

Agri-food for Healthy Aging (A-HA)

Building connections and advancing knowledge within
the agri-food, nutrition and health sectors

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Project Summary

The **Agri-food for Healthy Aging (A-HA)** initiative is a collaborative research group created through the efforts of the Schlegel-UW Research Institute for Aging (RIA), University of Waterloo, University of Guelph, and MaRS Landing.

A-HA's core researchers hold expertise in areas of applied nutrition & dietetics, nutritional sciences, food science, and human health. By exploring linkages between agriculture, food, nutrition and health, A-HA aims to realize innovative opportunities for Ontario's agri-food and health sectors to improve health and well-being of older adults.

With funding from the **OMAFRA/UofG Partnership via the Agri-Food and Rural Link program** (project#299509), A-HA is implementing a 3-year KTT project to build connections and advance knowledge in the agri-food, nutrition and health sectors. The project aims to:

- Share research results
- Increase collaborative research and dissemination opportunities
- Build community connections and stakeholder partnerships
- Train Highly Qualified Personnel

Specific activities to communicate with health professionals in community-based and congregate settings, food industry, government, and academia include:

- Communication efforts: annual newsletter, social media sites (e.g. Twitter), blog
- Hosting/attending networking and dissemination events
- Participation in a knowledge mobilization group: Nutrition Community of Practice

Partners for this project include Dietitians of Canada, Guelph Food Technology Centre, Ontario Long Term Care Association, Seniors Health Research Transfer Network, Schlegel Villages and Royal Agricultural Winter Fair.

These efforts will collectively contribute to a thriving agri-food sector by informing producers and food industry to realize market opportunities, and by helping the health sector realize health benefits to consuming Ontario's innovative agri-foods (e.g. functional foods). In order to realize the value of A-HA's research and facilitate a positive change, effective knowledge sharing is imperative. Without the widespread participation from community as well as industry partners, this collaborative group and its valuable KTT activities would not exist.

KTT Activities

KTT is a core mandate of A-HA and the following activities are a result of funding from the Agri-Food and Rural Link program.

Nutrition Community of Practice

The Nutrition CoP is administered through Seniors Health Research Transfer Network. Partners include Dietitians of Canada (sponsoring agency), Ontario Society of Nutrition Management, Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition - University of Guelph, Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, Personal Support Network of Ontario, the Schlegel-UW RIA and A-HA.

Goals of the Nutrition CoP are to:

- Link current and future practitioners involved in the nutrition care of older adults
- Promote evidence-based nutrition care for older adults by supporting knowledge exchange among experts, researchers, professional organizations, practitioners, and caregivers
- Disseminate best practices in nutrition care to frontline caregivers
- Advocate for innovation and best practices in the nutrition care of older adults
- Stimulate research on food and nutrition issues for older adults

To date, the Nutrition CoP core working group has held five teleconferences, and a webinar is planned for April 2011 to engage stakeholders and disseminate Dr. Heather Keller's research.

A-HA Listserv and Annual Newsletter

A-HA releases annual newsletters to highlight the year's achievements. Regular emails are sent out to over 400 agri-food and health sector stakeholders highlighting upcoming events and providing research updates.

Social Media

A-HA uses various social media sites to communicate with stakeholders and community members, including Twitter, Facebook, and a Wordpress blog. As of February 2011, A-HA has 117 Twitter followers, over 10 blog postings, and more than 65 fans on Facebook.

Research Activities

A-HA researchers are currently involved in a number of research activities. Here are a few examples:

- **Dr. Heather Keller** and **Dr. Lisa Duizer** from the University of Guelph are evaluating dietary meal options for aging adults with swallowing difficulties, focusing on sensory appeal, nutritional quality and budgetary constraints in long-term care. Partners include Campbell Company of Canada, Appetito, and HFS.
- **Dr. Lisa Duizer** is also exploring methods of texture modification for fresh meat and vegetables in retirement and long-term care homes so that the nutritional and sensory qualities address the needs of older adults. Partners include Turkey Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association, Ontario Farm Animal Council/AGCare, and the Schlegel Villages. Funding for this project is provided by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada through the Canadian Agricultural Adaptation Program (CAAP). In Ontario, this program is delivered by the Agricultural Adaptation Council.
- **Dr. Ken Stark** from the University of Waterloo and his team (including **Dr. Lisa Duizer**) developed a strategy to increase omega-3 fatty acid intake of an entire retirement home facility by developing and implementing various omega-3 fatty acid enriched food products. The team has completed data collection for assessing palatability and taste of the products created in a long term care environment. Partners include Ocean Nutrition Canada and the Schlegel Villages.
- **Dr. Heather Keller** is working on a longitudinal project to gain a better understanding of the issues faced by families experiencing dementia, specifically related to food and mealtimes in order to inform the development of educational tools and interviews to better assist families with these issues. Partners include Murray Alzheimer Research and Education Program at the Schlegel-UW RIA, and several Alzheimer Society chapters in South Central Ontario.
- **Dr. Alison Duncan** from the University of Guelph is exploring the consumption, awareness, understanding and motivating factors related to functional foods in older adults. Dr. Judy Sheeshka from the University of Guelph is a co-investigator on this research and the project is funded by the first Nutrition Research in Focus program of the Canadian Foundation for Dietetic Research.

How To Get Involved

Stay connected and follow A-HA's activities:

- Visit the A-HA website (<http://aha.the-ria.ca>)
- Follow A-HA on Twitter (@foodhealthaging)
- Become a fan on Facebook (Agri-food for Healthy Aging fan page)
- Check out the A-HA blog (<http://aha.the-ria.ca/blog/>)
- Sign up for the A-HA listserv (email a-ha@the-ria.ca)

