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PHOTO BY CRAIG O'DONNELL

More than corn on the Upper Shore

Harvesters like this one are a familiar September sight along local roads.

Harvest directory is year-round guide By CRAIG O'DONNELL codonnell@thekentcountynews.com

CHESTERTOWN — Harvest is more than combines and corn on the Upper Shore.

Doris Mason, executive director of the Upper Shore Regional Council, said the newest Upper Shore Harvest Directory was ready early in the summer. Since then it has been distributed all around the state.

This colorful, glossy brochure is designed to promote local products and draw tourists, too. Like the regional council, it covers the counties of Cecil, Kent and Queen Anne's. Altogether, the directory includes 121 agricultural and related businesses.

Entries for the three counties run from "Apiary" – there are three beekeepers – to "Wool." Most of them do business year-round. Some aren't directly involved in farming, such as fishing charters, petting zoos and restaurants. Along with the foldout map and guide, the directory has its own spot on the USRC website: www.uppershoreregionalcouncil.org/harvestdirectory.

On Monday, Sept. 23, Mason said the directory project is moving ahead by expanding the list, by creating a smartphone app and by helping interested businesses with marketing.

"Phase two involves putting everybody on the web," Mason said, "and a mobile app too, for both Apple and Android."

The app, when it's finished, will find a business or a product and also highlight other directory businesses within a 25-mile radius.

The council's efforts are funded by state grants. Mason's partner in taking the Harvest Directory beyond a brochure is the Washington College GIS Lab, directed by Stewart Bruce. The two organizations are providing the in-kind match. Washington College student interns have been a great help, said Mason.

The first stage won a \$19,500 state grant, Mason said. The second phase proposal was for \$25,000, and the partners got \$19,900. It's an open-ended directory, said Mason. Anyone who would like to be considered can go through the USRC website – there's an application right there – or contact her directly. "We don't want to leave anybody out," she said. Because the directory is online, new businesses can be added at any time.

As part of the second stage, the participants will have the chance to attend seminars on creating an effective website and on marketing through social media.

"Some of them don't have websites," she said, and she'd like to encourage them all to go online. By offering everyone who's interested a chance to learn how to use a website and social media to make their business more visible, Mason said, it becomes "part of setting up a concrete plan for each business."

The council also can put owners in touch with SCORE – a national network of retired executives – to get free help fleshing out a business plan. In the meantime, however, everyone in the directory has one page of information on the USRC's Harvest Directory website. Agribusinesses on the printed map have all their basic contact information online. When the brochure is updated in the spring, it will be revised to include new arrivals.

Mason said adding photos to the individual pages is coming, as well. Mason said she also hopes to find a couple of businesses who want to "go global," that is, expand their marketing presence beyond the local area using the Internet.

The Harvest Directory can be found elsewhere online, too. There's a Facebook page: see <https://www.facebook.com/upshoreharvestdirectory>. Mason sends word out on Twitter. There also are a handful of videos on the Harvest Directory YouTube channel.

For those who aren't in the immediate area, the USRC website links to a searchable, online version of the directory's map, hosted by the college GIS lab.

Anyone with an ag-related business can take part in the Harvest Directory. If it is simpler, said Mason, just pick up the phone and call her at 410-810-2124.

