

What Natural Products Expo West Told Us About New Product Development



The largest food show in the United States rarely disappoints, and this year was no exception. Even the **New York Times** is getting into the hype of Natural Products Expo West. What we find most interesting about this show is not necessarily the new products themselves, but what they tell us about the future of product development. Here are five takeaways from Expo West based on what we saw and what it means to the future of product development.

1 NEW DGA GUIDELINES ALREADY INFLUENCING PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

Despite their infancy, the new Dietary Guidelines for Americans already appears to be driving new product development toward dairy and meat products, especially meat sticks, beef jerky, cottage cheese and cheesy snack flavor profiles.

HOW CAN BLUEGRASS INGREDIENTS HELP?

Our complete line of **Dairy Powders**, **Dairy Concentrates** and **Dairy Seasoning Blends** can be used to add a dairy component to products, or impart dairy flavors. We also produce **citrus powders** perfect for flavoring meat sticks and beef jerky.

2 BIG BRANDS MADE BIG SPLASHES

Expo West used to be the home of emerging brands built to satiate the growing natural and organic markets. Times have changed as “big food” brands like Steak ‘n Shake and PepsiCo secured exhibition space to promote beef tallow and protein chips, respectively.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Big brands pivoting toward more healthful offerings is not exactly a new phenomenon. However, by appearing at Expo West, it signals that the lines between big food and natural food have blurred beyond recognition. Whether that’s a good or bad thing depends on who you ask.

3 FUSION HAS GONE MAINSTREAM

2026 was the year fusion solidified its place as a product development opportunity for any brand in any category. What's interesting about fusion in 2026, is it's not confined to just cuisine types. Today, brands are fusing flavors and even categories to continually provide consumers with TikTok-worthy eating experiences.

HOW CAN BLUEGRASS INGREDIENTS HELP?

A Korean bulgogi meatloaf with orange curry glaze was one of the most popular menu items we served at Expo West. That should tell you all you need to know about our experience and commitment to fusion. Contact our **Agile Kitchen Team™** to get started on your next fusion product.

4 CHOOSE YOUR FOCUS: MACROS AND MICROS

New products at this year's show appeared to choose between two distinct paths: macro or micro. New products were either protein-maxxing and fibermaxxing or touting the magnesium and post-biotic content of their products. Brands have continued to embrace personalized nutrition, and instead of developing products with a host of benefits, they have narrowed their focus to solving specific nutrient deficiencies.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Every category is ripe for macro and micro nutrient boosts, including **mac and cheese**. We expect the next frontier of new product development to focus on micro-eating occasions, such as what food you eat before a big meeting or right before bed.

5 COMPANIES ARE HITTING SINGLES, NOT HOMERS

There were a lot of interesting new products at Expo West, but very few truly innovative products. Given the economic uncertainty, problematic inflation and supply chain difficulties, it appears food brands have focused product development on quick, scalable line extensions, not moon shots. That makes sense given the challenges across the food industry as consumers embrace GLP-1 drugs and shun processed foods.

HOW CAN BLUEGRASS INGREDIENTS HELP?

Our line of **Dairy Seasoning Blends** are the perfect platform for launching flavorful line extensions that consumers crave.



MIDDLE
EASTERN
TACO 



Want to chat more about what we saw at Natural Products Expo West? Want to schedule a meeting to talk to our culinary experts about how to stay ahead of product development trends? Fill out this short **contact form!**