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Healthy Moms Podcast

BY **Wellness Mama**[®]
simple answers for healthier families

Episode 24: A Real Food Resource

Katie: Hi, and welcome to the "Wellness Mama" podcast. I'm Katie. And I'm really excited about today's guest. It's a special episode and it's about a new company that is near and dear to my heart. And I've actually been working with them, helping them trying to provide real food to families on an affordable level, because I know as a mom and as a family that's a big struggle to eat real food on a budget. We know how important this is for our kids but it's also...It is an uphill battle sometimes to find these foods locally and to be able to find them at affordable prices. So I'm so excited for today's guest.

His name is Gunnar Lovelace and he has become a personal friend as I've gotten to work with him in the company that he's helping found which is called "Thrive Market." And their goal is to make real food affordable for families. I'm actually so passionate about their mission that I decided to become an investor and to help get this to my readers as much as possible. So Gunnar, welcome. Thank you so much for being here.

Gunnar: Katie, it's great to be on your show. Thank you so much. Big fan of your work and really excited to be here.

Katie: Awesome. I am so excited you are here and I love to just jump right in because I'm excited to get the message about you guys out to the world. So start by telling us how did you start Thrive and what was the mission?

Gunnar: Well, you know, I grew up with a single mom and I saw how hard she worked to make healthy choices in her life. And then when she remarried, I was an early teenager, she married a man who was running a food co-op. So it left a very strong impression that by working together, we can access these products at much lower prices. And, you know, I took a very different tact in my professional career early on and started a couple software companies. One, teaching children how to read through educational cartoons and sold them, but have always been interested in health and wellness my whole life. And been studying the industry for a long time and just feeling like there's got to be a better way to make these products accessible to people at lower prices. And so we basically, we see Thrive as kind of like a 21st century co-op that takes the best of internet technology and marketing to make these products available at these prices for the first time.

Katie: Yeah. I absolutely love that. And the thing I love the most is this goal that you guys have. I know we've talked about it in person but talk about what the goal with Thrive is and what you guys really hope to accomplish.

Gunnar: Yeah. I mean, I think, we have a number of goals. And, you know, our first most important goal which everything stems from is just the overarching idea that we all connect with which is how do we make healthy living accessible to everybody, you know. And there's this, you know, we ask ourselves this question, "Why does the product with lots of processing, lots of chemicals and a lower nutritional density, why does that product cost more...I'm sorry, cost less than a product with, you know, little processing, no chemicals and higher nutritional density? Why does that product cost less?" It's because they've achieved economy as a scale and they're subsidized by various forms of corporate welfare.

So we see Thrive in terms of offering these natural nontoxic products at wholesale prices. We see ourselves as being part of a larger virtuous cycle that by making the prices more accessible it increases demand which then further lowers the price long term. And we think that's a really exciting trend to be part of.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And when I first heard about you guys, one of the things that I know I was most

excited about is that you guys said you were gonna be able to offer a lot of popular real food products that sometimes 30% to 50% off. So can you talk about the model and how you're able to do that and get them to consumers?

Gunnar: Yes. So essentially what we do is we buy from the brands and we work with, you know, the most popular brands offering, the top 3,000 products that you would find at Whole Foods across the, you know, a huge segment of categories. You know, everything from like baking and cooking and meal ingredients and healthy snacks and nut butters and super foods and body care and makeup and natural remedies and, you know, nontoxic baby care products and nontoxic home cleaning products. So we have a massive selection of categories and instead of doing the normal retail markup that a health food store would do, we just break even on the product and sell it for wholesale prices to our members.

And then the way that we make money as a business is we charge a membership fee like Costco. So for \$60 a year, it's the same price of a Costco membership, you can access the Thrive Market club online and purchase these products and get free shipping to your home wherever you are in the U.S.

Katie: Yeah, that's awesome. And I love that model. And I hope it's okay to talk about this, but one thing that also really resonated with me is that there is a social mission for you guys, too. And so, can you talk about what happens when someone buys a membership, what you guys do reciprocal to that that's also really special and neat?

Gunnar: Yeah. I think, you know, part of what we, you know, looked at when we were designing the business was how do we, you know...two functions. One, how do we make these products accessible to people that are interested in buying them? And how do we make them accessible to people that just don't even know or aren't even exposed to this is because they just would never even think to, you know, walk into Whole Foods?

And so, the thought process around that is that for every paid membership, you know, when you become a member, you're giving a free membership away to a low income family. And so we're doing that through a network of national nonprofit partners like Boys and Girls Club, we're doing a, you know, big thing with them over Thanksgiving for example. And we're gonna be distributing, you know, hopefully millions of memberships to low income families over the next five years all sponsored on a one-for-one basis for every paying member.

Katie: Yeah. That's so awesome. I love that. Let's get into a bit more the specifics because I know a lot of people listening may be really interested but wondering what specific things do you guys carry and what kind of categories. And I know you have a neat feature that allows people to shop by category. So if they're paleo, there's a specific category, if they're maybe moms there's a category for that, but can you talk about just the variety of different products that you carry and maybe even some specifics on brands and ones that are popular right now?

Gunnar: Yeah, definitely. I think, you know, we're focused on nonperishable products to begin with, and so that's about half of what you would normally find at a Whole Foods. So if you buy at Thrive Market your non-perishables and you go to a local farmer's market for your perishables, you're covered. And so that to us is like the model. Like, how can we complement people going to a local farmer's market and really offer them these products that they would need to get at a normal Whole Food store at the absolute lowest prices. So, you know, those categories are, you know, like nontoxic company supplies, nontoxic baby and kid-care products, it's natural remedies, it's super foods, it's nut butters, it's healthy snacks, it's cooking and baking or meal

ingredients. And so it's, you know, and much, much more.

And we, as you mentioned, we have a shop by category that allows you to instantly filter everything along certain criteria. So if you're like, if paleo is your thing or gluten-free is your thing or you just wanna see products really focused on motherhood and child care related, you can instantly filter the entire catalog. And then we have another 80 certifications and qualities that we've assigned to every single product in the catalog. So if you're like, if you're particularly concerned about allergens or hormone disruptors or BPA or whatever, there are fair trade or locally owned. These are all qualities that you can sort the entire catalog by and really get to exactly what you want in a quick direct way.

Katie: Yeah. And just to echo what you said, I love that you guys have such a wide variety and that also you like it makes it so easy to sort by those and, I think, that that really is the key. I know a lot of people are maybe hesitant to buy food products online because they, you know, they wanna be environmentally conscious and not have to do the shipping. But the thing I've always realized with that is foods in the grocery stores, especially processed foods have a much bigger environmental footprint because they have so much processing that goes into them and then they're still brought there on trucks and they use resources that way.

So it actually, in some ways, can be a smaller environmental footprint if you're buying products that are environmentally friendly and they're carbon offset, and I know you guys do a lot of that also. And, I think, what you said is so key, that if you get those real food non-perishables and then support your local economy as much as possible for your neat perishable foods and vegetables, not only is that gonna give you your maximum nutrient density in those foods, but you're also supporting the economy in multiple ways which right now I know our economy still struggling a little bit and that's a great way it can contribute. But can you talk about the environmental steps that you guys are taking as well and...

Gunnar: Yeah, definitely. I think, I mean, I think, you're just right on point with all of that and, you know, for me, you know, I have always cared very deeply about the environment. And, I think, you know, business has a responsibility to be very thoughtful about how it does that. And so for us, you know, we take that very seriously. We use, you know, 100% post consumer recycle packaging across the board. So every box, our inserts, all of our materials are materials that have been recycled and used in the supply chain before.

So we're re-purposing existing materials rather than contributing to new materials being, you know, chopped from trees. And then, as you mentioned, we're working with a carbon offset program so that we, you know, calculate how much we're shipping, what our employee commutes are. And then we, you know, we opt to pay for that and that gets done through various types of carbon offset programs that the carbonfund.org participates in. And it's a lot of, you know, tree planting and other rapid plant growth projects that, you know, will absorb CO2 from the atmosphere.

Katie: Yeah. That's awesome. And something else, I hope this is okay for me to talk about, but I recently got the chance to tour your facility and I was absolutely blown away because I was expecting, in a sense, you know, just a warehouse. Because you're just shipping products but you guys have created this gorgeous clean environmentally friendly place and you had a kitchen there and just looking around the kitchen everything in the kitchen was real food and organic. And you guys are living the mission as well as just talking it.

And, I think, that that's so rare because I know I've worked with a lot of companies and there are certainly many great companies out there but I've also seen companies where they're promoting a real food way of life

but they're getting McDonald's on the way home or they're, you know, eating processed food. So I love that everybody in your company seems like was very deeply involved with a social mission and with a real food mission. And it was not just a business for you guys but it's totally a passion as well.

Gunnar: Yeah, I mean, it's totally the case. And, you know, I personally believe in it. And, you know, as I mentioned earlier, my stepfather, you know, when he was running a food co-op, you know, they also ran a food program and so every day dozens of people would just come and eat together and you could just see the power of community that that creates. And so, you know, my goal with the business, with Thrive Market, is to really model that so that, you know, the entire company is on, you know, everybody has access for free to our food program and it's all organic food that we buy for everybody that works for the company and it's just one of the things that we do to take care of our people. And we feel like, you know, that's the right thing to do, and it's also quite frankly it's the smart thing to do because people are then eating healthy food, there's a deeper sense of community between everybody. Everybody feels inspired and excited and energized. And it creates a lot of really beautiful spontaneous moments together for everybody on the team.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And I love that you said it's the smart thing to do, too, because an objection I get on my blog a lot is from people saying you know, they can't afford to eat real food or it's too expensive. And obviously you guys are working on bridging that gap on a practical level and making it actually less expensive, a dollar for dollar. But I've always said too that real food pays for itself in dividends over the future and if you put that investment in you can save money both because you're eating...you don't need to eat as much food because it's more nutrient dense but also you're keeping your body in a healthier state so hopefully you don't have as many medical bills and you're not sick as often and you're more productive and there are just so many ways that it improves your health long term.

Gunnar: Yeah. I mean, I couldn't agree more which is obviously why we're here. We're, you know, super excited to really, you know, get this out there. And, I think, you know, the point that you bring up is that, you know, we really really can't afford not to eat healthy. And historically, you know, the main barrier to that was the short term cost of the products being more expensive, not withstanding the long term costs of having poor health and what that does to one's, you know, financial opportunities.

But with Thrive Market, what's so exciting is that we're basically creating an opportunity to eliminate the short term barrier that's been in front of the market historically where now people can buy these products for the same price that they would have bought conventional equivalents. So like on our website you can buy 70 loads of nontoxic laundry detergent from us at the same price that Walmart is selling 70 loads of toxic Tide laundry detergent. That's truly exciting to me and that's case by case across all the categories. We're either very close to, equal to or even less in a price than the conventional equivalent. And that's just never been available before.

Katie: Yeah. Well, and especially in areas, like I live in a, not a rural area but a smaller town and we don't have a Whole Foods, we don't have a Trader Joe's, we have one little tiny health food store that doesn't have very many products at all. So they clearly have a great community of farmers markets but, for non-perishables there are not really any good local option. So those would be things I'd be trying to buy online anyway, and I love that you guys make it so simple.

And I would love if you could just talk us through the process of someone who is new to Thrive Market and goes to your website, how can they become a member? Because I always is that that you guys are kind of like

Costco meets Amazon meets Whole Foods. But how do they start to become a member and how can they shop for products and how long does shipping take? And just all the practical questions maybe someone would be asking.

Gunnar: Sure, yes. So you basically...It's really straightforward, you come to the website, you have to register to be able to see the prices and we have to do that to protect our brands because of the deep value pricing that we provide to the members. So first of all, when you come to the site you just have to register, no credit card required. That way we protect the brands and that way you can see the catalog and all the pricing. So that's one thing.

The second thing is you can buy any product you want and when you do your first check out, you'll be enrolled in a trial period. And at any time, either during the trial period or after the trial period, if you're not happy you can get a refund on the membership. And so at the end of the trial period, you're gonna be billed \$60 for the annual membership and your membership will then sponsor another low income family's membership and that's really it. And then in terms of the shipping, you know, we do free shipping on all orders over \$50. And you know, most orders that people are doing on the site are \$70 to \$120. So, you know, if one plans their shopping it's actually pretty easy to get to a \$50 minimum, and then so we provide free shipping. And depending upon where you are in the country, it's gonna take, you know, two to five days to get to you.

Katie: Yeah. That's wonderful. I love that you guys are such a good alternative to other companies that you've brought all these small companies together. Because walking through your warehouse, that's what I was like looking at so many different products and I go, I already buy that and that and that and I love the companies and I love their missions. So I love that you guys are making it easier for these small companies to get their products out to the world also.

Gunnar: Yeah. I mean, I think, what's really interesting about that is that, you know, historically, you know, the companies are the natural product industry, they just don't have it in their DNA to market online. And you know, it takes a very unique skill set to do that well. And so we really see ourselves as a channel to really bring these products, these amazing wholesome products online direct to consumer in an aspirational brand experience in a way that just hasn't been done before. And that's really exciting.

So we're, you know, we're really...it's really a win-win-win for everybody. It's a win for the brand because we're bringing on new customers and new channels and helping them have a really strong brand presence online. It's a win for the members and the families that are paying for these products. And it's a win for the low income families that gets sponsored for every paid membership. So we love that there's this, you know, larger virtuous cycle that we get to play in.

Katie: Yeah, that's awesome. Well, can you also talk about like, I know we talked a little bit about the social mission but what's the long term goal with you guys for Thrive? In an ideal situation, what do you hope to accomplish?

Gunnar: You know, I think, what's so interesting about food and health in general is that it connects so many different issues and it doesn't really, you know, it doesn't matter...You know, having a good healthy life transcends so many of the normal ideological, political, divisions that this country is really stymied by. So whether you're liberal or conservative, you're rich or you're poor, you're a libertarian or environmentalist, we all care about having a healthy life. Like, that is a fundamental thing and we care about being able to have

children that can live a healthy life.

And so, you know, food and being able to access nontoxic wholesome real food is, you know, absolutely essential for the long term health of our personal families, the quality of life. And it's also essential for our economy, you know. We spend upwards of \$60 billion dollars a year now on obesity and diabetes related illnesses, with 50% of the country projected to be obese by 2030. And, you know, we are currently, our current food supply is, you know, we are overfed and undernourished. So by making these products accessible at wholesale prices, we're gonna be part of a larger solution that really is good for the family and it's good for the environment, good for the economy.

And then, I think, even connected to that, because these are all interconnected issues is that, you know, conventional agriculture and food supply is toxic for the environment, you know. So there is a town in Toledo, Ohio, just two months ago 500,000 people, they couldn't drink their own water, take a shower in their own water for two weeks because of massive toxic algae blooms that come from their water supply which is Lake Erie and those algae blooms are coming from over use of conventional, you know, from chemical fertilizers and conventional agriculture.

So food, health, the ability to access nontoxic you know, food and cleaning supplies you know, it cuts to critical issues around personal, family, quality of life, the environment and the economy. And that's an amazing thing to be able to participate in that.

Katie: Absolutely. I think, you said it so well. And I've done a lot of research on these issues as well because you know, my mission is that I wanna help create a healthier future for our kids. And my whole journey started when I had my first child and I read that his generation was gonna live a shorter life expectancy than our generation and I decided that was not okay for my child or for anybody else's child. And so in researching this ,it's amazing that they're finding chemicals now in under 30 feet of ice in the Antarctic. And that this has become such a widespread problem. And I really think that this is a time when we do have to address it because we're not gonna get many more chances if we don't start fixing these problems right now. And, I think, like you said, real food and nontoxic cleaners and protecting our water supply that's all a key part of it.

Gunnar: Yeah. I mean, it's all the same issue. And what's so interesting about food is it somehow it lowers like the normal political rhetoric that people will tend to get stuck on by a really strong ideological views about what they have and it just cuts to the core of our basic humanity. Like, we all wanna live a healthy life. And so by really creating, being part of, you know, what you're doing and what we're doing and what thousands of others are doing in terms of creating platforms and venues for people to understand how to use these products and how to access them for the first time, you know.

We're really all participating including your readers and your audience, we're all participating in this massive virtuous cycle where, you know, these things are becoming easier, more accessible, more commonly understood and they transcend, you know, a lot of the normal political divisions that, I think, you know, get in our way.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And back to even just, I mean, it makes them more affordable on a very practical level and frees up money in the budget for other areas of health or maybe other things you wanna buy or supplements or things you may not be able to afford now. I signed up for Thrive with my personal email and just looked through and realized by putting things in my cart that I would normally buy at the store, if I had to

drive an hour to the closest Whole Foods and then buy those things, it really was an average savings I think for me of about 30% to 35%. So I was amazed by that and I'm so excited that you guys are making that available to families. I think that's gonna be just huge and the impact it has on so many families.

Gunnar: Yeah. I mean, and I think you know, one of things that I find so exciting about that, too, is that, you know, we're now making these products available at equal to or, you know, slightly less than their conventional equivalence. So you know, like as I mentioned, a laundry detergent, a corollary or, you know, even like baby wipes you know, you can buy Seven Generation nontoxic, you know, baby wipes 64 count for \$3.50 whereas Huggies baby wipes for 64 count on average about \$5. And, you know, those Huggies baby wipes that seem so innocuous you know, EWG has flagged them for indecrun disruption that can lead to developmental toxicity and, you know, organ system toxicity. So it's, you know, like, there are all sorts of products in the conventional supply that we just don't understand what the effects are and by offering nontoxic and natural products at the same price, we're eliminating so many problems by making that available.

Katie: Absolutely. And yeah, I think, just eliminating that cost barrier is gonna be, like I said, pivotal for so many people.

Gunnar: So I think, you know, I think one of the things that, you know, is so interesting about this is there's this incredible awakening that's happening. I mean, you look at your audience and how big it is, I mean, there's such, people are really understanding, I think, for the first time largely fueled by the openness and democracy of the internet, you know, people are able to access this information for the first time. And you know, now, you know, a health issue arises and probably the first thing that people do now instead of go to the doctor is they Google it. And so, you know, like, that's really interesting. Obviously there's a lot of challenges in that in terms of a lot of misleading information and that's why trusted sources like your site and like our site is important because we become a trusted voice in the midst of all the noise. But, you know, that's just, I think, in general, that's a really exciting trend and it's great to be part of that.

Katie: Absolutely. And I've made it for my readers, if anybody's interested in checking out Thrive, I made a short link that's easy to get to and it's just wellnessmama.com/go/thrive. That way they can find you and learn more about you and like you said they can just register for free on there and browse through the products and see all the discounts before they buy anything. And, I think, they'll be blown away at the variety that you guys have. I know I'm still blown away. Everytime I go in there I find new things that I didn't realize you guys even had and I have been involved with you for months. So I think it's gonna be incredible.

Gunnar: Yeah, we keep adding. I mean, we've got, you know, a bunch of great brands coming in from some specific stuff on paleo that we're gonna, you know, be adding in. And, you know, that's just part of our process, you know. So we're gonna be constantly adding brands. That said, you know, we don't see ourselves as like Amazon with 50,000 products. Our focus is instead of having 30 different types of nut butters or whatever other category, we wanna just have one or two nut butters and make that like the best of class in each category, so that, you know, when you come on to the site you don't have to like try to decipher what the difference are between 30 options of the same thing. It's just, you know, that this is a good option and it's curated and it's easy for you to make the decision.

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. And, I think, how you mentioned you have all the different labels that you use that was really helpful also because you can just really just glance and see if it's gluten-free or see if it's allergen-

free or see if it meets whatever your qualifications are. So I think that will simplify the process. I know when I buy health foods on Amazon I have to dig through trying to find the ingredients somewhere at the bottom and then see if it even tells the ingredients. And if it does, see if it's safe and it's a long process. And usually I have to like read the reviews because someone else has found the ingredients and they're not listed there or whatever it is. And you guys make that so much easier.

Gunnar: Yeah. I mean, our whole goal as a business is radical transparency so, you know...and we see that in terms of all aspects of the supply chain. So whether it's, you know, eliminating the retail markup and just charging exactly our costs that, you know, that's transparent. In terms of you know, making sure that people can easily access the ingredient information and the nutritional profiles, you know, that's transparency. And all the way down to, you know, our environmental activities and, you know, who we're distributing memberships with and how we distribute those memberships. Our goal is as we grow to make sure that anybody who is interested can access that information as easily and directly as possible.

Katie: And that's awesome. Well, Gunnar, thank you so much for your time and for being here and for explaining about Thrive. And, again, I hope that everyone will at least go check it out. It's an amazing resource that I know I use and will be using more in the future. And that you are all, again, it's just wellnessmama.com/go/thrive.

Gunnar: Yeah. And just, again, thank you, Katie, you know, just so appreciate your help, what you represent in terms of the new media trend and just really really excited to be working with you and grateful for your help and support.

Katie: Thanks, Gunnar. We'll talk soon.

Gunnar: Yeah, all right. Have a great day.

Katie: You, too. Thank you so much for listening to this episode of the "Wellness Mama" podcast, where I provide simple answers for healthier families. If you would like to get my "Seven Simple Steps for Healthier Families" guide for free, head on over to wellnessmama.com and enter your email and I'll send it over to you right away. You can also stay in touch on social media [facebook.com/endlesswellness](https://www.facebook.com/endlesswellness) or on Twitter and Instagram [@wellnessmama](https://www.instagram.com/wellnessmama).

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Thanks as always for listening and for reading and for being on board with creating a future for our children that's healthier and happier. And until next time, have a healthy week.