

What are you eating? Mobile app can tell you

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Gatorade drinkers wondering about the calcium pantothenate in their favorite sports drink won't have to guess much longer.

INRFOOD, a [mobile application](#) and website created by a group of Durham, N.C., startups, will allow users to scan the bar codes of [food products](#) and see the ingredients. The application will launch by the end of November and is the brainchild of Jaargon, a health care [startup](#) in the American Tobacco Campus' American Underground complex.

"With health care, we need to get back to basics," said Jaargon CEO Keval Mehta. "One of the problems is that we don't look at the components of food, the ingredients. We're educating users on what this stuff is, where it comes from."

The application, which has data on more than 200,000 products and 40,000 ingredients, lets users scan the bar codes of packaged foods through their [iPhone](#) camera or online via their webcam. The application then loads information on the product, providing facts on what the ingredients are used for and where they come from. The platform also color codes ingredients as red, yellow or green based on their nutritional value and includes special codes for medical considerations such as pregnancy and allergies or cultural preferences.

"If I scan a box of JELL-O, the gelatin in there is not vegetarian-friendly, and a little alarm will go off and tell me it's not suitable for me," said Mehta, a vegetarian.

The application will also offer [product recall](#) information, he said.

Though the mobile application is free, features including the color-coding, cultural and medical considerations and recall information disappear after 30 days. Users can pay a one-time fee of \$2.99 for the full version and lifetime updates.

"We want to price it where it's quite attractive and affordable to most people," Mehta said. He hopes to have as many as 1,000 downloads a day of the application in the first two months, with at least half of them converting to the paid version.

Work on INRFOOD started in April, when Mehta and his team began recruiting five other American Underground startups to help develop and design the application. Jaargon sought out dieticians and nutritionists to assist with the ingredient coding.

Two Toasters, a startup that builds mobile products, built the iPhone application and helped develop the database needed to process all the search queries, CEO Rachit Shukoa said.

"It needed to be very easy to use, so someone who may not be as technologically adept would still be able to pick up the application and know exactly what to do," he said. "I'm a huge foodie, and learning more about what I was consuming really made me think this was an interesting concept and one that hasn't been done in the mobile space."

Shukoa said working with the other startups, which include Smashing Boxes, Appuware and the Council for Entrepreneurial Development, was also a unique opportunity because his co-developers were easily accessible in the American Underground. The complex is a center designed to house entrepreneurial ventures, which typically have few employees. Jaargon, for example, has seven employees. .

"Overall I'm excited to see the project get in front of the users," he said. "That's the true test."

Mehta said the application is marketed toward women ages 18-38 but is designed for everyone to use. The application development team was composed of 20 men and one female, and the platform made the biggest difference in the eating habits of the men, he said.

"Men are not really our target demographic, because they just eat what they want, but pretty much anybody who has a mobile device we'd like to target," he said. "Our application's not going to be pink or anything like that, but it's really geared toward female users."

Ryan Sobus, a registered dietitian with Healthy Diets in Raleigh, N.C., said she would likely recommend the application to her patients if the ingredient guidelines matched her own.

"People respond very well to the color-coding because it's instantaneous feedback on whether something is good or not," she said. "If that helps people to put down the potato chips and pick up an apple, then I'm a fan."

Several nutrition-based [applications](#) already exist. Fooducate, a free application that similarly allows users to scan a product bar code, gives foods a letter grade based on their ingredients and [nutritional value](#). FoodScanner, an application by Daily Burn, allows its downloaders to scan a bar code and keep track of how many calories they eat. The app costs 99 cents.

But Mehta said his focus on ingredients is what will distinguish INRFOOD from its competitors.

"If you scan a Twinkie and you see what's in a Twinkie and you still

want to eat it, more power to you," he said. "But don't say you didn't know."

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