

You eat, they eat, Weat: Plamondon woman launches farm to table smartphone app

BY LEXI FREEHILL

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PLAMONDON - Farmer's Market Saturday's in Athabasca are highly anticipated by both shoppers looking to score unique, local products and vendors hoping to expand their customer base.

The Athabasca Farmers Market runs weekly in the summertime at the Riverfront Park, and every two weeks indoors at the multiplex during the colder months, with no markets in January and April this year.

And while the market draws in crowds of buyers and sellers from far beyond county lines, one Plamondon woman identified a gap in the niche of connecting consumers with small growers, producers, and entrepreneurs: what about non-market days?

"It's only a couple hours a week that we get to sell our goods, that's it. And why couldn't we sell it the whole time, the whole week?" is the question Cadziana Beyer is seeking to answer with her app, Weat Local Market.

Beyer has spent most of her life in the quaint countryside of Plamondon. She was raised on a now fourth-generation large-scale cattle and grain farm, and now lives with her husband and four children close to her childhood home, growing food to put on their own table.

"There was always this idea in my mind that it needs to be easier for people to connect with food," said Beyer. "I always thought, 'Why don't we sell cows right to people?' My dad would always say, 'It's not worth my time because of the bulk we deal in.'"

Beyer's curiosity around access to food remained with her as an abstract question until her cranial light bulb lit up and illuminated the answer while on a family trip to Ontario.

"My brother was getting married, and his wife was from an area called Peterborough, which is cottage country near Kawartha Lakes, and this area was really chock full of market stalls and market pop-ups," said Beyer.

While family members were able to wander through the local wares on offer, Beyer was relegated to the confines of the vehicle, nursing her baby.

"I was like, man, there's so many vendors and things and products to buy, but I can't see any of it. I'm stuck here, but in the meantime on my phone playing," she

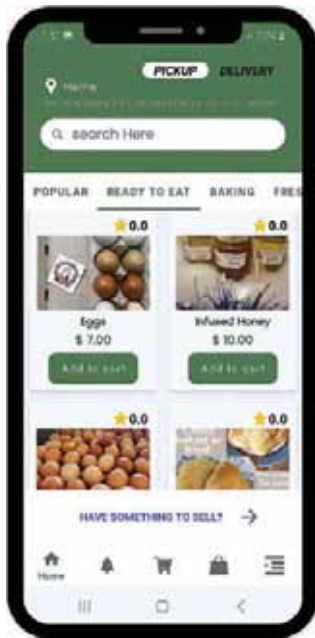


ILLUSTRATION SUBMITTED BY CADZIANA BEYER
A digital mock-up of the Weat Local Market app's interface, which allows customers to explore categories of home-grown, homemade, and handcrafted goods for sale by producers and creators in a 50 kilometre radius.

added. "I was like what if there was an app that you could just — I wanted to call it flybys — fly by and pick something up from someone who made it?"

After returning from the trip, Beyer said she got to work making phone calls and researching existing platforms with similar services. With the green light from AHS and seed money from an advancing agriculture group, she contracted developers to build the initial versions of the Weat Local Market smartphone app released in 2022.

"It's been a building process this entire time and I work on it daily; religiously."

"Going into it, I had the illusion that I would have something up and going in a matter of a few months, and realistically it's been years," she added. "This was one of the first things that I've ever built from scratch by myself."

Beyer said as both a buyer and producer herself, her motivation is driven by a desire to feed her neighbours, strengthen the local economy, and keep smaller, non-industrial growers in the game.

"The more money that we spend in our communities, the more it stays in our communities," she said. "Supporting our local farmers means that we're all successful; it's something that only makes sense. It has to make sense."

She said part of levelling the playing field between smaller scale Albertan farmers and large-scale corporate grocery chains selling international produce that travels, on average, 3,000 miles before hitting the shelves, growers need to capitalize on trends in shopping and tech.

"It's really going to be the death of farming if we can't start buying our food locally," said Beyer. "The bigger grocery stores are allowing click and collect, we could have the same model for farmers. We just have to figure out a really clever way to do it."

The app allows producers or vendors to choose and change their locations and populate their own products, visible to buyers within a 50 kilometre radius. Shoppers can navigate different categories of goods, and select and pay for products from multiple vendors in the same payment.

Weat Local Market has around 400 registered users, and more than 1,000 downloads, with both numbers climbing each day, according to Beyer. While most of the uptake is in the Plamondon, Athabasca, and

Lac La Biche areas, she noted the app has users in Ontario and B.C., and her goal is to see it used across the country and possibly beyond.

Cadziana and Justin Beyer are raising four kids along with their app development efforts. Beyers said she's excited to see her project grow alongside her family, and said the app is "another one of my babies."

Despite taking longer than she initially anticipated, the process of building Weat Local Market has become an integral part of Beyer's own journey.

"It's just my purpose. I feel like it's part of my whole life and everything I've done," she said. "It's kind of like another one of my babies."

"I just think that there has to be a way to connect to food and it just doesn't exist yet and I cannot believe that it doesn't," she added. "It's my life's mission to figure this one out."

Weat Local Market can be found on the Apple App Store and the Google Play Store.

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