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CP PHOTO

Kate Alexander, right, stands with team members Paula Duenas and Marshall Bell, holding their gluten-free Chickitos chickpea chips. Alexander couldn't find many gluten-free snack foods in grocery stores, so she decided to make her own. The result, a gluten-free chip made mostly from chickpeas, has landed her the opportunity to win a national competition for food development.

Students find new uses for food standbys – peas, beans, lentils

The Canadian Press

TORONTO — Kate Alexander couldn't find many gluten-free snack foods in the grocery store, so she decided to make her own.

The result, a gluten-free chip made mostly from chickpeas, landed the recent graduate of the nutrition and food science program at the University of Alberta, a spot in a national competition for food development.

"I'm a celiac, so I find it really hard to find quick, easy snack food that's gluten-free and is relatively healthy if not tasty," she said.

"There's some healthy options out there, but they don't always taste the greatest or last the longest on the shelves."

The Chickito, as Alexander and teammates Paula Duenas, Marshall Bell and Eden Berhe call the product, went up against two competing entries in the Mission Impulsive contest held in Vancouver and finished in first place.

The event is a publicity campaign for Pulse Canada, an industry group that represents growers,

processors and traders of peas, lentils, beans and chickpeas.

The other entries included the Benny Bar, a granola bar replacement made from lentils and chickpeas that came in second, and Dip 'n' Go, a combination of a crisp made of beans, peas and chickpeas and three different dips made from beans, lentils or peas. Dip 'n' Go came in third.

Each product is the result of months-long development by each team.

The process of developing Dip 'n' Go started with a trip to the grocery store to see what products are already available and to gather ingredients. The team then drew up a draft recipe and after that began a process of trial and error in the kitchen.

It helps "if you take notes on what you did and what problems you saw along the process," said Adi Berk who, along with fellow University of Guelph students Hannah Rotstein and Hilary Watt, developed Dip 'n' Go.

The process to develop the Benny Bar took a long time, in part because you can't make too many

changes at one time, said University of Saskatchewan student Caitlin Olauson who, along with teammates Erin Berscheid and Kaipeng Yu, helped develop it.

The group started developing the bar by speaking with mothers and dietitians about what they'd like to see in a granola bar. From there, the group spent months tinkering with the recipe – but only a little each time.

"If you try to change too much at once, then you don't know which changes worked and which ones didn't work," said Olauson. "If you start over all again then you don't know what worked and what you did that made it worse."

Each group won regional contests to earn the right to compete in Vancouver and try to convince three judges they'd developed the best product.

The winning group at the national event will receive \$2,500.

Dylan MacKay of Manitoba won last year's competition for his "pea-rogy," a perogy made with half chickpea flour and half wheat flour.

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