Seneca's hackathon addresses challenges in the food sector

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More than 1,000 students and alumni came together to tackle food issues ranging from hunger to wellness in Seneca's sixth annual hackathon.

Teams from more than 35 postsecondaries brainstormed innovative solutions to address five different challenges, with mentorship from industry professionals, in the student-run event.

"The quality of ideas this year was next level," said Fenil Mehta, Co-Chair, Hackathon 2025. "You could tell everyone was really invested in the problem statements and a lot of ideas caught the attention of our partners, which could lead to real-world applications."

Participants had to come up with a solution to one of the following challenge categories: food sustainability; innovative retail solutions; food insecurity and charitable support; nutrition, wellness and consumer education; and food safety, traceability and transparency.

More than 30 companies and organizations such as the following Toronto-based businesses: Thinking North, an investor network; Second Harvest, a food rescue organization; and Esri Canada, which builds mapping software, participated in the four-day event.

This was Mr. Mehta's third hackathon with Seneca and he said the finale, which was held in-person at Seneca on Saturday, March 29, was the biggest yet. Mr. Mehta, an alumni of the Business Analytics and the Project Management – Information Technology graduate certificate programs, said there were so many strong teams it was difficult for the judges to pick the winners.

Fifty teams qualified for the finals and seven awards were given out.

The top prizes went to:

- First place: University of Toronto, for a program that uses games and videos to teach elementary students about reducing food waste
- Second place: Seneca, for an AI-powered tool that uses speech/text in multiple languages and offers recipes and an item location search

- Third place and First Nations Award: Seneca, for an AI-powered app that provides personalized, culturally relevant meal plans and mental health resources for improved well-being (pictured, left to right, Abdulmuhsin Baks, Kamella Hoang, Sean Muniz, Cris Huynh)

"The hackathon showed how technology can play a role in making food systems more efficient and accessible," Mr. Mehta said. "It also sparked some really interesting conversations about the future of food innovation."

The event was rounded out with appearances from Neil Hetherington, CEO, Toronto's Daily Bread Food Bank, who gave a keynote speech, and Isa Lee, Councillor, City of Markham.

The hackathon was a huge success thanks to the teams competing and input from mentors, judges and sponsors, Mr. Mehta said.

"Their insights were a game-changer for participants," he said. "Seeing people from different backgrounds — developers, designers, business folks — come together to build solutions in such a short time was really inspiring."

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