

Dear Potential Participant:

Dr. Jason Gilliland and the FRESHER team from the Human Environments Analysis Lab at Western University invite you to participate in a study exploring the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the food industry. The research team also involves Dr. Godwin Arku, Dr. Anders Holm, and John Fleming from Western University, Dr. Bob Andersen from the Ivey School of Business at Western University, Dr. Jamie Seabrook from Brescia University College, Dr. Sean Doherty from Wilfrid Laurier University, Dr. Leia Minaker from University of Waterloo, and Dr. Jess Haines from University of Guelph.

The Food Retail Environment Study for Health and Economic Resiliency (FRESHER) is composed of two parts: 1) a survey of current and former employees, and employers in the retail food industry; and 2) interviews with owners and senior managers of these businesses. We are inviting you to participate in the interview component of the study.

Why is this study being done?

This study will explore the effects of COVID-19 on the retail food environment across urban, suburban, and rural contexts. This evidence will be useful for policymakers to assess the impacts of COVID-19 financial support programs on business survival and adjust policies and programs to ensure Ontario's food security during future pandemics and emergency situations. This research will identify the struggles faced by business owners and operators, and their current and former employees, as well as the variety of strategies that they have used to keep their businesses from closing. It will also identify governments, BIA's, and other organizations responses to the COVID-19 crisis and their impact on the resiliency of these businesses.

How long will you be in this study?

It is expected that you will be actively involved in this study for no more than 3 hours over a six-month period. You will be contacted by members of the research team to arrange an interview. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to complete an hour-long interview. Following the interview, you may be contacted to clarify your responses and seek feedback on the study's knowledge sharing materials.

What will happen in this study?

We are asking that you participate in a one-hour interview with a member of the research team via telephone or one of Western University's web conferencing services (i.e. Collaborate UE, Zoom, Microsoft Teams). You will be asked a series of questions related to your experience as an operator of a retail food establishment during the COVID-19 pandemic. These questions will focus on the impacts to, strategies deployed in, and outlook for, your business. Given the methods used in this study, we ask that interviews be audio-recorded for transcribing and analysis by the research team. Should you not wish to be audio-recorded, we will only take notes of our conversation. Audio-recordings will be retained in raw format until they are transcribed. Recordings will then be de-identified using voice modulation technology to render your voice

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unrecognizable, and removing personally identifiable information from the recording itself, to maintain your confidentiality as a participant during the required 7 year retention period of the study's records after project completion.

What are the risks and harms of participating in this study?

The possible risks and harms to you include emotional upset or distress when discussing the COVID-19 pandemic situation. We have compiled a list of resources, financial support programs, and contacts that you can access for yourself and your business.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

You may not directly benefit from participating in this study but information gathered may provide benefits to society as a whole which include improving the resiliency of the food sector to future pandemics and large-scale emergencies, and informing governments on how to better support, and aid in the recovery of, the food sector.

Can I choose to leave this study?

You can leave the study at any time and ask that your data be destroyed by contacting one of the researchers within this time period. While it is not possible to withdraw your data from a report that has been already submitted for publication, you may withdraw your data from being used in all future reports. You can contact the research team via email at fresher@uwo.ca

How will my information be kept confidential?

Representatives of The University of Western Ontario's Non-Medical Research Ethics Board may require access to your study-related records to monitor the conduct of the research. While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. If data is collected during the project which may be required to report by law, we have a duty to report. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this consent form.

Identifiable information that may be collected during the study include your name, business name, phone number, email address, location of your business, and potentially identifiable phrases that you use in the interview. All information will be kept strictly confidential based on the conditions you report in your consent form to participate in the study.

You have complete autonomy as a participant over the level of confidentiality you wish to maintain in this study. As indicated on the consent form, you may choose to allow the researchers to disclose your name and business details, and attribute statements and direct quotes based on the level of disclosure. You may modify this portion of the consent agreement at any time, without affecting your participation in the study.

You may use third-party online services when participating in this study. When information is transmitted or stored on the internet, privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk that your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers).

However, Western University only makes use of third-party services who maintain strict privacy

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standards and/or are deployed as on-premises university managed services. Zoom, Blackboard Collaborate, and Microsoft Teams are institutionally supported services recommended to us as researchers for secure web conferencing with study participants. Microsoft Forms is used to confirm your implied consent to participate in the study and schedule your interview. This service is deployed in a secure computing environment on servers managed by Western University.

Only researchers associated with this study will have access to the study records through an encrypted connection on a password-protected server with two factor authentication. Any paper files are housed securely in a locked institutional storage room. All data is de-identified and aggregated prior to publication.

All data will be collected and stored based on the details of your consent to participate in the study. The data will be stored on a secure server at Western University. Any potentially identifiable information will be retained for a minimum of 7 years after study completion, and then destroyed according to institutional policies. This excludes identifiable information that may have been made publicly available in reports from the study based on your consent to share that type of information. Non-identifiable data may be retained indefinitely and could be used for future research purposes (e.g., to answer a new research question). By consenting to participate in this study, you are agreeing that your data can be used beyond the purposes of this present study by either the current or other researchers.

How am I compensated for this study?

You will be compensated with a \$40 gift card to a retail food outlet or local shopping district of your choosing for your participation in this study. If you do not complete the entire study, you will still be compensated with the same amount. You will receive a link via email from the research team to claim your compensation shortly after your scheduled interview time.

What are my rights as a participant in this study?

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to be in this study. Even if you consent to participate you have the right to not answer individual questions or to withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose not to participate or to leave the study at any time it will have no effect on your business or personal interests.

You do not waive any legal right by consenting to this study. You may request a copy of data pertaining to you as a participant in the study by contacting the researchers directly.

Who can I contact if I have more questions?

If you have questions about this study, please contact the study team via fresher@uwo.ca or calling 519-661-2111 x80963. The project lead, Dr. Jason Gilliland can be reached at jgillila@uwo.ca or (519) 661-2111 x81239

If you, or someone you know, needs support during these challenging times, visit our list of resources at <https://fresher.theheal.ca/help/>.

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If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or the conduct of this study, you may contact The Office of Human Research Ethics (519) 661-3036, 1-844-720-9816, email: ethics@uwo.ca. This office oversees the ethical conduct of research studies and is not part of the study team. Everything that you discuss will be kept confidential.

Sincerely,

Dr. Jason Gilliland

Professor, Department of Geography, Department of Pediatrics, Department of Epidemiology & Biostatistics, School of Health Studies

Director, Human Environments Analysis Lab

Director, Urban Development Program

Scientist, Lawson Health Research Institute

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

FRESHER STUDY CONSENT FORM

By checking this box [], I consent to participate in the interview component of the Food Retail Environment Study for Health and Economic Resiliency, which means the researchers may report generalizable information collected from my interview, referring only to the municipality and the sector (e.g. grocery, restaurant, takeout) in which my business operates.

I, _____ (Name) indicate my consent to participate in the Food Retail Environment Study for Health and Economic Resiliency study.

I agree to allow the researchers to use the following email address or phone number to organize an interview with me, and contact me throughout the course of the study.

Email Address: _____

Phone: _____

Furthermore, I provide the research team with the following consent related to attributing direct quotes and statements to me (select one):

- The researchers **may attribute** statements and direct quotes to my name and business name in any dissemination materials.
- The researchers **may attribute** statements and direct quotes to my business name only.
- The researchers **may not attribute** my name or business name to any statements or direct quotes. The researchers will use a pseudonym in this case when using statements or direct quotes from my interview.
- The researchers **may not use** any verbatim statements or direct quotes from my interview. My data will only be reported in generalizable terms as outlined above.

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FRESHER – Gilliland et al.
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