



**TESTIMONY OF FOOD NORTHWEST
on SB 5516**

**Transportation and Economic Development
Ways and Means Subcommittee**

April 1, 2019

Good afternoon, I am Craig Smith, Director of Government Affairs for Food Northwest. Established in 1914 and headquartered in Portland Food Northwest is an association of food producers in Oregon, Idaho and Washington. I am here this afternoon to speak in support of the proposed BOLI budget and in particular to speak to two specific aspects of the proposed budget that are important to food companies.

As members of this committee know, food processing is the backbone of many Oregon's rural economies. As the industry becomes more technical, food companies, and particularly those in rural communities, are having great difficulty attracting and training adequate numbers of skilled workers. Many opportunities for skilled and semi-skilled workers in our industry are currently unfilled. These are family wage jobs with good benefits.

For that reason we strongly support BOLI's proposal to establish a position in Eastern Oregon that will focus on apprenticeship and the training needs of Eastern Oregon employers. This is an important piece of a bigger picture solution to the long-term employment needs of rural employers. We appreciate BOLI's support and initiative and look forward to working with the agency as this position is funded and filled.

Additionally, this budget request will significantly strengthen BOLI's Business Technical Assistance program by recognizing it as a core division. In today's increasingly complicated regulatory world, it is critically important that employers have a place to go and find the training and compliance tools they need.

Food companies work hard to stay in compliance with increasingly complex laws and regulations. Having the agency work with employers to help foster a stronger employer – employee community in this way promotes economic growth and prosperity for all. This budget proposal addresses that need.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. Food Northwest requests that you join us in support of SB 5516.