

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 retail food sector. 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 survey 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 responses by governments, BIA's and other organizations to the COVID-19 crisis, exploring how these policies and programs have contributed to the resiliency of food retail businesses.

### **How long will you be in this study?**

It is expected that you will be involved in this study for 20 to 30 minutes while completing the survey.

### **What will happen in this study?**

We are asking that you participate in a survey lasting between 20 to 30 minutes. You will be asked a series of questions related to your experience as a current or former employee, or employer, in the retail food industry during the COVID-19 pandemic. These questions will focus on the impacts to, and working experiences, in your industry.

If you are an employer that chooses to report your contact information, you will be contacted by a member of the research team to participate in an interview. This is an additional activity, where you will receive a separate Letter of Information and Consent form.

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

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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 should you need assistance.

### **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 quoting the unique confirmation code provided to you at the end of the survey. 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 directly at [fresher@uwo.ca](mailto: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. Data will be kept until the conclusion of data analysis and publications from this study are completed. The results of this study will only be presented for groups so that participants will never be individually identifiable. While we do our best to protect your information there is no guarantee that we will be able to do so. You do not waive any legal rights by signing this consent form.

The only potentially identifiable information collected from the survey during this study is your 6-digit postal code, income, place of employment, age, and gender identity. You have the option to not report any of this information in your survey response.

The researchers will not be able to link your survey responses to your email address or other contact information that is associated with the draw or setting up an interview if you are an employer, should you choose to provide it.

All information will be kept strictly confidential.

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 your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Your survey responses will be collected through a secure online survey platform called Qualtrics. Qualtrics uses encryption technology and restricted access authorizations to protect all data collected. In addition, Western's Qualtrics server is in Ireland, where privacy standards are maintained under the European Union safe harbour framework. The data will then be exported from Qualtrics and securely stored on Western University's server.

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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.

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 upon study completion, after which it will be destroyed based on institutional policies. Non-identifiable aggregated 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 entered into a draw to win one of three \$500 gift cards to a retail food outlet, or local shopping district of your choice. It is expected that there will be 1000 participants in the draw. If you win the draw, you will be notified via the email address you provided at the end of the survey and will be able to claim your prize by contacting the researchers.

### **What are my rights as a participant in this study?**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may decide not to participate 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 you, your employment, your business, or eligibility for government programs.

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, quoting the unique confirmation code presented to you at the end of the survey.

### **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](mailto:fresher@uwo.ca) or calling 519-661-2111 x80963. The project lead, Dr. Jason Gilliland, can be reached at [jgillila@uwo.ca](mailto: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/>.

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](mailto: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,

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**Food Retail Environment Study for Health & Economic Resiliency**

Email: [fresher@uwo.ca](mailto:fresher@uwo.ca)

Social: @FRESHER\_Canada

Web: <https://fresher.theheal.ca>

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.

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## **FRESHER STUDY CONSENT FORM**

By checking this box [  ], I consent to participate in the Food Retail Environment Study for Health and Economic Resiliency.

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FRESHER – Gilliland et al.

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