Vietnamese government. He lands in Boston with his family in 1980 and his brother is placed with his family in Los Angeles. And back in Vietnam, they would make this hot sauce based off of a Thai sauce called sriracha sauce. Okay. And so David is thinking, all right, there's a lot of Vietnamese people coming here. They're going to want sauce. Someone needs to make it. He called his brother and said, "Do they have hot peppers out there in California?" His brother said, "yes." So he got his whole family on a plane and they landed in Los Angeles. And basically within a couple of months, he was producing sriracha to hot sauce. Sriracha is made from uncooked jalapeno peppers, ripe red jalapenos, which you don't normally see in the grocery store. But David said hot sauce has to be red. And despite the fact that they've never spent a penny on advertising, they have never been able to produce enough sauce.

00:25:56

Chris Cillizza

And these days you can find sriracha everywhere. McDonald's even made a sriracha Big Mac sauce. So in about 40 years, it went from a niche, cheaply made hot sauce targeting Vietnamese immigrants and refugees to a fast food commodity. And fast food is something we haven't talked a whole lot about in this episode. But throughout a lot of the 20th and 21st centuries, we started to industrialize our food. Think about TV dinners. Hungry Man - I eat a lot of those - and Lean Cuisines. Or even Soylent, which we talked about earlier, which got me to wondering about what might be on the horizon in terms of our food. Is our relationship with food, flavor and taste fundamentally changing? I mean, is it changing in ways that you've seen over the past hundred or 200 years? Are we headed toward eating our food in a pill? Are we headed toward the Willy Wonka, you eat a piece of gum and it has an appetizer, the main course and dessert all in that single piece?

00:26:52

It's the most amazing, fabulous, sensational gum in the whole world. What's so bad about it? This little piece of gum is a three course dinner.

00:27:01

Bull.

00:27:01

No roast beef, but I haven't got it quite right yet.

00:27:03

Dr. Paul Freedman

Certainly when I was growing up, the assumption was that in the world of the future, you'd just have a kind of like microwave plus. In other words, the meals would be sort of ready for you. And they might or might not have much taste, but the fuel delivery system would become much more efficient. And that didn't happen. Beginning in the 1970s, there was a reaction against the industrialization of food, against the homogenization of taste, and the whole farm to table movement or the rediscovery of local and seasonal food kind of is a rebellion against that fate. And the fact that restaurants are so popular that young people are particular patrons of restaurants, that food trucks, the food courts, that these are things that are so widespread and so popular, shows that what people want is something much different from a kind of fuel or pill model.

00:28:03

Dr. Paul Freedman

Having said that, the impending crises that are related to climate and food production and possible future scarcity may demand some of these Willy Wonka or artificial systems. You can see this with the current way of raising animals for meat globally is unsustainable. So I think one has to hope that they're going to find, or to some extent they already have, quote "meats", artificial meats, artificial products, plant based or lab based products that mimic meat. I'm afraid that's going to have to be more likely, whether you like it or not, just because of the consequences of the system that we have.

00:28:52

Chris Cillizza

I find that oddly comforting. So our desire for flavor is so innate that we push back on the bland industrial food complex and started seeking out flavors that are both local and exotic. And we've also started to think about ways that our insatiable appetites are shaping the world and are starting to look for alternatives. I haven't quite figured out how to make plant based meat alternatives taste like the real thing yet, but it feels like we're getting closer. I want to thank Yale Professor Paul Friedman for being on this week's episode of Downside Up. And now Sarah Lohman, please join me for our weekly round of trivia in which we quiz you about any number of things related to flavor.

00:29:40

Sarah Lohman

Do I get a phone a friend, or...

00:29:42

Chris Cillizza

You get none of that.

00:29:43

Sarah Lohman

Me and my brain.

00:29:43

Chris Cillizza

It's just you and your brain. But that's in your wheelhouse. These are...

00:29:47

Sarah Lohman

Okay.

00:29:47

Chris Cillizza

These are spice and flavor related questions.

00:29:50

Sarah Lohman

Okay, let's do this. I'm ready.

00:29:51

Chris Cillizza

Okay. Okay. If you were to buy it by the pound, this spice would cost more than gold. What is considered the rarest and most expensive spice in the world?

00:30:02

Sarah Lohman

That's going to be saffron.

00:30:04

Chris Cillizza

Correct. One for one.

00:30:05

Sarah Lohman

Yeah, a close second and third is cardamom and vanilla.

00:30:10

Chris Cillizza

Wow. Extra credit. Way to polish the apple for the teacher. I like it. As a...

00:30:16

Sarah Lohman

They're hand harvested. So a lot of these major spices are still expensive because they still have to be largely processed by hand.

00:30:22

Chris Cillizza

The labor, yeah.

Sarah Lohman 00:30:24
The labor, exactly.

Chris Cillizza 00:30:25
All right. Question number two. This 2021 American film features Nicolas Cage as a gourmet chef who disappears and lives off the grid as a truffle hunter. When a beloved pet is stolen, he navigates the seedy restaurant underground of Portland, Oregon, looking for answers. Name that film.

Sarah Lohman 00:30:43
The film is Pig.

Chris Cillizza 00:30:45
Oh, you're making this look easy. Golly.

Sarah Lohman 00:30:47
But actually, pigs aren't used anymore. We've trained dogs to sniff out truffles, and that's because the pigs would then try to eat the truffles after they found them.

Chris Cillizza 00:30:57
And dogs don't eat them?

Sarah Lohman 00:30:58
No, dogs don't want to eat a mushroom. No, they just want to make you happy. The pig doesn't want to make you happy.

Chris Cillizza 00:31:03
Here's just one more example about the ways that dogs have made our lives easier. If you want to learn more, tune in for next week's episode on what if we never had domesticated dog.

Chris Cillizza 00:31:12
I feel like this one is just an absolute layup for you. But here we go. According to a 2022 analysis of Instacart customer data, what is the most commonly purchased hot sauce in the United States? You don't need this hint, but I'm going to give it to you. It features a picture of a rooster on the bottle.

Sarah Lohman 00:31:30
That's going to be sriracha. Wow. That's amazing. It's amazing. I actually didn't realize that it had unseated Tabasco.

Chris Cillizza 00:31:38
Isn't that crazy?

Sarah Lohman 00:31:38
Tabasco briefly came out with its own version of sriracha that I don't think was successful, but they saw it coming. But like, at the same time, Tabasco is not going anywhere. Like that's an American classic.

Chris Cillizza 00:31:47
No, I think it's a both/and, but it is remarkable, given Tabasco's sort of placement in the marketplace, that sriracha has overtaken it. And sriracha is relatively, to your point, it's since the eighties. It's relatively new. Okay. You're three for three. Question four. This chef put his celebrity status to good use with the creation of the World Central Kitchen, a nonprofit that provides meals to first responders in the wake of natural disasters. Name that chef.

Sarah Lohman 00:32:12
Is that Jose Andres?

Chris Cillizza 00:32:14
Correct. Four for four. And now to see if you can go five for five, "Anyone can cook," says a fictional chef in the 2007 Pixar film Ratatouille about a rat that somehow becomes a gourmet chef in Paris. When designing the dishes that would appear in the film, the animating team based their fictional restaurant off of this real world spot that can be found in Napa Valley, California, and has been called the best restaurant in the world. Name that restaurant.

Sarah Lohman 00:32:43
I actually did not know this. I mean, I picked it up from the clues. I did not know this in the context of Ratatouille. But that would be Chez Panisse.

Chris Cillizza 00:32:51
It's the French Laundry.

Sarah Lohman 00:32:53
Nooooo! Oh well I just disagree with the premise then.

00:33:00

Chris Cillizza

Yes, agree. You can agree to disagree. That's always your right. And as I say, I just read the questions. I'm not responsible for the content.

00:33:08

Sarah Lohman

It's fine.

00:33:11

Chris Cillizza

Sarah is going to have to take that up with The New York Times. They were, after all, the ones that once called French Laundry the best restaurant in the world.

00:33:17

Chris Cillizza

So what would our world be like without flavor? In a word, bland. We have fewer ways to connect with one another, and our worlds would feel much smaller without the chance to eat new and interesting foods. Our history might look different, too, if ancient humans hadn't been driven by that same desire. Sure, we would have found other ways to divide and understand our world and other reasons to get together. But would anything ever really match a good meal shared with good friends? Thank you to Sarah Lohman and Dr. Robert Freedman for sharing your expertise with us this week. I owe you each a nice dinner and I promise I won't ask you to explain the history of everything on the menu. Thanks for listening to our very first episode of Downside Up. Let me know your thoughts on a world without flavor by tweeting me @Chris-C-I-L-L-I-Z-Z-A. And if you've got ideas for future topics, send those to me there too. Also, if you like our show, please share it with your friends and make sure you rate review and subscribe.

00:34:14

Chris Cillizza

Next time on Downside Up...What if we had never domesticated the dog?

00:34:17

David Grimm

You're talking about a time where humans were often on the brink and whole populations and societies were often on the brink of blinking out. Could dogs have made that difference?

00:34:28

Dr. Margot Demello

If we didn't domesticate them, would we have computers and houses and like all of that?

00:34:32

Chris Cillizza

Downside Up is hosted by me, Chris Cillizza. It's a production of CNN in collaboration with Pod People. At CNN, our producer is Lori Galarreta and our executive producer is Abbie Fentress Swanson. Alexander McCall leads audience strategy for the show. Tameeka Ballance-Kolasny is our production manager and James Andrus and Nichole Pesaru designed our artwork. The team from Pod People includes Rachael King, Matt Sav, Aimee Machado, John Hammontree, Madison Lusby, Regina de Heer and Morgane Fouse. Theme and original music composed by Casey Holford. Additional music came from epidemic sound. Special thanks to Lindsay Abrams, Fuzz Hogan, Emma Lacey-Bourdeaux, Drew Shankman, Lisa Namerow, Jon Dianora and Courtney Coupe.