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Smartphone app helps promote healthy, local food options

WATERLOO – Eating fresh, local food can have numerous health benefits and also help the local economy. But finding those local options isn't always easy.

A new smartphone app called **SmartAPPetite**, developed by researchers at Wilfrid Laurier University and Western University, is looking to make it easier for people to "eat local" and connect with healthier food options.

Launched in late November, the app provides users with daily, customized messages, which include nutrition tips, recipes and information on where to find local food options based on the user's location. The app promotes the motto "Buy Local, Eat Smart, Get Healthy," and aims to not only encourage people to live a healthier lifestyle, but also boost the local food economy.

Laurier Professor of Geography and Environmental Studies **Sean Doherty** worked as a co-investigator on the project, with **Jason Gilliland**, a professor in Western University's Faculty of Social Science, as the principal investigator.

"Smartphones provide an unprecedented opportunity to actively reach out to people with valuable, even life-changing information," said Doherty. "Doing so at the right time and location is key."

After years of research tracking humans and their health using smartphones, Doherty jumped at the opportunity to partner with Gilliland to produce an app that gives back to the community.

"Of all the lifestyle changes we could promote, connecting people to burgeoning local food providers seemed like a natural start," he said.

Doherty, a local-food enthusiast, and an impressive amateur chef in his spare time, worked on several components of SmartAPPetite, including the algorithm that matches messages to users based on their preferences, and the logic of location-based messages. The app was developed through a partnership between Laurier, Western University's Human Environments Analysis Laboratory (HEAL), the London Training Centre, Brescia University College and the Old East Village Business Improvement Area in London.

Currently, the app features local-food vendors from the London area; however, the SmartAPPetite team plans to expand to include regions throughout Southwestern Ontario, before covering the rest of the province and eventually Canada.

SmartAPPetite can be downloaded at www.smartappetite.ca.