

The food and beverage industry reinvents itself for the health-conscious generation at Expo FoodTech 2026

Expo FoodTech 2026 will spotlight the rise of functional beverages, NoLo drinks, and next-generation proteins, including fermentation-derived and cultivated alternatives

Industry leaders including Damm, Grupo Gallo, and Lotus Bakeries are driving the shift toward healthier, more sustainable products

Madrid, April 24, 2026 – Health and nutrition are becoming increasingly important to consumers, particularly among younger generations. According to recent research, including the *Who Cares, Who Does?* report by Worldpanel by Numerator, nearly one in four consumers (23%) identify as Eco-Actives. This shift is reshaping the food and beverage industry, accelerating the development of business models that combine health, sustainability, and convenience, while delivering more functional, personalised products aligned with evolving consumer expectations.

To discuss these new models and explore the scope of this emerging food trend, [Expo Foodtech 2026](#) will bring together senior executives from companies such as **Hijos de Rivera (Estrella Galicia), Gallo, Lotus, and Damm**, among others, at the BEC in Bilbao, Spain, on May 27–28. The event will showcase the latest innovations in functional beverages and alternative proteins.

At the **Food 4 Future World Summit**, R&D leaders will explore how food companies are reformulating existing products and developing new solutions to meet growing demand for healthier, functional, and natural foods. Cristina Sánchez, R&D Director at Grupo **Gallo**, and Víctor Villanueva, Country Manager at **Lotus Bakeries**, will discuss how innovation and advanced natural ingredients are enabling the creation of products that deliver enhanced nutritional value, improved taste, and scalable commercial impact.

New food trends and new markets

Nowadays, consumers are increasingly looking for products that are not only tasty but also offer tangible health benefits. This trend is transforming the sector, from **personalized nutrition** to alternative proteins. Tanit Esnal, Commercial Director at **Lipowell**; Inés Echeverría, Head of Strategic Projects at **CNTA**; and Sara Arranz, a researcher at **AZTI**, will share their insights on how to integrate health, taste, and convenience into scalable business models. They will also address the role of retail and digital platforms in this evolution and how to communicate benefits related to metabolism, energy, women's health, the microbiome, and other factors, all in a way that is credible and accessible to consumers.

The **alternative protein** market is another key player in this shift, comprising next-generation proteins such as those based on fermentation, hybrid solutions, and cultured meat. However, the success of this innovative market still depends on regulatory clarity, consumer confidence, and the ability to scale up industrial production. In this context, experts and industry leaders from consulting firms such as **Atova**, plant-based companies like **Vacka**, and innovation centers such as **CNTA, Tecnalía** and the **Food+i** cluster will analyze how Europe can open new protein markets and turn scientific advances into competitive and sustainable food solutions for the market, with a global approach and an eye toward advanced markets such as South Korea.

Beverage innovation takes centre stage

The beverage sector is undergoing a profound transformation as brands respond to changing consumer preferences. At the **Beverage Forum**, Javier Ruiz de Galarreta, President and CEO of **ARAEX Grands Spanish Fine Wines**; Antoni Folguera, Off-Trade Business Unit Director at **DAMM**; and Jon Murillas, R&D Manager at **Varma Spirits & Wines**, will discuss how brands are redefining beverages through new ingredients, functional benefits, and sustainability. This transformation responds to the growing interest in purpose-driven beverages and new ways of experiencing flavor.

Meanwhile, Yago Campos, Director of R&D and Innovation at **Hijos de Rivera (Estrella Galicia)**; Lorena Salcedo, Transformational Innovation Manager at **Liquats Vegetals**, and Monserrat A. Jasso, Researcher in Culinary Biotechnology at **GOe TECH (Basque Culinary Center)**, will explore the rapid growth of the NoLo segment—premium low- and no-alcohol beverages designed for health-conscious consumers seeking new drinking experiences.

In addition, the Food 4 Future World Summit will address national and European regulatory challenges through Spain's **AgriFoodTech Sandbox** program, which is already enabling companies to push the boundaries of innovation despite these regulatory hurdles. Representatives from the **Government of Navarra**, the company **Uraphex**, and **Eatable Adventures** will share how this practical model is helping to accelerate learning, support better decision-making, and give innovation a decisive boost.

[About Expo FoodTech \(May 27 and 28, 2026, BEC-Bilbao\)](#): this is the leading innovation event for professionals across the entire value chain of the food and beverage sector. Over two days, F4F – Expo Foodtech will bring together food industry professionals at the Bilbao Exhibition Centre (BEC) to learn about the latest solutions in foodtech, robotics and automation, processing and packaging machinery for different segments of the food industry, as well as food safety and science. It will also host the Food 4 Future World Summit, the largest European congress where you can discover the latest trends, success stories, and tools to transform the food and beverage industry. F4F - Expo Foodtech, organized by NEBEXT and AZTI, will be held simultaneously with [Pick&Pack for Food Industry](#), the only event in Spain specializing in packaging and logistics solutions for the food industry.

[About NEBEXT](#): Next Business Exhibitions (NEBEXT) is Spain's largest private organizer of professional events specializing in technology, innovation, and sustainability for various industries.

[About AZTI](#): AZTI is a science and technology center that develops high-impact transformation projects and businesses with organizations aligned with the 2030 SDGs. Specializing in the marine environment and food, it provides cutting-edge, value-added products and technologies based on solid science and research.