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FRESH TAKE

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Thousands of entrepreneurs, investors, buyers and distributors across the food industry are already packed inside the Anaheim Convention Center for the big return of Natural Products Expo West after a two-year hiatus. I'm one of them. I'll be scouring the floor today for brands with fresh concepts and, I'll be honest, snippets of hot tea.

Probably above all else, I'll be on the lookout for greenwashing. There are too many claims on labels without actual validation and verification, and as food systems consultant Alison Grantham told me, if a brand hasn't aligned its corporate sustainability goals with the United Nations' recommendations, then what's even the point? According to the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report, in the next eight years, emissions must collectively be cut in half. Feeble promises and fake standards will only hurt us all in the end.

"We have so much greenwashing, especially in food. It happens constantly, and people talk about foods as if they are solutions," Grantham says. "Really, it's marketing. Is it going to scale? What we need is to move the baseline."

A lot has changed since the last major Expo West in 2019, when Oatly banners covered the escalator banks. Nearly 20,000 new products launched that year. The peak of the boom! The pandemic made it harder for a lot of upstart brands to succeed, which is [what my feature out today is all about](). The food startup failure rate has risen. In 2019, Expo West welcomed 3,600 exhibitors. There are 800 fewer this year. That's sobering, but the food that actually gets to our mouths will probably be better for it. Too much noise can get distracting.

Later this afternoon, I'll also be speaking on a panel on how brands can build better connections. If you're in Anaheim, come through and say hi! The session kicks off at 2:30 p.m. and will go until around 5 in Grand Ballroom F. Wishing you a sunny weekend!

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