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**Securing tomorrow's supply chain: Addressing the produce industry's truck driver shortage**

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By

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Transportation isn't just a topic of conversation in the produce industry, it's the lifeline ensuring the timely delivery of perishable goods to consumers. Amidst daily logistical concerns, the pressing need to attract and retain truck drivers looms large: The American Trucking Association predicts a shortage of 160,000 drivers across the logistics industry by 2030, underscoring the urgency of action.

While discussions around autonomous trucks offer glimpses into the future, the immediate need for drivers persists. Recognizing this, Oregon has taken proactive measures, with over 325 individuals obtaining Commercial Driver's Licenses in spring 2024 through federally funded training programs. These initiatives mark crucial steps toward ensuring a robust supply chain for the produce industry, emphasizing the importance of industry-wide collaboration and innovation in addressing this challenge head-on.

The initiative was made possible by the [Good Jobs Challenge](#), a program under the Economic Development Administration aimed at bolstering workforce development with a \$500 million grant dispersed across 32 states/regions and various industries. Central to this endeavor is the reinforcement of American supply chains, with a particular emphasis on training individuals in rural communities to meet the demand within the logistics sector.

**Dubbed as Driving Prosperity, Oregon's venture was spearheaded by the Southwestern Oregon Workforce Investment Board in partnership with Lane Workforce Partnership and Rogue Workforce Partnership. The program's core offering was tuition-free CDL training, which trained people with the necessary skills to secure employment, effectively addressing the state's driver shortage.**

Traditionally, undertaking a CDL training course is a significant financial investment, averaging around \$5,000, spanning four to eight weeks of instruction, coupled with ongoing living expenses. The grant alleviated this financial burden, enabling future drivers to pursue training without undue financial strain.

Georgia Conrad, of the Oregon Workforce Partnership, underscored the multifaceted benefits accrued by program participants.

“Not only did these drivers embark on a new career path, but they also immediately gained access to competitive wages, comprehensive benefit packages including sick leave and

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vacation time, retirement programs and medical coverage,” she said.

For those interested in exploring similar opportunities, a visit to the [U.S. Economic Development Administration](#) is recommended to check eligibility for these grants within one’s respective state or region.

*Eric Patrick is a seasoned marketing director within the GrubMarket family, bringing over two decades of experience in the fresh produce industry and logistics. He's also an adjunct marketing instructor at Yakima Valley College. He appreciates the importance of logistics and how it impacts industries every day.*

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