



Local leaders meet with Sen. Jeff Merkley at Coconut Bliss.



Chinese food buyers tour SnoTemp.

A GROWING FOOD AND BEVERAGE HUB

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Local food and beverage producers are capturing the attention of an international audience. In August, a Chinese Food and Beverage Buyer Trade Mission came to Eugene. This was the first time such a mission traveled to the Southern Willamette Valley.

The group of Chinese buyers had one-on-one meetings with a number of local producers at Hummingbird Wholesale, then enjoyed a lunch at Falling Sky, followed by tours of Snotemp and Ninkasi (they were digging the Prismatic Juicy IPA!). More international buyers are expected in the coming year.

U.S. senators are also taking notice. Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon and a group of 20 local industry leaders held a very productive

roundtable conversation at Coconut Bliss. The group discussed opportunities to solidify our region as a food and beverage manufacturing hub.

Simultaneously, resources continue to be built out, supporting the marketing of our region and its companies. Travel Lane County, for example, is coordinating the development of a Southern Willamette Valley Food Trail. This project includes a number of trails marketed by Travel Oregon and other partners that include farm-to-table, u-pick and farm tours, craft beverage, foraging and other agritourism experiences.

Lane Community College is forging forward with its goal to launch a Food & Beverage Manufacturing Program. The college is hiring new faculty with Food & Beverage

manufacturing experience to support the program and industry members are providing guidance in course development.

Sat Bir Khalsa, director of global community and human resources development at Yogi Tea, sums things up well: “Our community has been a pioneer and front-runner for natural food and other food categories for many years. We are now collaborating and engaging our talented businesses to benefit the whole. Our work will bring awareness of the breadth and depth of our businesses, will give a voice to our sector, will promote collaboration for sharing resources, and will promote collective success for our communities.”



Lane County is home to 165 food and beverage manufacturing companies, which employ 4,019 people, bringing over \$179 million in wages to the area. With firm counts growing at almost 7 percent a year, the industry has created over 1,000 new jobs since 2012. By most estimates, this is a billion-dollar industry that will only continue to grow.