



Key Trends from Expo West 2025: Innovation, Health, and the Future of Food

Another busy Expo West is in the books for D.A. Davidson's food & beverage team. Although "highway close" for our team members based in Orange County, the show is always a whirlwind with three days of constant conversations, endless samples, and plenty of follow ups. This year, we saw (tasted) exciting innovation and optimism from the brands and investors we met with and we're enthusiastic for where the industry is heading in 2025. Expo West brought together the best in food innovation and several key themes stood out. From protein-packed comfort foods and gut-friendly ingredients to the resurgence of M&A activity, here are the top trends we saw shaping the future of the consumer food industry:

PROTEIN BY DEFAULT

Protein isn't just for shakes and bars anymore – it's making its way into everyday staples. Brands are reimagining classic comfort foods with added protein, whether through whey, plant-based sources, or even novel ingredients like fungi. Standouts included **Drumroll Snacks'** high-protein donuts, **Wonder Monday's** delicious protein cheesecakes, **Crisp Power's** protein pretzels, **LIVIVA's** low carb and high protein pasta, **TruJoy's** frozen Greek yogurt, **Chike Nutrition's** protein iced coffee, and **Twin Peak's** protein puffs. We also saw new protein breads, popcorn, dips, energy drinks, and more.

AUTHENTIC GLOBAL FLAVORS

Ethnic cuisine continues to move beyond mainstream, "Americanized" products to truly authentic recipes and ingredients. Expo West highlighted authentic, elevated products across multiple ethnicities, whether it be Mexican, Korean, Indian, Middle Eastern or even Indo-Chinese. Some of our favorites included **Laoban Dumplings**, **Deep Indian Kitchen**, **COYOTAS Tortillas**, **Fly by Jing Sichuan Chili Crisp**, and **Maya Kaimal** leading the charge with their bold, ready-to-eat dishes.



GUT HEALTH & FIBER FIRST

Consumers are increasingly prioritizing gut health, and brands are responding with fiber-rich formulations and probiotic-packed foods. Prebiotic sodas, supplements, probiotic kimchi, functional yogurts, and fiber-enhanced snacks dominated the floor, with **Supergut**, **BelliWelli**, **Cleveland Kitchen**, and **Mother-In-Law's** making waves in the category.

MUSHROOMS, ADAPTOGENS & MORE

Functional ingredients like mushrooms, adaptogens, and nootropics continue to gain traction with brands using them to enhance energy, focus, and relaxation. From **hiyo's** non-alcoholic functional seltzers (a popular choice at happy hours after the show), **MOSH's** brain-supporting bars with ashwagandha, **Nature's Fynd's** mushroom-based yogurt and breakfast patties, **Four Sigmatic's** cognitive-boosting coffee, **Magic Mind's** mental performance shot, to **Raaka's** functional chocolates, these ingredients are moving further into the mainstream.

OAT-POWERED EVERYTHING

Oats are proving to be one of the most versatile ingredients in food innovation. Beyond oat milk, Expo West showcased oat-based yogurts, ice creams, and even savory snacks. **Stoked Oats'** OatRice, **Oat Haus'** Granola Butter, **Brainiac's** Fruit & Oat smoothie pouches, **Maria and Ricardo's** CarbBueno tortillas made with oat flour, and **Wild West's** Bear Claws with oatmilk chocolate stood out with their creative and delicious oat-powered offerings.

REFRIGERATED SNACKS AND TREATS

The chilled section is heating up. From on-the-go protein bites and donuts to delicious chocolate bars, fresh, perishable snacks and treats are redefining convenience. **Drumroll Snacks**, **Wonder Monday**, **Honey Mama's**, **Mush**, **Once Upon a Farm**, and **Magic Mind** exemplify the shift toward fresh, functional foods. We expect this high-traffic section of stores to continue seeing a rise in innovation.

THE SWEETENER DILEMMA

The debate around artificial sweeteners was on full display at Expo West. While many brands are leaning into monk fruit, allulose, stevia, and date-based alternatives, others are doubling down on clean-label formulations with minimal added sugars. **Spade's** all-natural sodas, and **Scrummy Sweets'** sugar and sugar alcohol-free gummy bears exemplify how brands are navigating this evolving landscape.

M&A AND CAPITAL RAISES ARE BACK ON THE MENU

After a slower period in deal activity, investors and acquirers are hungry for new opportunities in food and beverage. Growth-stage brands are attracting and actively seeking capital again, and strategic buyers are looking to compensate for flat-ish unit growth by acquiring higher growth brands. With valuations stabilizing and a renewed focus on profitability, Expo West signaled that the capital markets are warming back up.

Expo West 2025 proved that innovation in food and beverage is evergreen. With health, functionality, and sustainability driving the industry forward, it's an exciting time to watch how brands evolve to meet consumer demand. Please reach out to discuss the latest trends and transactions, and to receive our quarterly food & beverage industry updates. We'll see you next year in Anaheim!

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