



Todd Edman of Waitrainer and Whit Hemphill of Wildtime Foods talk business at the first Food and Beverage Networking Night, held at Oakshire Brewing last fall.

## FOOD AND BEVERAGE SECTOR: LANE COUNTY IS HUNGRY FOR COLLABORATION

Article by MICAH ELCONIN, SEASON TO TASTE CONSULTING || Photo by ROBERT SCHERLE

In July 2017, I was selected by the Lane Sector Strategies Team to solidify Lane County's place as a food and manufacturing hub. Our first task was to convene a 23-member industry advisory board to inform work that supports 157 companies, employs 3,865 people and brings over \$169 million dollars in wages to the area.

Collaboration is happening at an unprecedented level and energy is high throughout the community. Quarterly industry happy hours are ablaze with conversation among rooms packed full of industry members. The sector is rallying support around our new sector strategy work, as we broker connections and develop creative strategies for collaboration.

Local colleges are gearing up to inspire the next generation of food and beverage professionals. In February, Lundquist College of Business hosted a food and beverage career day, featuring over 30 regional firms. Lundquist is also offering a food business course in the spring and a food business student club is in the works. Leveraging its expertise in culinary arts and manufacturing education, Lane Community College is collaborating with local industry to develop industry specific advanced manufacturing courses.

Businesses have gained access to programs to bolster their navigation of increasingly complex health and safety regulations. A cohort of local firms are working together under the guidance

of Oregon Manufacturing Extension Partnership to build out food safety protocols required under the new Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA), and Northwest Food Processors Association is bringing a 2.5 day course to Eugene in April focused entirely on similar subject matter. A FSMA Roundtable support group also launched in March.

My next step will be building an industry association to further unify and promote local businesses, as I plan to earn more national attention for local firms as we dive into larger projects.