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Lane County Sector Strategy Team Hires Food & Beverage Strategist, Micah Elconin

Elconin to lead Food & Beverage sector work, following successful model of Technology Sector focus

Lane County, OR (August 16, 2017) – The Lane County Sector Strategies Team (LCSST), made up of regional workforce development, economic development, city and business leaders, have completed a successful RFP process for a Food and Beverage Sector Strategist and have awarded the position to Micah Elconin of Season to Taste Consulting.

The LCSST was created to support critical industries in Lane County, including forming sector partnerships targeting specific industries. Driven by local labor market data, the LCSST chose to focus attention first on the Technology Sector. The Technology Sector work launched in 2015 led by the Technology Association of Oregon and has achieved much success. Food and Beverage was selected as the second sector to focus strategic efforts to support the growing industry.

Lane County is home to over 138 food and beverage companies, which employ over 3,300 people, bringing over \$131 million dollars in wages to the area. The Food and Beverage Sector in Lane County is projected to grow by 444 additional jobs by the year 2024 for a 13.2% growth rate. An additional 843 jobs will need to be replaced by that time. In 2015, the Lane County average annual wage in the Food and Beverage Sector was \$42,293 compared to \$40,802 for all industries.

In 2016 the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce kicked off the Food and Beverage Sector Strategy work with local LCSST partners by convening the industry leaders and identifying six strategic goals for the sector.

Food and Beverage Sector Strategy Goals:

1. Develop shared resources to attract, retain and grow local businesses.
2. Create positive awareness and recognition through coordinated branding efforts.
3. Build a stronger workforce — aligning curriculum at local high schools and colleges; raise awareness of food and beverage careers.
4. Smooth utility costs — increase awareness of utility assistance programs and utility costs.
5. Streamline regulations and permitting.
6. Increase collaboration across the industry.

After six goals were identified, teams of industry leaders and economic development professionals from across the community began working towards those shared priorities.

Early Successes include:

- Smoothing utility costs through [EWEB's Business Growth and Retention Program](#)
- Promoting the sector through [Travel Lane County's](#) culinary tourism videos and in-flight advertisements
- Lundquist College of Business launching undergraduate and graduate level food and beverage business course with significant industry integration in Spring 2018
- Oregon Manufacturing Extension Project leading Food Safety Modernization Act training with local cohort of growing businesses
- Creation of [Willamette Grown and Crafted](#) Regional Brand

After shared goals were developed and coordinated efforts were underway, an RFP went out spring of 2017 for an entity to lead continued efforts. Micah Elconin of Season to Taste Consulting earned the project and beginning in July 2017 has taken on the role of Food and Beverage Sector Strategist. Elconin will lead the coordination of projects defined by industry leaders. Elconin's work is funded by Lane Workforce Partnership, Lane County, Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce, and EWEB.

Lane County Industry Advisory Board:

Jason Lafferty, CEO at SnoTemp

Nigel Francisco, CFO at Ninkasi Brewing Company

Chris Cameron, Sr. Director of Supply Chain at Attune Foods

Whit Hemphill, Co-Owner at Wildtime Foods

Marty Parisien, CEO at Singing Dog Vanilla

Sat Bir Khalsa, Director of Global Community and HR Development at Yogi Tea

The Advisory Board is actively recruiting additional members.

Micah Elconin Bio:

Micah Elconin is the founder of [Season to Taste Consulting](#). He leverages over a decade of experience as a sales manager, food entrepreneur, non-profit manager, analyst, teacher, professional chef and amateur gardener to provide value for regional food businesses. He is also a Mentor in Residence at RAIN Eugene. Micah holds an MBA from the University of Oregon, BA from the University of California, Santa Barbara and dual certificates from Bauman College. He is an avid rock climber, runner, and cyclist.

Elconin's past projects include:

- Leading and growing sales by 50% between 2015 and 2016 at [Harvest Santa Barbara](#), a wholesale local and organic produce distributor servicing the Central Coast of California.
- Development and launch of [Sprout!](#), a 12,000 square foot regional food hub that includes incubator kitchen, business support services, year round farmers market, office and event space.
- Creation of "Lane Country Food Makes Dollars and Sense", a local foods marketing campaign implemented by [Willamette Farm and Food Coalition](#).
- Consulting for [Nutiva](#), one of the fastest growing natural foods businesses in the country.
- Consulting for [BRING](#) recycling, an organization that helps people understand how the stuff we use shapes the planet we share.
- Founding and managing The Educated Vegetable, a personal chef service focused on seasonal plant based cuisine and therapeutic applications. Past clients include Will Smith, David Crosby, and Noah Wyle.