

Crossroads Resource Center

7415 Humboldt Ave. S. / Minneapolis, Minnesota 55423 / 612.869.8664
kmeter@crcworks.org www.crcworks.org

Tools for Community Self-determination

Mid-Plains Nebraska Local Farm & Food Economy

by Ken Meter, Crossroads Resource Center (Minneapolis)
for
Center for Rural Affairs
and
USDA Heartland Regional Business Center

With the generous assistance of Hawley Hamlet (Lincoln, Nebraska)

February, 2025

*Covers Arthur, Chase, Cherry, Dawson, Dundy, Frontier, Furnas, Gosper, Grant, Hayes, Hitchcock, Hooker,
Keith, Lincoln, Logan, McPherson, Perkins, Red Willow, & Thomas Counties in Nebraska.
(19 Counties)*

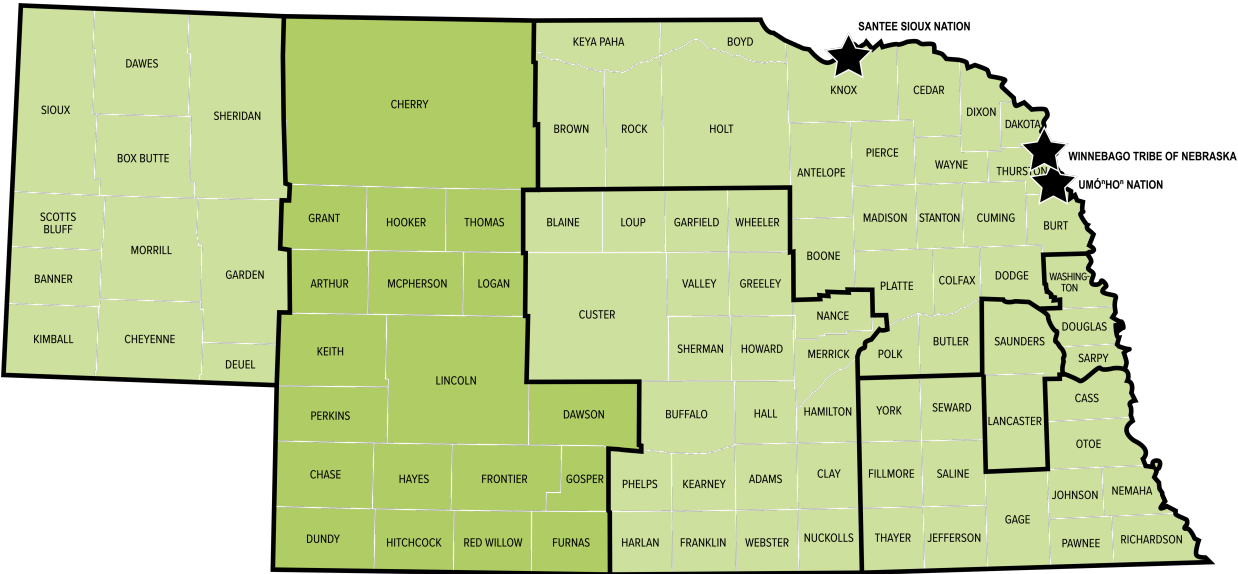


Photo by Kylie Kai, Center for Rural Affairs

Table of Contents

PERSONAL INCOME, POVERTY, & FOOD INSECURITY.....	4
PERSONAL INCOME IN MID-PLAINS NEBRASKA	4
ISSUES AFFECTING LOW-INCOME RESIDENTS OF THE MID-PLAINS NEBRASKA REGION	6
FOOD-RELATED HEALTH CONDITIONS	10
MID-PLAINS NEBRASKA’S FARMS	10
FARM CHARACTERISTICS	10
FARM PRODUCT SALES	11
SMALL & MID-SIZE FARMERS	11
FARM PRODUCTION EXPENSES	12
MAJOR CROPS AND LIVESTOCK.....	13
FOODS RAISED MORE DIRECTLY FOR HOUSEHOLD CONSUMPTION	16
DIRECT SALES.....	16
VEGETABLES, POTATOES, & ORCHARDS	16
ORGANIC FOOD SALES	17
FARM OPERATOR CHARACTERISTICS.....	17
RACE & ETHNICITY.....	17
FEMALE PRODUCERS	17
YOUNG PRODUCERS.....	17
ACTIVE MILITARY OR VETERAN PRODUCERS.....	18
FARM OWNERSHIP.....	18
CONSERVATION PRACTICES	18
FARM INCOME IN MID-PLAINS NEBRASKA	19
NET CASH INCOME	19
FARM & FOOD ECONOMY SUMMARY	25
MISSING DATA.....	25
MID-PLAINS NEBRASKA SUMMARY	25
HOUSEHOLD FOOD CONSUMPTION	27
MID-PLAINS NEBRASKA	27
LINCOLN METRO	27
STATE OF NEBRASKA	28
KEY DATA SOURCES	29

Mid-Plains Nebraska



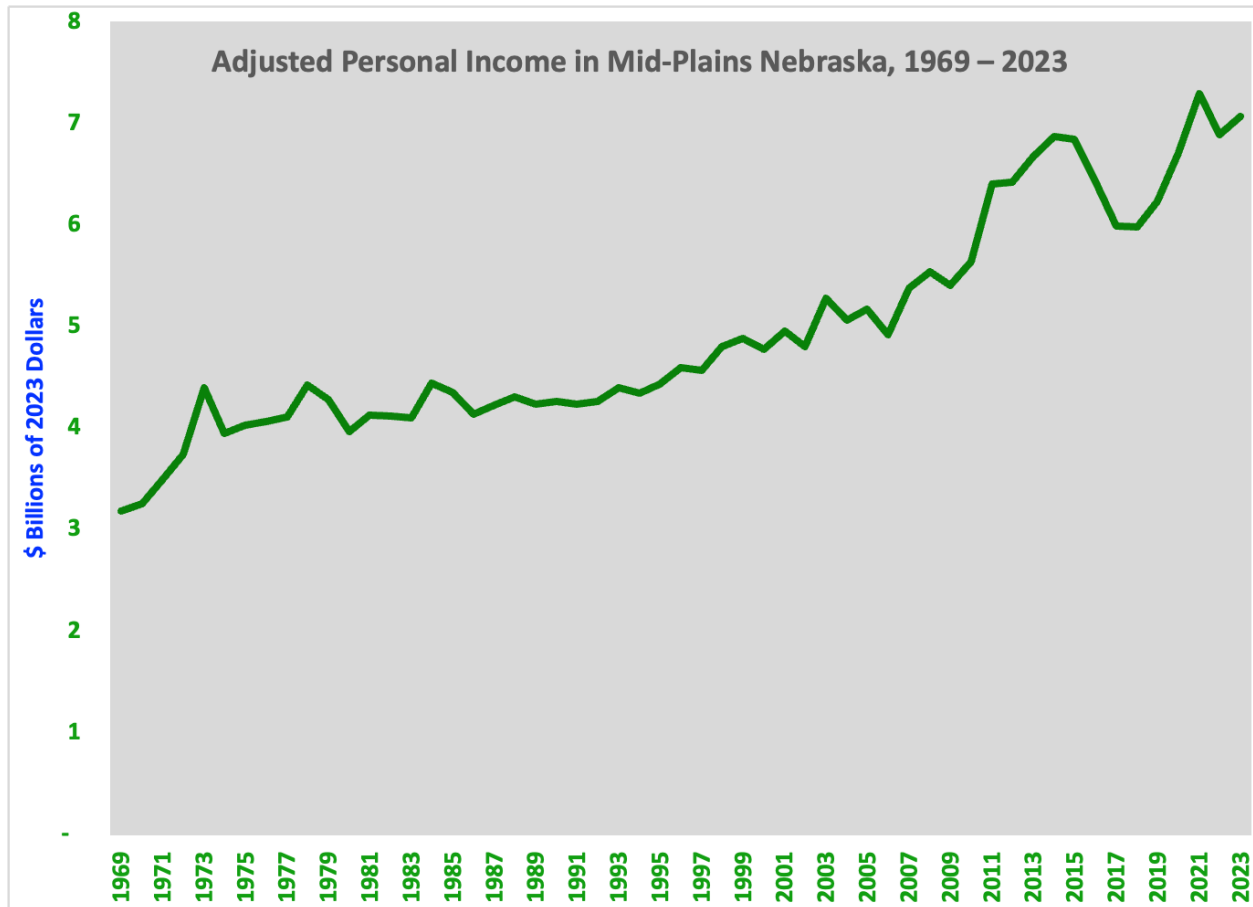
Map by Kylie Kai, Center for Rural Affairs

Personal Income, Poverty, & Food Insecurity

Personal Income in Mid-Plains Nebraska

105,349 Mid-Plains residents received \$7.1 billion of income in 2023 (See Chart 1). This was an increase of 122% from \$3.2 billion 1969, with dollars adjusted for inflation.

Chart 1: Adjusted Personal Income in Mid-Plains Nebraska, 1969 – 2023



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index.

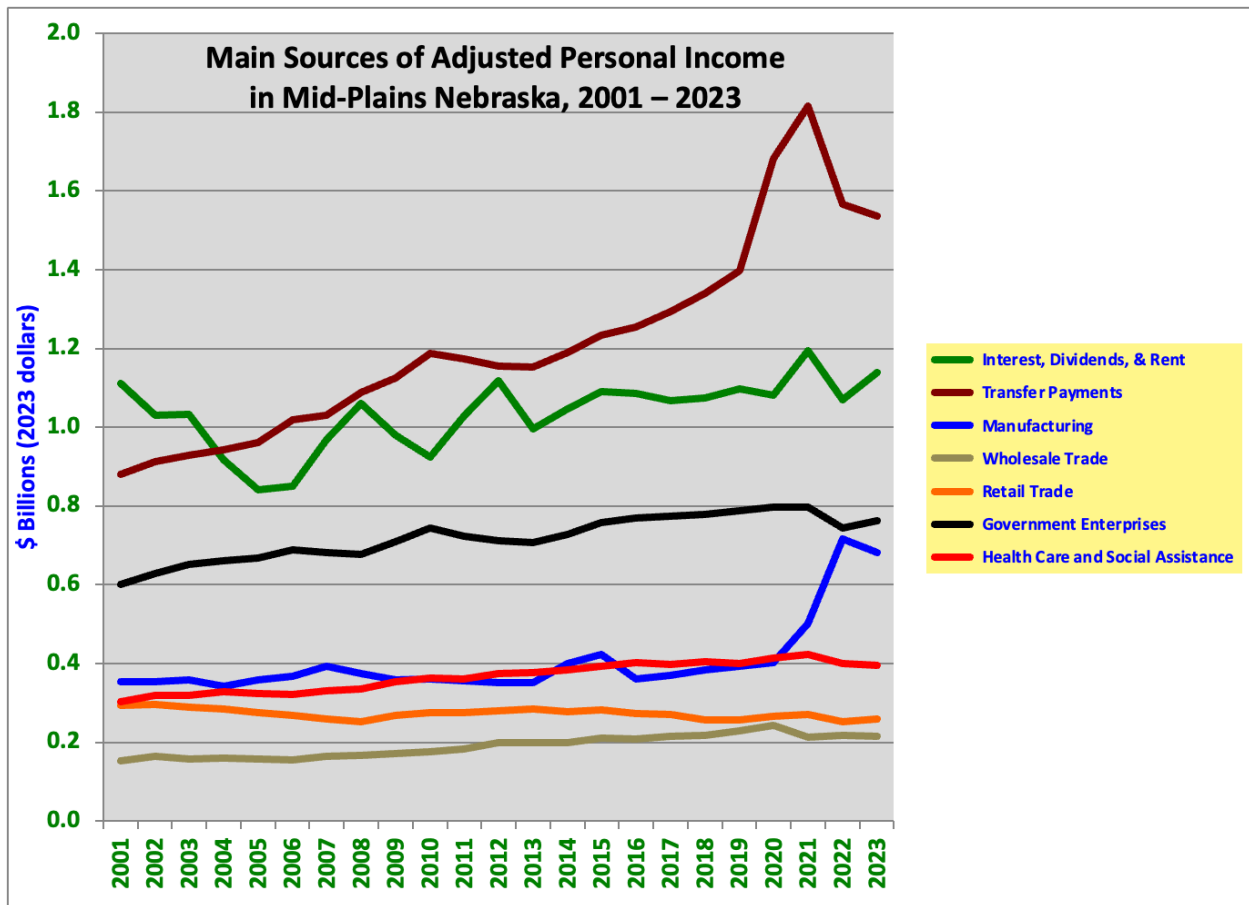
The largest source of personal income is transfer payments (from government programs such as pensions), totaling \$1.5 billion (See Chart 2 below). Ranking second was capital income (from interest, rent, and dividends) at \$1.1 billion. Government jobs (including educational workers) ranked third at \$762 million. Manufacturing workers earned \$682 million, after a growth spurt in recent years. Health care workers earned another \$395 million. Wholesale workers earned \$260 million and retail workers earned \$214 million.

Income earned from personal transfer payments includes retirement and disability insurance benefits, medical benefits, income maintenance benefits, unemployment insurance; and veterans' benefits. Unfortunately, the Bureau of Economic Analysis stopped publishing detailed estimates of transfer payment sources for counties and states in September, 2024.

Government income includes \$66 million of income earned by federal workers and \$681 million earned by state and local government workers. Military personnel earned \$14 million of personal income.

Note that income from public sources (government jobs and transfer payments) makes up 32% of all personal income in the region.

Chart 2: Main Sources of Adjusted Personal Income in the Mid-Plains Nebraska

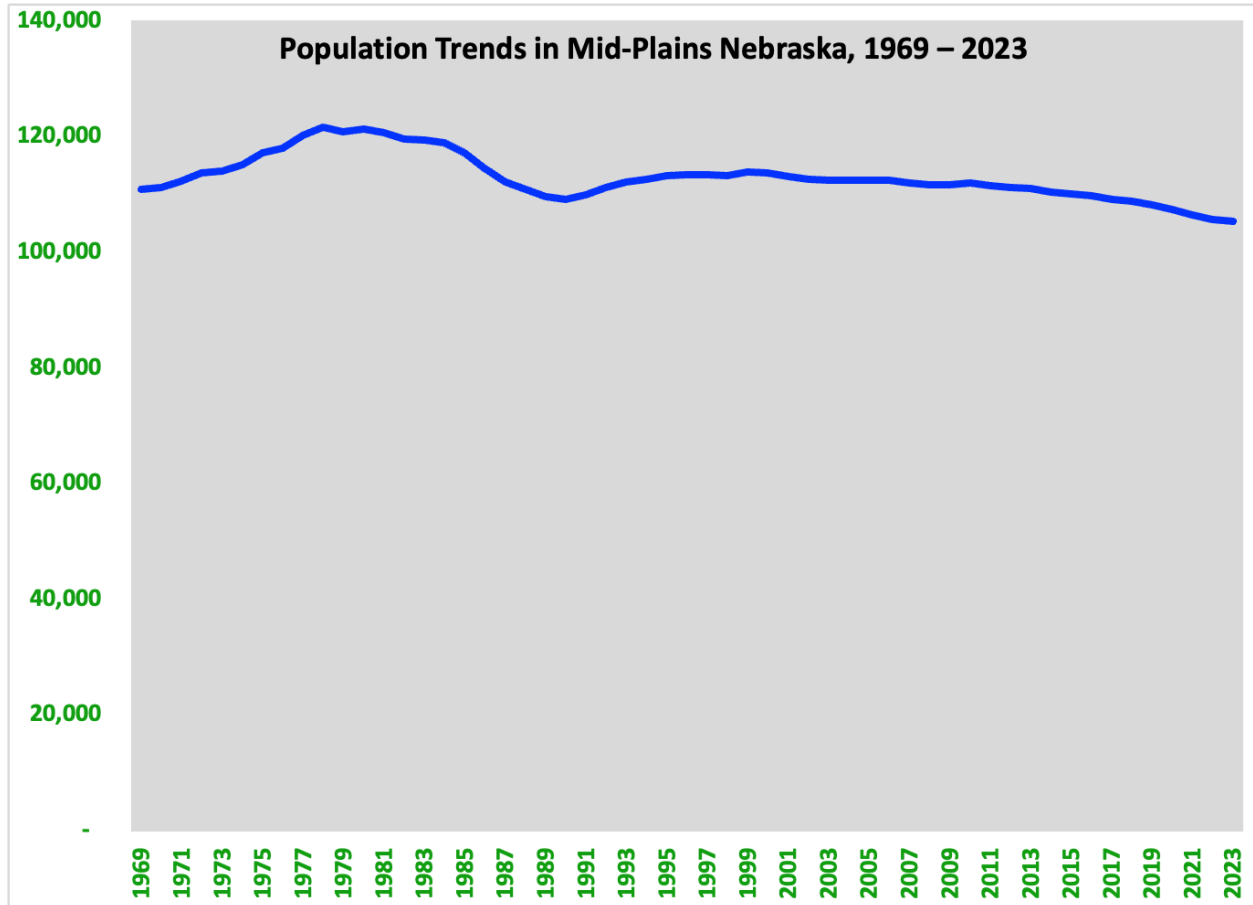


Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index.

Population of the Mid-Plains region decreased 5% since 1969, as shown on Chart 3. The region's population peaked in 1978, and the current level is 13% below that peak. This makes the rise in

personal income all the more striking. Although this is an important farming region, there has been limited public planning to assure that residents have a secure and resilient food supply.

Chart 3: Population Trends in Mid-Plains Nebraska, 1969 – 2023



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023.

Issues Affecting Low-Income Residents of the Mid-Plains Nebraska region

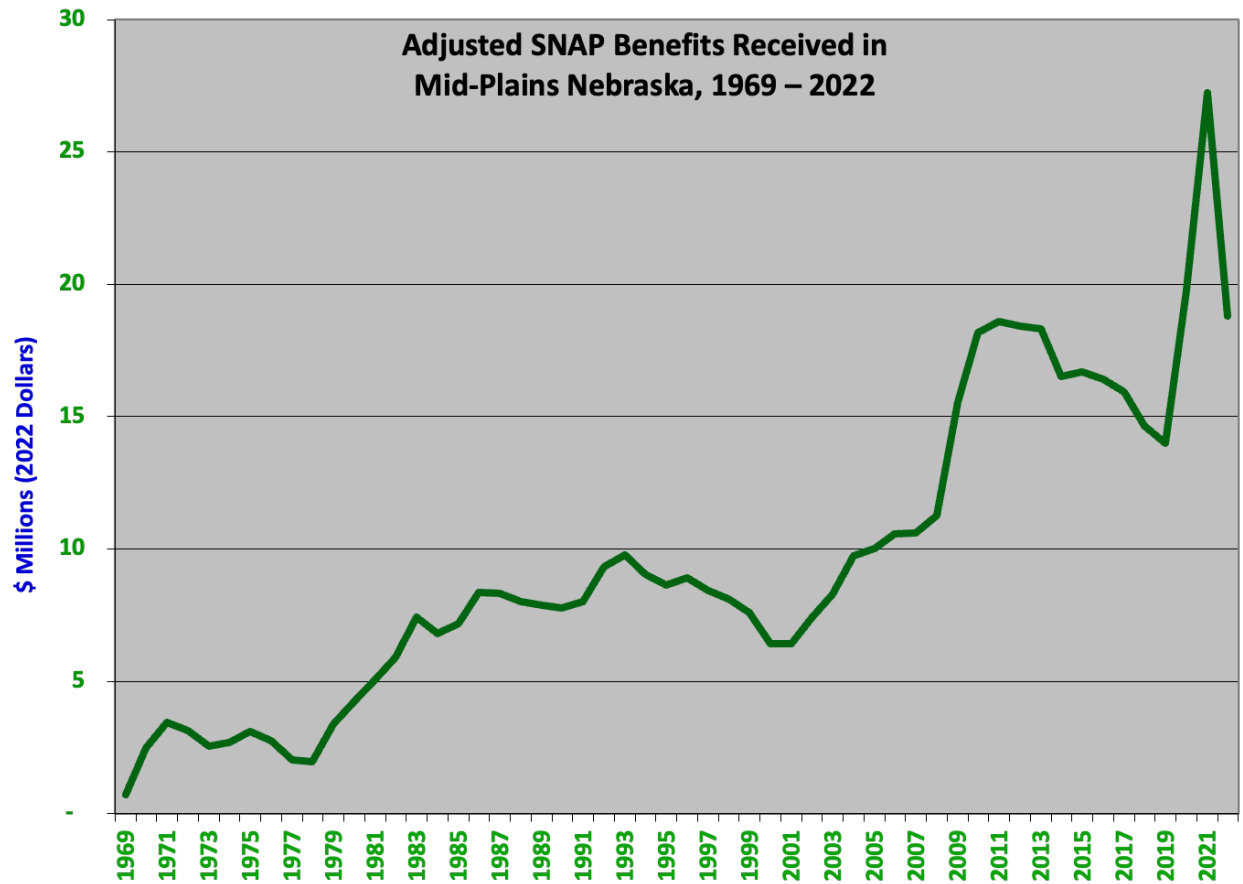
Despite rising income for the region as a whole, nearly 30,000 residents (29%) earn less than 185% of federal poverty guidelines. At this level of income, children qualify for free or reduced-price lunch at school under federal programs. This is higher poverty rate than for Metro Omaha (21%) or Metro Lincoln (25%) but slightly lower than the Panhandle (30%). Sources: *Federal Census of 2019-2023*; *USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022*.

4% percent of the region's households (about 4,300 residents) earn less than \$10,000 per year. Source: *Federal Census of 2019-2023*.

About 13,500 residents (13%) collected \$19 million in SNAP benefits in 2022, down from a pandemic peak of \$27 million (See Chart 4). SNAP benefits averaged \$12 million for the years 1989–

2022. Additional relief is extended to low-wealth mothers through WIC coupons. *Data from Federal Census of 2019-2023, USDA Census of Agriculture, Bureau of Labor Statistics, & Bureau of Economic Analysis. Note that BEA stopped reporting SNAP receipts by county in September, 2024, so 2022 figures are the most recent data available.*

Chart 4: Adjusted SNAP Benefits Received in Mid-Plains Nebraska, 1969 – 2022



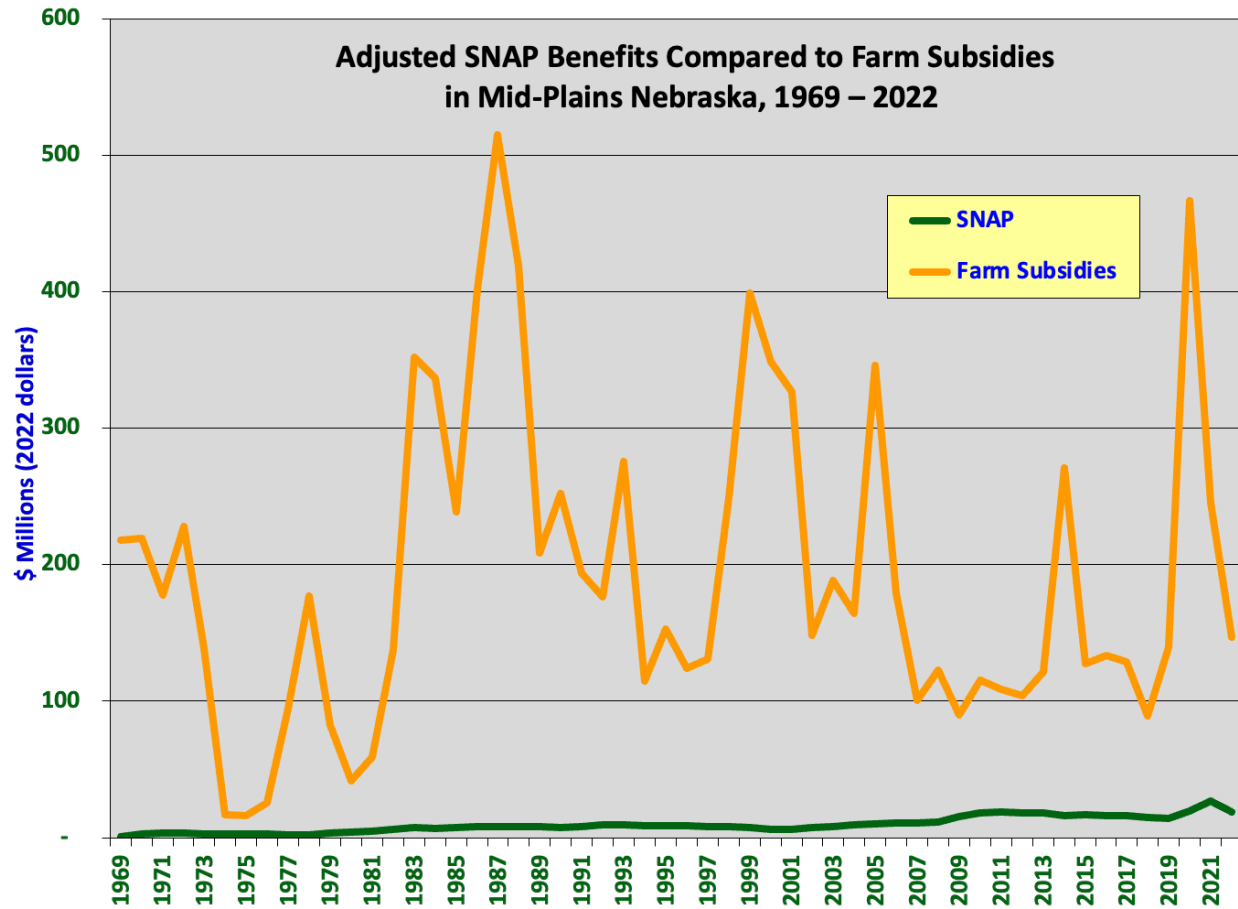
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index. SNAP data for 2023 are not available because BEA no longer publishes these reports.

The rise in SNAP receipts since 2001 has been quite sharp. This raises the question of why a farming region is experiencing such a rise in demand for food relief.

In light of concerns that have been expressed about SNAP benefits, it is useful to compare these benefits to federal subsidies for farmers. 3,324 (57%) Mid-Plains Nebraska farmers received a combined total of \$117 million in subsidies in 2022, mostly to raise crops such as corn or soybeans that are sold as commodities, not to feed local residents. This was 28% of the subsidies that Nebraska farmers received; a higher proportion than the region's percentage of farms (16%). *Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

Bureau of Economic Analysis data covering farm income are no longer reported by the agency, since their publication was discontinued in September, 2024. The most recent data available show that Mid-Plains Nebraska farmers received \$147 million in subsidies in 2022. *Note that this is more than the total reported by the USDA NASS Census of Agriculture.* Average federal subsidies to Mid-Plains Nebraska farmers were \$182 million per year during the years 1989–2022. This is 16 times the amount allocated for SNAP benefits. This comparison is shown on Chart 5.

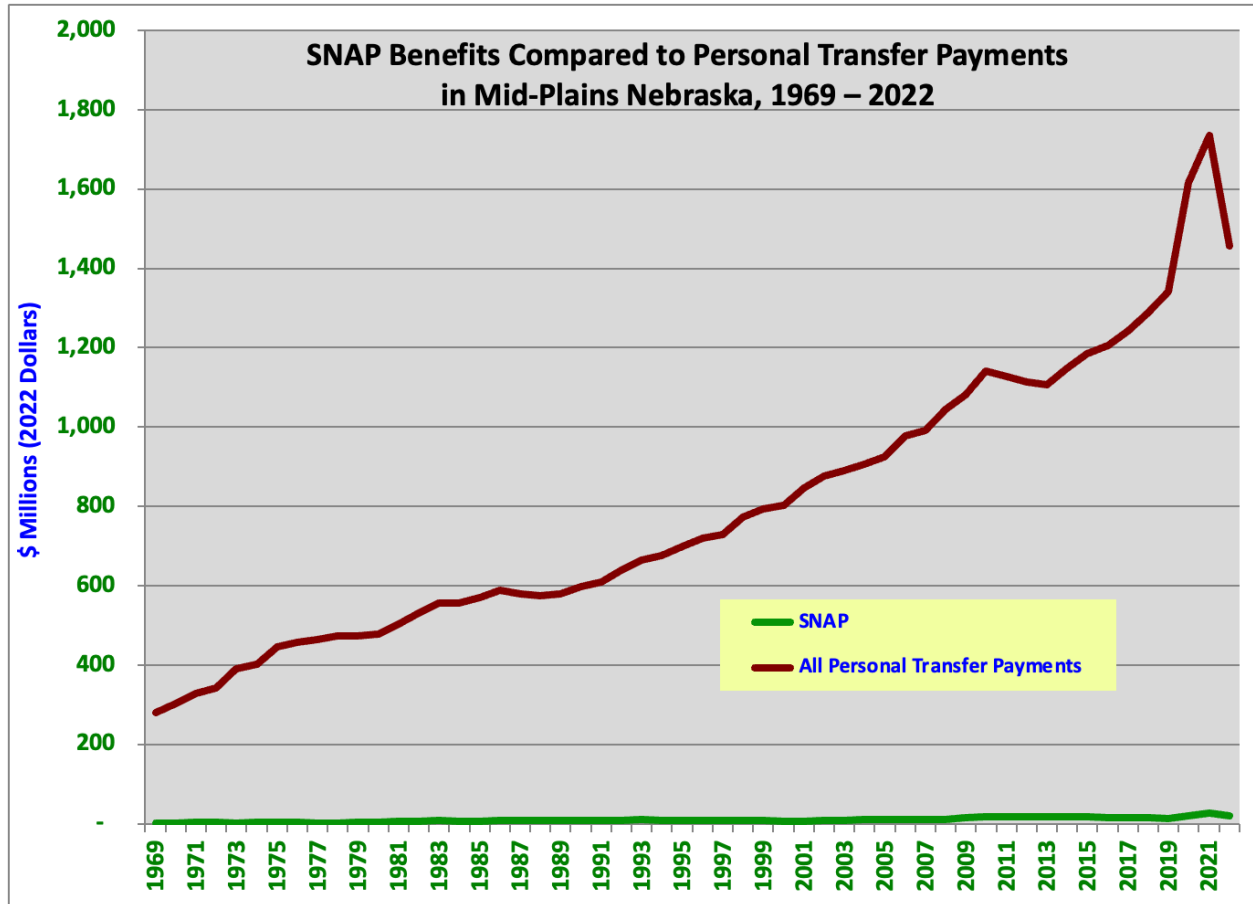
Chart 5: Adjusted SNAP Benefits Compared to Farm Subsidies in Mid-Plains Nebraska, 1969 – 2022



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index. Farm income and SNAP data for 2023 are not available because BEA no longer publishes these data.

It is also useful to compare SNAP benefits to the total of transfer payments received by Mid-Plains Nebraska residents, as Chart 6 shows. SNAP benefits are included in the total transfer payments depicted on the chart, but are a small amount (1.3%) of transfer payment receipts of \$1.5 billion.

Chart 6: Adjusted SNAP Benefits Compared to Personal Transfer Payments in Mid-Plains Nebraska, 1969 – 2022



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index. Transfer payment data for 2023 are not available because BEA no longer publishes these reports.

Although poverty is not the only factor, a considerable proportion of Nebraska residents are at risk because they lack health insurance. No data were reported by CDC covering the Mid-Plains region counties, so we rely upon statewide data to assess this. Statewide, 11% of adults aged 18–64 carried no health insurance in 2023. Source: Centers for Disease Control. Note that publication of these data was suppressed by the current President in February, 2025.

Food-Related Health Conditions

No specific counts for Mid-Plains Nebraska counties were reported for the following data in this section, so statewide data are provided here. *Note that publication of these data was suppressed by the current President in February, 2025.*

57% of Nebraska residents reported in 2021 that they eat five or more servings of fruit each day. 43% do not. Vegetable consumption was more prevalent, with 79% of Nebraskans reporting that they eat at least one vegetable per day. 21% do not. These are key indicators of health, since proper fruit and vegetable consumption has been connected to better health outcomes. *Source: Centers for Disease Control. Counts for 2021 are the most recent data available.*

28% of Nebraska adults reported in 2023 that they have at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity five or more days per week, or vigorous physical activity for 20 or more minutes for three or more days per week. 72% do not. *Source: Centers for Disease Control.*

10.8% of Nebraska residents have been diagnosed with diabetes as of 2023. *Source: Centers for Disease Control.* Medical costs for treating diabetes and related conditions in Nebraska were estimated at \$1.38 billion per year in 2017, and national costs have increased 26% since then. The most recent data show that direct and indirect medical costs of diabetes total \$412.9 billion per year nationally. To show the significance of this cost, it amounts to 76% of the total value of all crops and livestock sold by U.S. farmers in 2022. *Source: American Diabetes Association. Also Parker et al (2024). Economic Costs of Diabetes in the U.S. in 2022; Diabetes Care 2024; 47:26–43; <https://doi.org/10.2337/dci23-0085>.*

72% of Nebraska residents were overweight (35%) or obese (37%) in 2023. *Source: Centers for Disease Control.*

Mid-Plains Nebraska's Farms

Data in this section are drawn from the USDA NASS Census of Agriculture unless otherwise noted. Data for 2022 were released in February, 2024. The Census of Agriculture defines a “farm” as “an operation that produces, or would normally produce and sell, \$1,000 or more of agricultural products per year.”

Farm Characteristics

- 5,849 farms. This is 13% of Nebraska farms.
- Mid-Plains Nebraska has 13,111,533 acres of farmland, 30% of Nebraska's total.
- Average size is 2,242 acres, 227% of the state average.
- Estimated market value of an average farm was \$4,335,733 in 2022. This is 128% of the Nebraska average.
- 1,009 (17%) Mid-Plains Nebraska farms are less than 50 acres in size. *See Table 1.*
- 2,222 (38%) of the region's farms are 1,000 acres or more. *See Table 1.*

Farm Product Sales

- Mid-Plains Nebraska farms sold \$4.6 billion of crops and livestock in 2022, 16% of Nebraska's total.
- Of these sales, \$1.8 billion (39%) were crop sales, and \$2.8 billion (61%) were livestock. These amounted to 13% and 18% of the state total, respectively.
- 1,757 Mid-Plains Nebraska farms sold less than \$10,000 of products in 2022. This was 30% of the region's farms. *See Table 2.*
- 2,784 of the region's farms sold more than \$100,000, 48% of the region's farms. *See Table 2.*
- 1,316 (22%) of the region's farms sold more than \$500,000 of farm products. These farms sold \$4.2 billion of products, totaling 90% of the region's sales.
- 3,324 (57%) of the region's farmers received a combined total of \$117 million in subsidies in 2022.
- 41% of Mid-Plains Nebraska farms reported a net loss to the Census of Agriculture in 2022. This is higher than the statewide rate of 38%.

Small & Mid-Size Farmers

Definitions of “small and mid-size” farmers vary according to the type of farming. Here is a breakdown of Northeast Nebraska farms by size and sales levels.

Table 1: Farms by Size

Farm Size	Farms	Pct of Region
1–9 Acres	323	5.5%
10–49 Acres	686	11.7%
50–179 Acres	902	15.4%
180–499 Acres	938	16.0%
500–999 Acres	778	13.3%
1,000 Acres or More	2,222	38.0%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Table 2: Farms by Sales Range

Sales Range	Farms	Pct of Region
Less than \$2,500	1,198	20.5%
\$2,500–\$4,999	267	4.6%
\$5,000–\$9,999	292	5.0%
\$10,000–\$24,999	407	7.0%
\$25,000–\$49,999	383	6.5%
\$50,000–\$99,999	518	8.9%
\$100,000 or More	2,784	47.6%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Production Expenses

The region's farmers spent \$4.0 billion to produce crops and livestock in 2022. Detailed expenses are listed below in Table 3:

Table 3: Farm Production Expenses

	\$ Millions
Livestock Purchased	1,159.7
Feed Purchased	744.4
Fertilizers & Conditioners	318.6
Cash Rents	272.3
Depreciation	262.4
Seeds	186.2
Chemicals	174.7
Maintenance & Repairs	172.3
Hired Farm Labor	148.8
Other Expenses	130.5
Fuels & Oils	129.2
Property Taxes	111.6
Utilities	97.9
Interest Expense	80.3
Custom Work	55.7
Medical Supplies	49.4
Equipment Rental	31.9
Contract Labor	15.6

Note that this list does not add up to the total value of farm expenses listed above. This total is about \$180 million more. Depreciation is not included in USDA's total. Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Major Crops and Livestock

As Table 4 shows, Mid-Plains Nebraska crop farmers primarily grow corn, forage, and soybeans.

Table 4: Top Crops Produced on Mid-Plains Nebraska Farms, 2022

	Farms	Acres
Corn for Grain	1,836	1,301,880
Forage	2,049	635,979
Soybeans	988	387,263
Wheat	880	286,010
Sorghum for Grain	228	53,484
Dry Edible Beans	72	16,990

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Cattle and Hogs were the principal livestock raised, as Table 5 shows.

Table 5: Major Livestock Inventories and Number Sold

Livestock	Farms	Inventory	Animals Sold
Cattle & Calves	2,930	1,595,470	1,700,438
Hogs & Pigs	69	209,350	413,363
Laying Hens	304	6,276	N / A
Sheep & Lambs	100	3,450	N / A
Broiler Chickens	8	N / A	410

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

The same crops and livestock, of course, account for most farm product sales, as Table 6 and Chart 7 show.

Table 6: Mid-Plains Nebraska's Top Farm Products in 2022

*Note: Considerable data have been suppressed for several of the counties in Mid-Plains region, as USDA attempts to protect the confidentiality of individual farms. This means that totals cannot be comprehensively reported for the Mid-Plains Nebraska region. The data in the table and pie chart below represent **minimum** values.*

See also Chart 7 on next page.

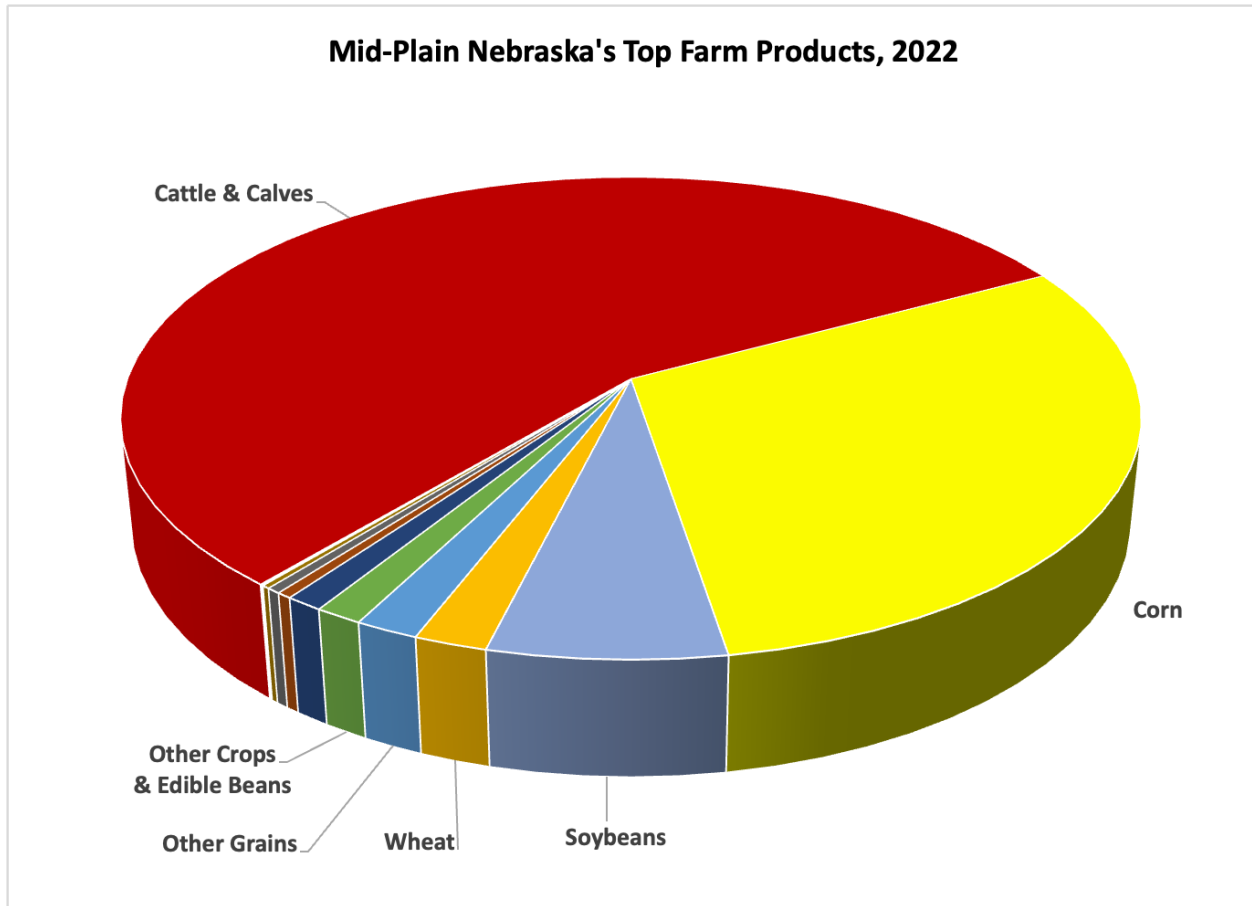
	Farms	\$ Millions
Cattle & Calves	2,944	2,275.06
Corn	1,888	1,227.14
Soybeans	988	263.56
Wheat	880	81.37
Other Grains & Edible Beans	242	70.85
Other Crops & Hay	1,003	53.27
Hogs & Pigs	112	42.19
Vegetables & Potatoes	58	16.78
Sorghum	251	15.72
Other Livestock	65	8.75
Horses & Ponies	290	2.18
Sheep & Goats	142	1.29
Fruits, Nuts, & Berries	39	0.30
Poultry & Eggs	163	0.16
Nursery & Greenhouse	26	0.03

Note that at \$4.2 million, direct sales from farmers to household consumers, retail stores, institutions and food hubs as well as value-added products amount to more than the value of the 11th-ranking product, Horses & Ponies. *See details below.* Of course, many of these direct sales are also included in the totals listed above (for example, meat, vegetable, and fruit sales). Organic product sales, at \$21 million, surpassed the sorghum crop in value.

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Chart 7: Mid-Plains Nebraska's Top Farm Products in 2022

Data from Table 6 on previous page. Note that this data set is incomplete due to data suppression.



Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Foods Raised More Directly for Household Consumption

Direct Sales

Table 7: Direct Sales to Households & Institutions

	Farms 2022	Sales \$ 2022	Farms 2017	Sales \$ 2017
Direct to Households	127	1,632,000	108	312,000
Direct to Retail & Institutions	36	1,480,000	10	0
Value-Added Products	72	1,266,000	31	6 ,000

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022. Note once again that due to data suppression of sales data in 15 of the 19 counties, comprehensive findings cannot be reported. Reporting was most complete in Chase, Cherry, Dawson, Lincoln, & Perkins Counties. The numbers in the table above and narrative below are **minimum** values. Because data are so incomplete, reliable sales trends from 2017 cannot be calculated.*

127 (2%) of Mid-Plains Nebraska farms sold at least \$1.6 million of farm products directly to household consumers in 2022. At least 19 more farmers were involved, for growth of 18%.
36 (0.6%) farms sold at least \$1.4 million of products directly to retailers, institutions, and food hubs. At least 26 more farmers were involved, for growth of 260%.

72 (1.2 %) farms sold at least \$1.2 million of value-added products in 2022. At least 41 more farmers were involved, for growth of 132%.

Vegetables, Potatoes, & Orchards

The Mid-Plains region has at least 2,592 acres devoted to vegetable production, 2,554 acres to potatoes, and 136 acres of orchards, as shown in Table 8:

Table 8: Vegetables, Potatoes, & Orchards on Mid-Plains Nebraska Farms

Crop	Farms	Acres
Vegetables	56	2,592
Potatoes	31	2,554
Orchards	37	136

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Note: *Once again, data covering vegetable and fruit production was suppressed for 11 of the 19 counties. Most of the vegetable production shown in Table 8 was in Chase County. Orchard acreage was mostly reported for Dawson, Dundy, Keith, & Lincoln Counties. Actual totals could be considerably higher than what is shown here.*

Organic Food Sales

Although sales data were suppressed by USDA for 5 counties, at minimum 58 Mid-Plains Nebraska farms reported selling at least \$21 million of organic products. Sales were strongest in Dawson, Keith, & Lincoln Counties.

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Operator Characteristics

Race & Ethnicity

Mid-Plains Nebraska's farm operators are predominantly White, as Table 9 shows. Note that Hispanic (or Latino) identity is an ethnicity, not a race.

Table 9: Farm Operators by Race & Ethnicity

Producers by Race	Number	Percent
American Indian or Alaska Native	26	0.23%
Asian	7	0.06%
Black or African-American	2	0.02%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0	0.00%
White	11,127	99.41%
More than One Race	31	0.28%
Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity	117	1.05%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Female Producers

Female producers are very important to Mid-Plains Nebraska's farm community. 3,461 Farms (59%) have female producers. These women manage, or co-manage, 50% of the region's farm acreage.

Table 10: Female Producers

Farms	Female Producers	Acreage
3,461	4,021	6,510,048

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Young Producers

Mid-Plains Nebraska has 1,206 young producers. This is 13% of the young producers in the state. USDA defines “young producers” as those who are 34 years old or younger.

Table 11: Young Producers

Young Producers	Percent of Nebraska
1,206	13%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Active Military or Veteran Producers

Mid-Plains Nebraska hosts 719 veteran or active military farmers.

Table 12: Active Military or Veteran Producers

Military/Veterans	Percent of Nebraska
719	12%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Ownership

Most (89%) Mid-Plains Nebraska farms, and 79% of farm acres, are owned by families or family corporations.

Table 13: Farm Ownership

Type of Ownership	Farms	Acres
Family or Individual	4,449	6,463,277
Partnership	484	1,865,968
Corporation (Family)	766	2,798,974
Corporation (Other)	58	367,910
Estate, Trust, Prison, Association, or Native Reservation, etc.	92	175,750

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Conservation Practices

As Table 14 shows, Mid-Plains Nebraska Farms were more likely to rely upon Bureau of Reclamation Irrigation water than farmers in the rest of the state, with 16% of the region’s farms

drawing upon this irrigation source. Fewer farms practiced special cropping techniques, with the exception of rotational grazing, which fell considerably above the region's share of Nebraska's farms (13%).

Table 14: Farms Adopting Conservation Practices in Mid-Plains Nebraska, 2022

	Farms	Pct of Nebraska
Used Bureau of Reclamation Irrigation	155	16%
Practiced Alley Cropping, Silvopasturing, or Riparian Buffers	32	9%
Harvested Biomass for Renewable Energy	25	11%
Practiced Rotational Grazing or Intensive Management	1,003	18%
Had On-farm Packing Facility	4	5%

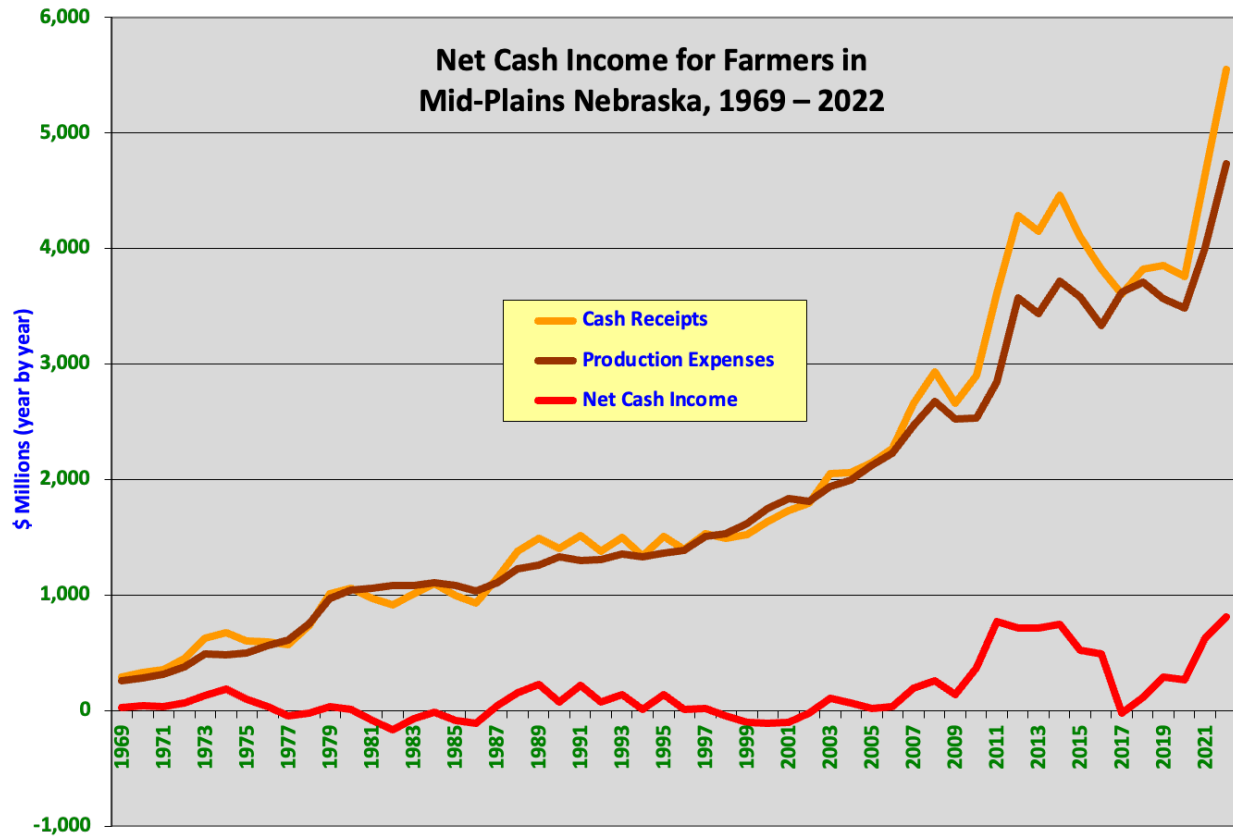
Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Income in Mid-Plains Nebraska

Net Cash Income

The following section considers the Net Cash Income received by Mid-Plains Nebraska farmers. Net Cash Income is a measure of the returns farmers earn from the act of producing crops and livestock. It is calculated by subtracting Production Expenses (maroon line on the following charts) from Cash Receipts (orange line). This is a different measure than “Net Income,” which typically includes other sources of income such as federal subsidies and cash rental income. In our experience this is a more nuanced measure of the state of the regional food and farm economy. Net Cash Income is shown below with a red line.

Chart 8: Net Cash Income For Farmers in Mid-Plains Nebraska, 1969 – 2022



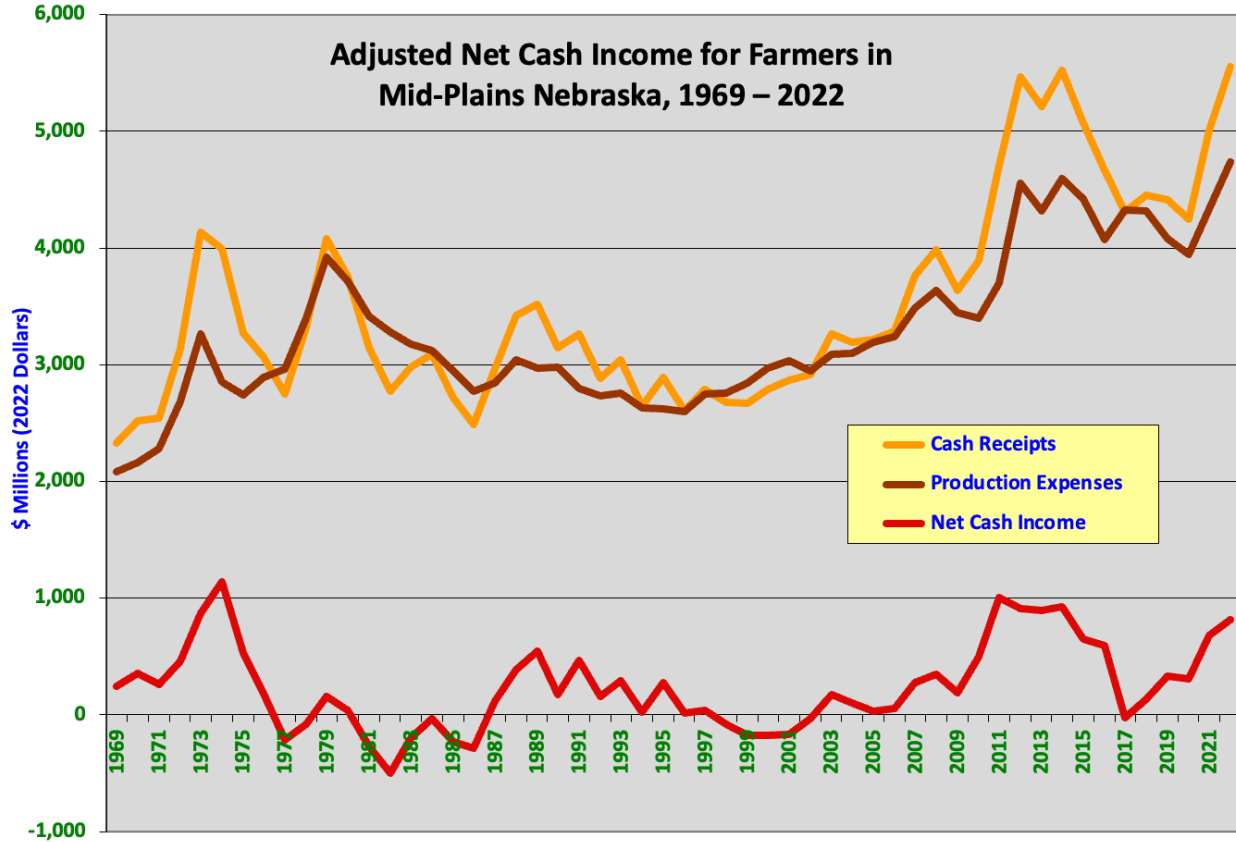
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Note that these data are no longer reported by BEA; 2023 data are not available.

Chart 8 shows that Mid-Plains Nebraska farmers have increased sales over the past 54 years, from \$292 million in 1969 to \$5.5 billion in 2022. That is a 19-fold increase, and signifies tremendous growth in revenue. *Note that BEA no longer reports farm income data, so no 2023 data are available. Note also, that these data differ slightly from those reported by USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, shown above.*

Unfortunately, the chart also shows that production expenses have risen in concert with cash receipts. From 1969 to 2010, then, the net cash income earned by farmers held fairly steady at low levels. In 13 (31%) of those 42 years, net cash income fell below zero for the entire Mid-Plains Nebraska farm sector. Something dramatic happened in 2011 to increase margins, but these data do not tell us what that change was. Moreover, even after that peak, net cash income fell below zero again in 2017. It then rose to a surplus of \$816 million in 2022. Thus, profitability for the farm sector is uncertain. It would be difficult to conclude that merely increasing sales means increased margins.

However, it is also important to take inflation into account when examining these results. Chart 9 does just that, taking the very same data set and adjusting for the rise in the cost of living by expressing all values in 2022 dollars. Once this adjustment has been made, very different patterns emerge.

Chart 9: Adjusted Net Cash Income For Farmers in Mid-Plains Nebraska, 1969 – 2022



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index. Note that these data are no longer reported by BEA; 2023 data are not available.

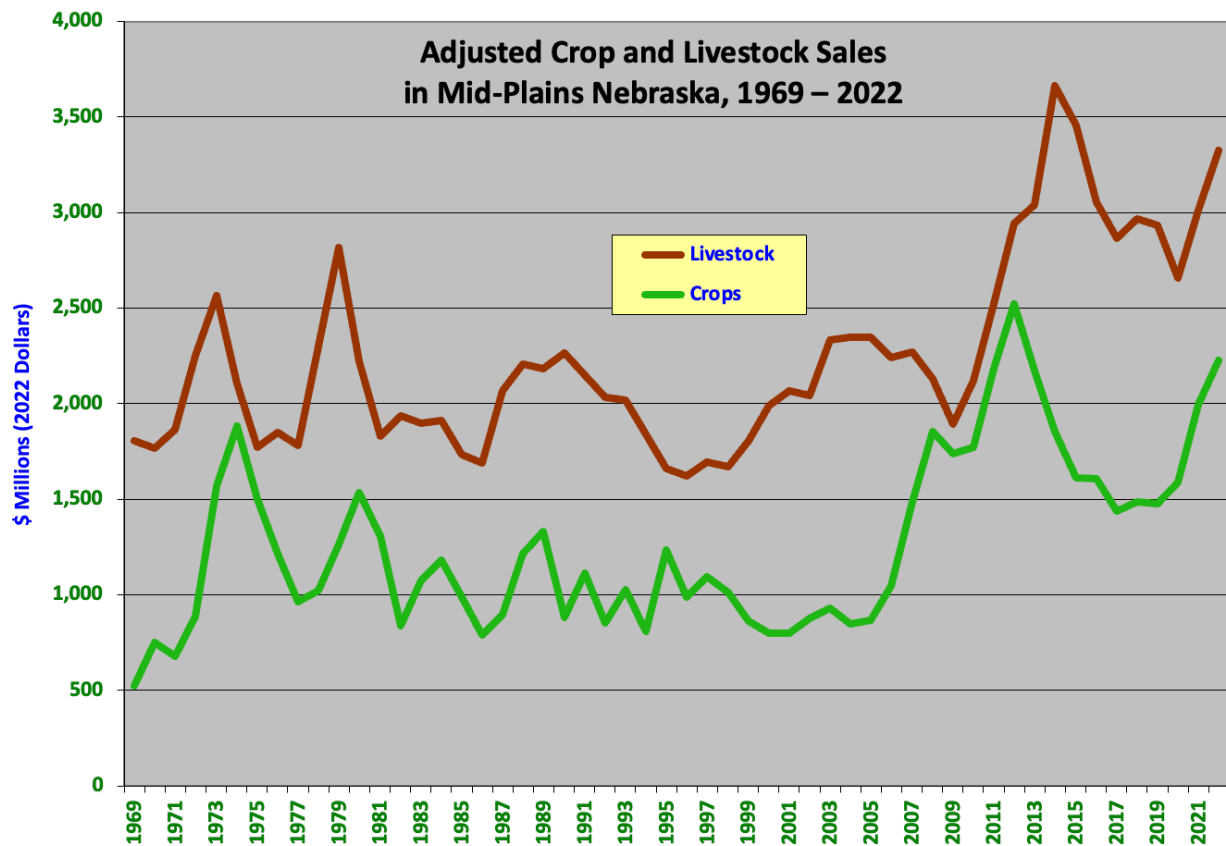
Once adjusted for inflation, the growth in sales is not nearly so dramatic, but is still robust. The value of cash receipts earned by the region's farmers rose 138% from \$2.3 billion to \$5.5 billion in 2022 dollars. Net cash income held fairly steady across this 54-year period, falling below zero for 14 years. Peak income of \$1.1 billion was realized in 1974, during the OPEC energy crisis, when US farmers enjoyed high prices for a couple of years. These years of peak prosperity, however, are always short-lived. Net cash income for 2022, as high as it was, turned out to be 72% of the overall peak. Middling margins were the norm.

To assess the strength of the farm sector, it is useful to calculate returns since 1989, after the upheavals of the Farm Credit Crisis of the 1980s had settled down. Over those 34 years, Mid-Plains Nebraska farmers averaged a net cash income of \$300 million, despite suffering an overall loss in 2017. On average, the region's farmers sold \$3.7 billion of products, spending \$3.4 billion to raise them. This resulted in an aggregate surplus of \$10 billion over those 34 years; a significant contribution to the regional economy.

However, with the terms of trade for the agricultural sector being so uncertain, this leaves open the question of how much more money farmers might have been made if prices were more rewarding and if farmers raised more of their own inputs.

The next chart, Chart 10, offers a glimpse into what prompted the more prosperous year in 2011. This shows that there was a boom in sales for both crops and livestock sold by Mid-Plains Nebraska farmers. Crop sales were fairly level from 1969 to 2007, but increased rapidly, presumably because of speculative investments during the global housing crisis. It would seem that with rising feed (grain) costs, livestock producers were forced to raise prices, and buyers were willing to buy. The sector's losses in 2017 appear to have been led by declines in crop sales, although livestock sales fell as well. Now both crop and livestock sales appear to be elevated to a higher level, at least for a while. *This chart is also expressed in inflation-adjusted dollars.*

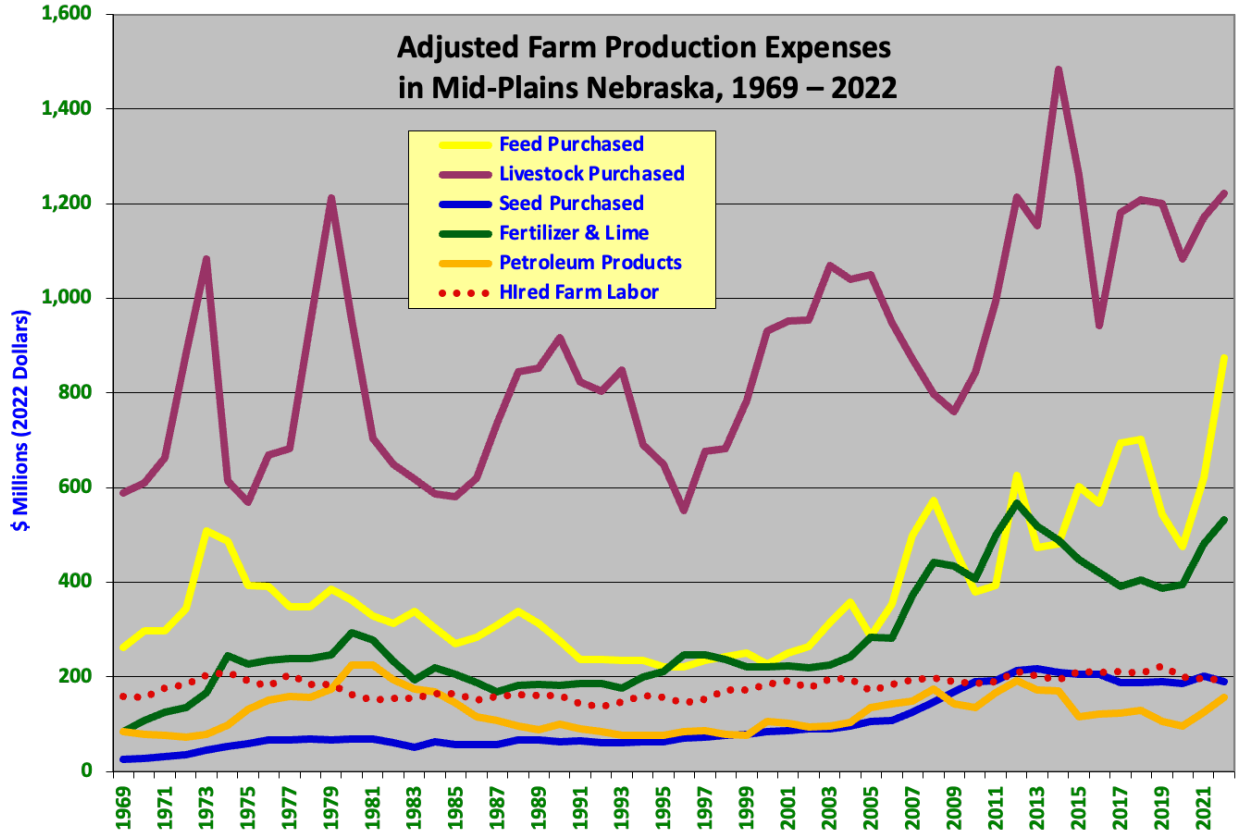
Chart 10: Adjusted Crop and Livestock Sales in Mid-Plains Nebraska, 1969 – 2022



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index. Note that these data are no longer reported by BEA; 2023 data are not available.

A still more complete picture emerges once we consider the costs of production. Rising production costs have been led by rising expenditures for livestock, feed, and fertilizers. Rising seed costs also play a lesser role. Farmers have effectively held labor costs quite steady, while reducing fuel and oil use. *Once again, these have been adjusted for inflation.*

Chart 11: Adjusted Farm Production Expenses in Mid-Plains Nebraska, 1969 – 2022



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index. Note that these data are no longer reported by BEA; 2023 data are not available.

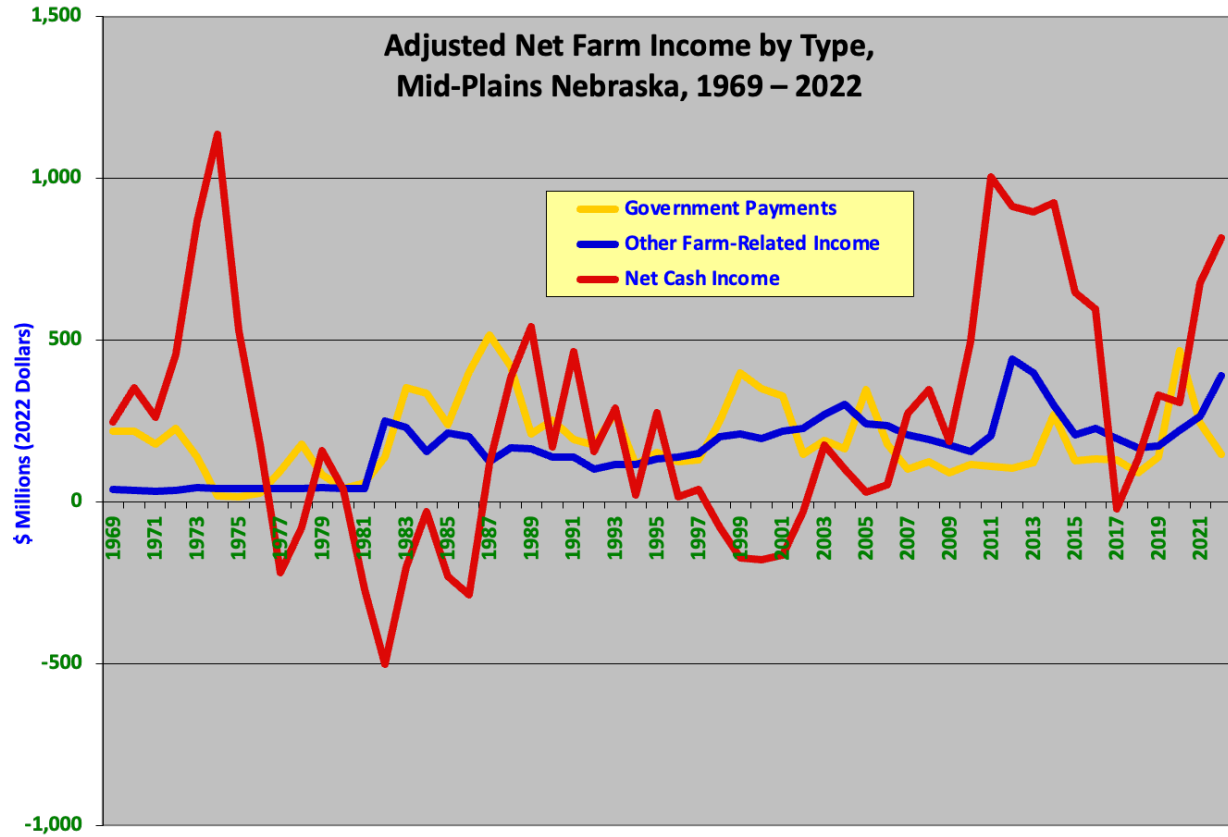
From the perspective of farm laborers, however, steady labor costs means that labor is largely not benefitting from the increased sales farmers have enjoyed. From the perspective of the region as a whole, many of the rising costs are expenses for purchasing inputs sourced outside of the region, sending perhaps \$1 billion out of Mid-Plains Nebraska.

Finally, it is useful to consider all forms of net income enjoyed by Mid-Plains Nebraska farmers. These are shown on Chart 12. This chart shows that government payments are a relatively discrete source of income. Designed to be countercyclical payments, they are meant to fill gaps left by uncertain markets. Nonetheless they averaged \$190 million during the years 1989 to 2022, 63% of net cash income. However, the chart also shows that government payments surpassed net cash income in 14 of the past 34 years.

An even more important (and steadier) source of income is farm-related income, which largely is cash rents for renting farmland to a tenant farmer or performing custom field work. This has held at a fairly steady average of \$212 million per year, with a noticeable bump upward in 2012 when farmers enjoyed higher cash receipts. That suggests that when landowners saw that farmgate prices were high they charged their tenants higher rents. Cash rents are the most stable form of net

income, and also run at 70% of net cash income. For many landowners, it makes more sense to rent out land than to farm it, displacing the risks of farming onto someone else.

Chart 12: Adjusted Net Farm Income by Type, Mid-Plains Nebraska, 1969 – 2022



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index. Note that these data are no longer reported by BEA; 2023 data are not available.

Farm & Food Economy Summary

Missing Data

For two decades, Crossroads Resource Center has produced studies of local farm and food economies that centered around the comprehensive and potent data bases compiled by the Bureau of Economic Analysis to assist community planning efforts. Unfortunately, the agency announced in September, 2024, that it was terminating publication of two critical data sets. These missing data covered both farm income and transfer payments. They have been reported for each county and state in the U.S., and made available through an exceptionally user-friendly web platform. BEA cited budgetary constraints in its announcement that these data would no longer be published.

This removes a powerful way for Americans to learn about the realities of rural economies, most of which are both based on farm production, and heavily reliant upon transfer payments.

The agency still offers archived data for the time period 1969–2022. This is most recent available data. Future policy discussions will be hampered by the lack of updated tallies. Having access to detailed estimates of farm income and transfer payments can be very important to creating a civil discourse that is based upon solid data, rather than conjecture.

We have found BEA data to be more valuable than many other data sets that are available, for several reasons: (1) No other data sets drilled down to provide robust estimates for each county in the nation, making it easy to identify long-term trends that have evolved over more than 50 years. (2) Because data were collected to strengthen local economic development planning, they were more balanced than specific data sets reported by agencies that have more specialized interests centered upon their professional focus. (3) It was extremely easy to use.

Mid-Plains Nebraska Summary

5,849 Mid-Plains Nebraska farmers sell an average of \$3.7 billion of food commodities per year (1989–2022 average), spending \$3.4 billion to raise them, for an average gain of \$300 million each year. This is an average net cash income of \$51,000 per farm. *Note that these sales figures compiled by the BEA may differ from cash receipts recorded by the USDA Agriculture Census (above).*

Overall, farm producers earned a surplus of \$10 billion by selling crops and livestock over the years 1989–2022. Yet farm production costs exceeded cash receipts for 6 years of that 34-year period. Moreover, 41% of the region's farms reported net losses in 2022.

Farmers and ranchers earn another \$212 million per year of farm-related income — primarily custom field work, and land rental income (34-year average for 1989–2022). This is 70% of net cash income. Federal farm support payments are a complementary source of net income, averaging \$190 million per year for the region for the same years. This is 63% the value of net cash income.

Many of the farm inputs farmers purchased (for example, tractors, combines, fuel, chemicals, etc.) were sourced outside of the region. This created a significant cash flow (perhaps \$1 billion or more) away from the region. This is difficult to measure precisely.

The region's farmers spent nearly twice as much feeding livestock (\$744 million) than would be required to feed the entire Mid-Plains Nebraska population for a year (\$386 million). Indeed, there are 15 times as many cattle living in Mid-Plains Nebraska as people. Massive infrastructure has been constructed to ensure that these animals are fed, but similar infrastructure is lacking for conveying healthy food from local farms to Mid-Plains Nebraska residents.

Mid-Plains Nebraska Consumers

See also information covering low-income food consumption and food-related health conditions, page 1-2 above.

105,349 Mid-Plains Nebraska consumers spend \$386 million buying food each year, including \$243 million for home use. At least 90% of this food is produced outside the region, so consumers spend more than \$350 million per year buying food sourced outside Mid-Plains Nebraska. This is more than the net cash income that farmers earn. Only \$1.6 million of food products (0.04% of farm cash receipts and 0.42% of the region's consumer market) are sold by farmers directly to household consumers.

Farm and Food Economy Summary

Farmers earn \$300 million each year producing food commodities, while spending more than \$1 billion buying inputs sourced outside of the region. Even when farmers make money, these input purchases result in substantial losses to the region as a whole.

Meanwhile, consumers spend \$350 million buying food sourced outside the region. If each Mid-Plains Nebraska resident purchased (or had purchased for them) \$5 of food each week directly from some farm in the region, this would generate \$27 million of new farm income for the region. This would amount to a small increment to farm cash receipts, but would create social and economic connections between farmers and consumers.

Household Food Consumption

Household consumption estimates are compiled using Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey data.

Mid-Plains Nebraska

Table 15: Mid-Plains Nebraska Markets for Food Eaten at Home (2023)

105,349 Mid-Plains Nebraska residents purchase \$386 million of food each year, including \$243 million to eat at home. Home purchases break down in the following way:

	\$ Millions
Meats, Poultry, Fish, & Eggs	50
Fruits & Vegetables	45
Cereals & Bakery Products	31
Dairy Products	23
“Other,” incl. Sweets, Fats, & Oils	94

If Mid-Plains Nebraska residents purchased (or had purchased for them) \$5 of food for home use directly from farmers in the region, this would generate \$27 million of new farm income for Mid-Plains Nebraska.

Although the prevailing food system infrastructure is far more efficient at routing food to metro areas than to Mid-Plains Nebraska residents, the market for food in the region is 30% of the Metro Lincoln market, as Table 16 shows.

Lincoln Metro

Table 16: Lincoln Metro Markets for Food Eaten at Home (2023)

350,179 Lincoln Metro residents purchase \$1.3 billion of food each year, including \$808 million to eat at home. Home purchases break down in the following way:

	\$ Millions
Meats, Poultry, Fish, & Eggs	167
Fruits & Vegetables	151
Cereals and Bakery Products	102
Dairy Products	76
“Other,” incl. Sweets, Fats, & Oils	312

If Metro Lincoln residents purchased (or had purchased for them) \$5 of food for home use directly from farmers in the region, this would generate \$91 million of new income for the region’s farms.

State of Nebraska

Table 17: State of Nebraska Markets for Food Eaten at Home (2023)

1,978,379 Nebraska residents purchase \$7.2 billion of food each year, including \$4.6 billion to eat at home. Home purchases break down in the following way:

	\$ Millions
Meats, Poultry, Fish, & Eggs	942
Fruits & Vegetables	854
Cereals and Bakery Products	577
Dairy Products	429
“Other,” incl. Sweets, Fats, & Oils	1,760

If Nebraska residents purchased (or had purchased for them) \$5 of food for home use directly from farmers in the region, this would generate \$514 million of new farm income for the state.

Key Data Sources

Bureau of Economic Analysis data covering regional personal income

<http://apps.bea.gov/itable/?ReqID=70&step=1>

Food consumption estimates from Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Expenditure Survey

<http://www.bls.gov/cex/home.htm>

USDA NASS Census of Agriculture

<http://www.nass.usda.gov/census/>

USDA/Economic Research Service food consumption data:

<http://ers.usda.gov/Data/>

USDA/ Economic Research Service farm income data:

<http://ers.usda.gov/Data/>

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey. https://www.cdc.gov/brfss/data_tools.htm

For more information:

To see results from *Finding Food in Farm Country* studies in other regions of the U.S.:

<http://www.crcworks.org/?submit=fffc>

To read the original *Finding Food in Farm Country* study from Southeast Minnesota (written for the Experiment in Rural Cooperation in 2001): <http://www.crcworks.org/ff.pdf>

A more detailed summary is available for the State of Nebraska: “Nebraska Farm & Food Economy Data Compilation” by Ken Meter for Center for Rural Affairs (June, 2024).

<http://www.crcworks.org/nebfood24.pdf>

For further information:

Contact Ken Meter at Crossroads Resource Center

kmeter@crcworks.org

(612) 869-8664

All CRC studies are posted at <http://www.crcworks.org/>

USDA Heartland Regional Food Business Center, Center for Rural Affairs, & Crossroads Resource Center are equal opportunity providers. <https://heartlandfoodbusiness.org/usda-non-discrimination-statement/>