

## Crossroads Resource Center

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*Tools for Community Self-determination*

# Northeast 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 Antelope, Boone, Boyd, Brown, Burt, Butler, Cedar, Colfax, Cuming, Dakota, Dixon, Dodge, Holt, Keya  
Paba, Knox, Madison, Pierce, Platte, Polk, Rock, Stanton, Thurston, & Wayne Counties in Nebraska.  
(23 Counties)*

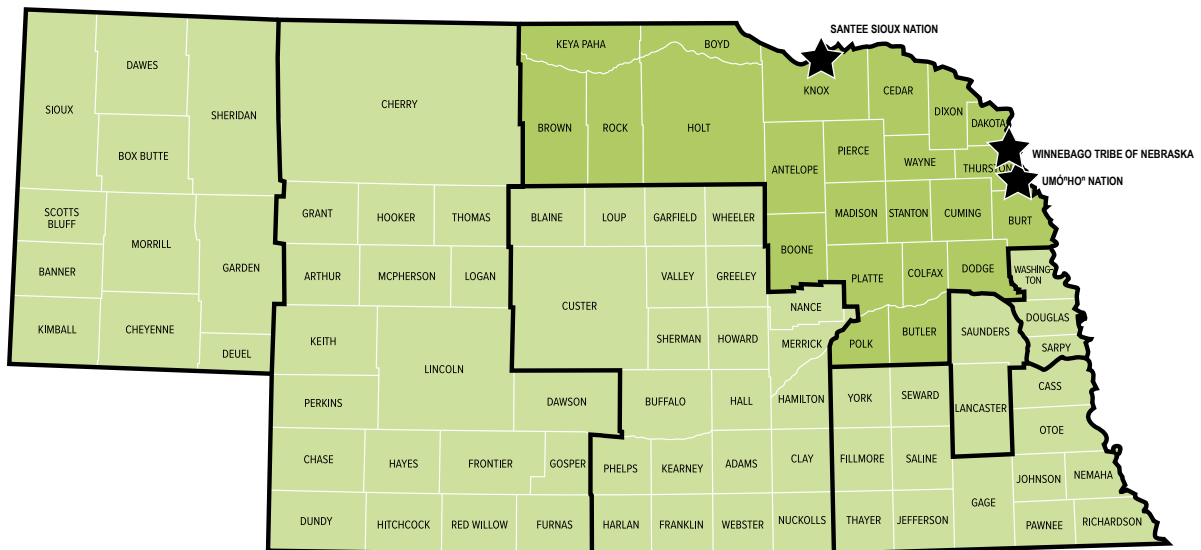


*Schuyler Community Garden. Photo by Kylie Kai, Center for Rural Affairs*

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## Northeast Nebraska



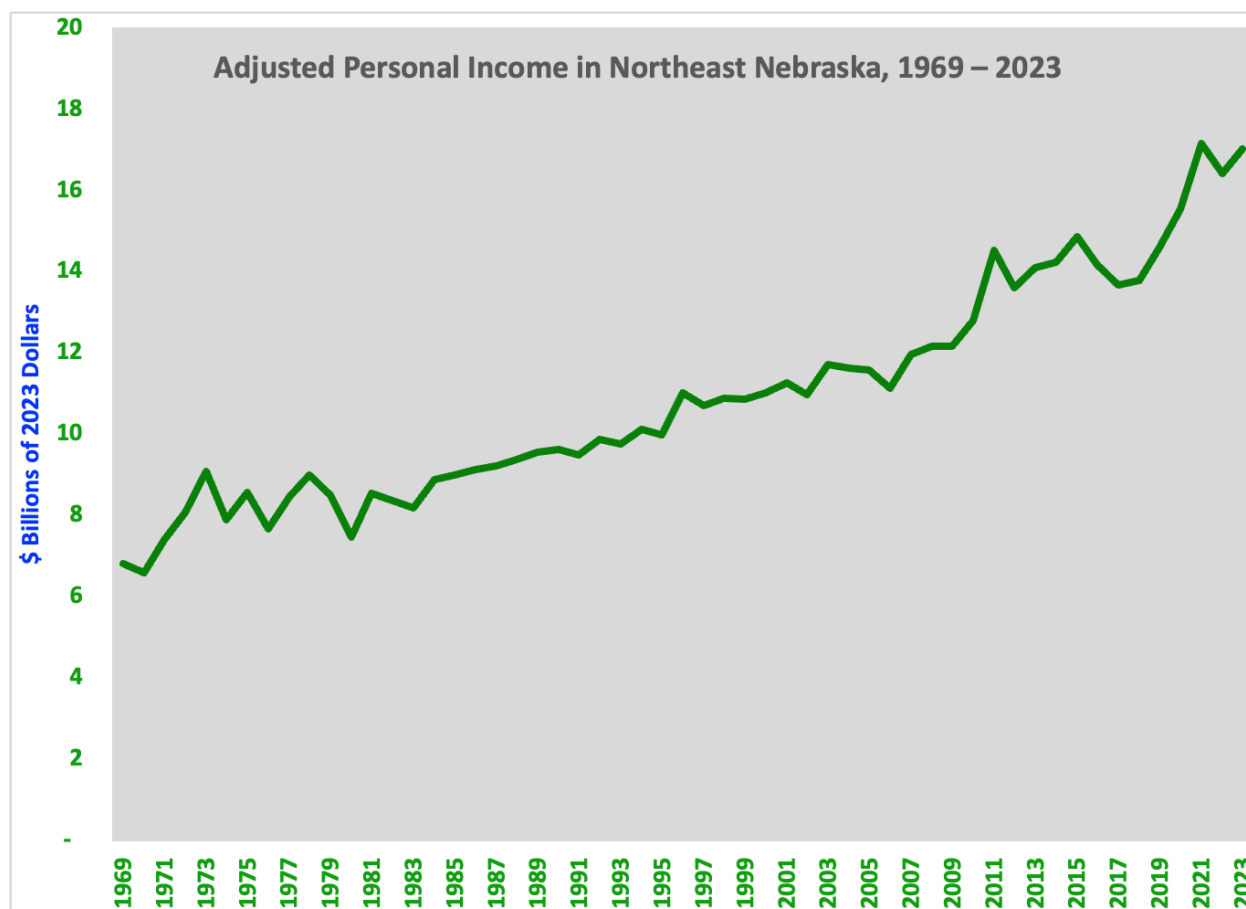
*Map by Kylie Kai, Center for Rural Affairs*

## Personal Income, Poverty, & Food Insecurity

### Personal Income in Northeast Nebraska

248,585 Northeast Nebraska residents received \$17 billion of income in 2023 (See Chart 1). This was an increase of 150% from \$6.8 billion 1969, with dollars adjusted for inflation.

**Chart 1: Adjusted Personal Income in Northeast 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 manufacturing jobs, which accounted for \$3.2 billion. (See Chart 2 below.) This is one of the few regions of Nebraska to have such a strong manufacturing sector. However, it should be kept in mind that manufacturing workers ranked third in income from 2011 through 2021. Ranking second in personal income in 2023 were personal transfer payments, after ranking first from 2013 until 2022. These transfer payments (from government programs such as pensions) totaled \$3.1 billion.

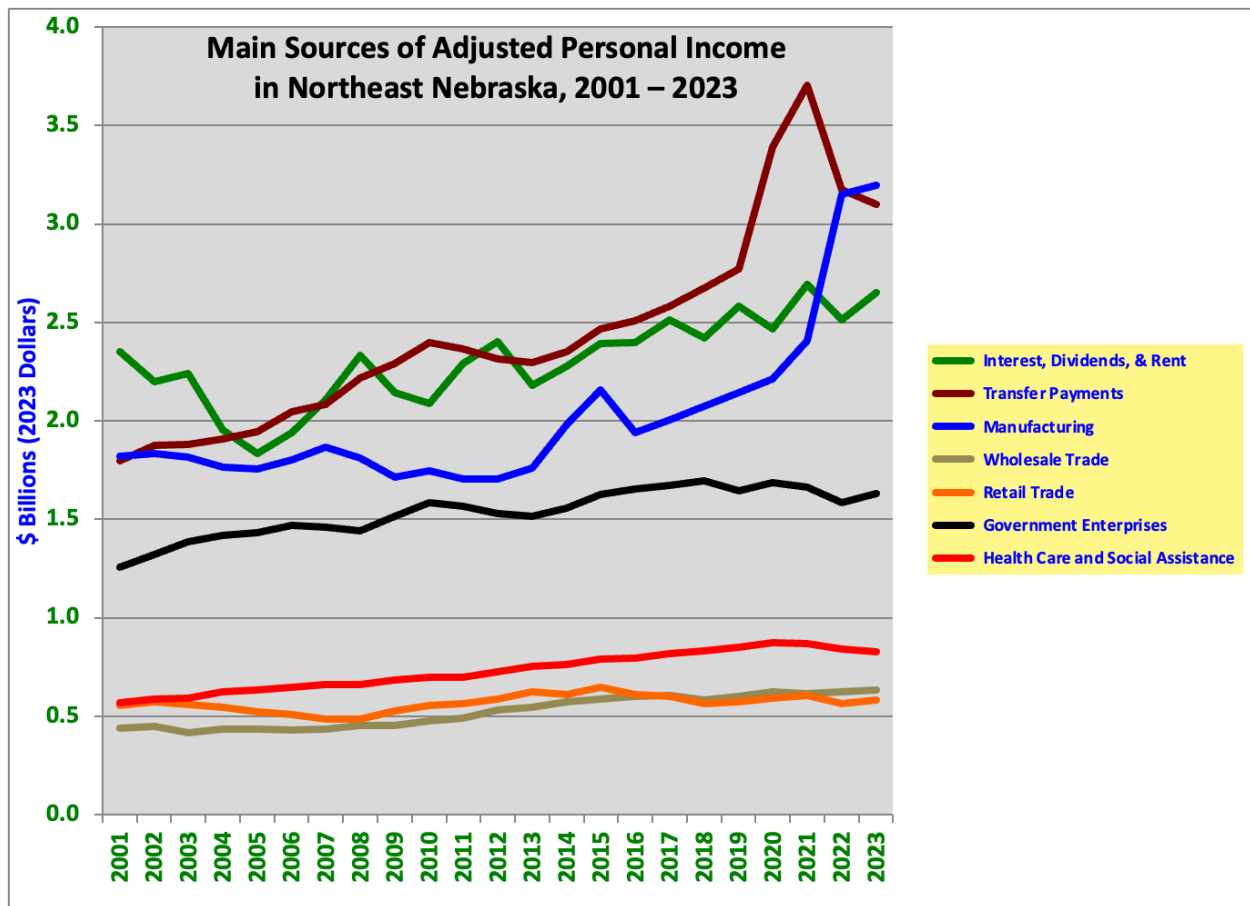
Capital income (from interest, rent, and dividends) ranked third at \$2.6 billion. Government workers (including educational workers) ranked fourth at \$1.6 billion. Health care workers earned another \$829 million. Wholesale and retail workers earned \$635 million and \$581 million, respectively.

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 decided in September, 2024 to stop publishing detailed estimates of transfer payment sources for counties and states, so more recent data are not available.

Government worker income includes \$108 million of income earned by federal workers and \$1.5 billion earned by state and local government workers. Military personnel earned \$36 million of personal income.

Note that income from public sources (government jobs and transfer payments) makes up 28% of all personal income in the region.

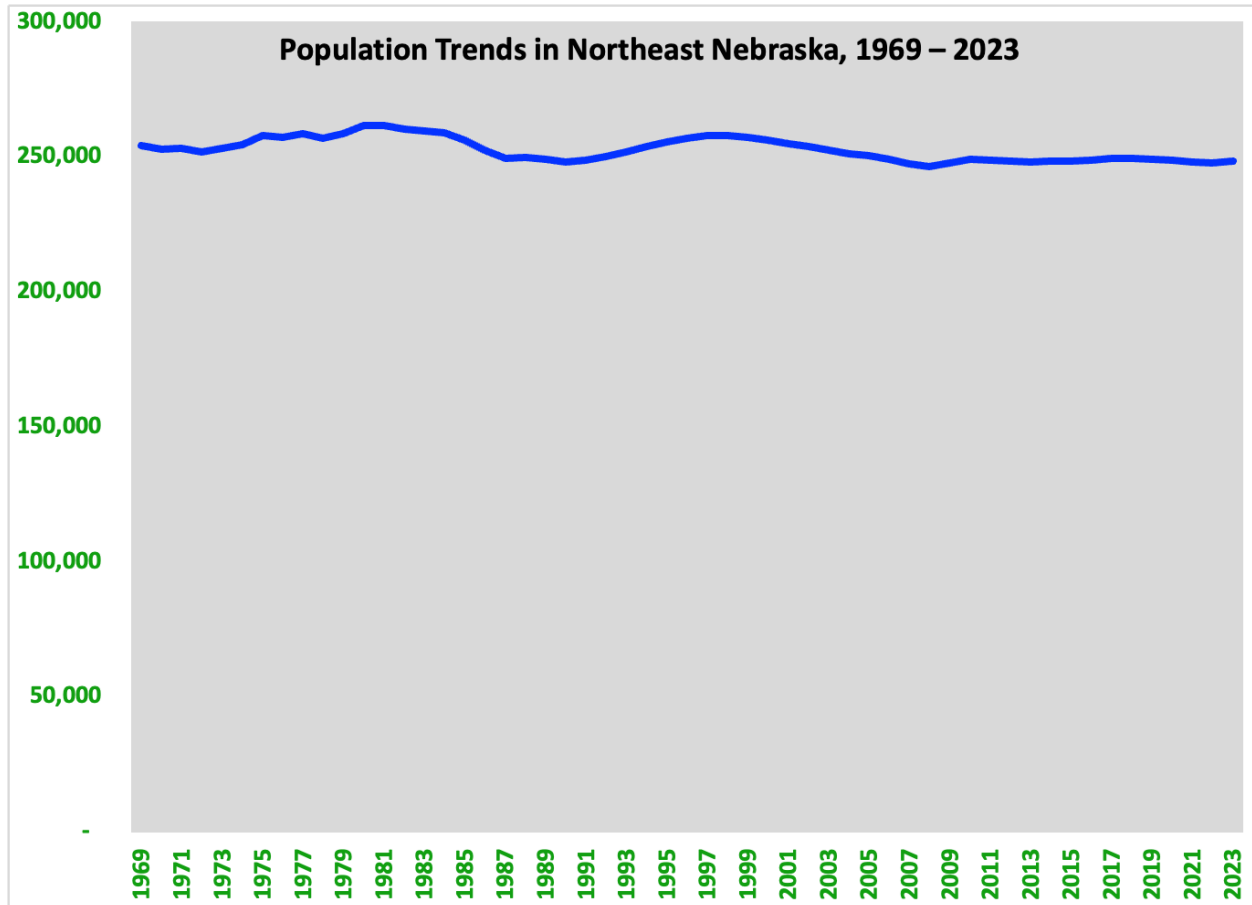
**Chart 2: Main Sources of Adjusted Personal Income in the Northeast Nebraska**



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

Population of Northeast Nebraska decreased 2% since 1969, as shown on Chart 3. Peak population was in 1980. This makes the rise in personal income all the more significant. 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 in Northeast Nebraska, 1969 – 2023**



*Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023.*

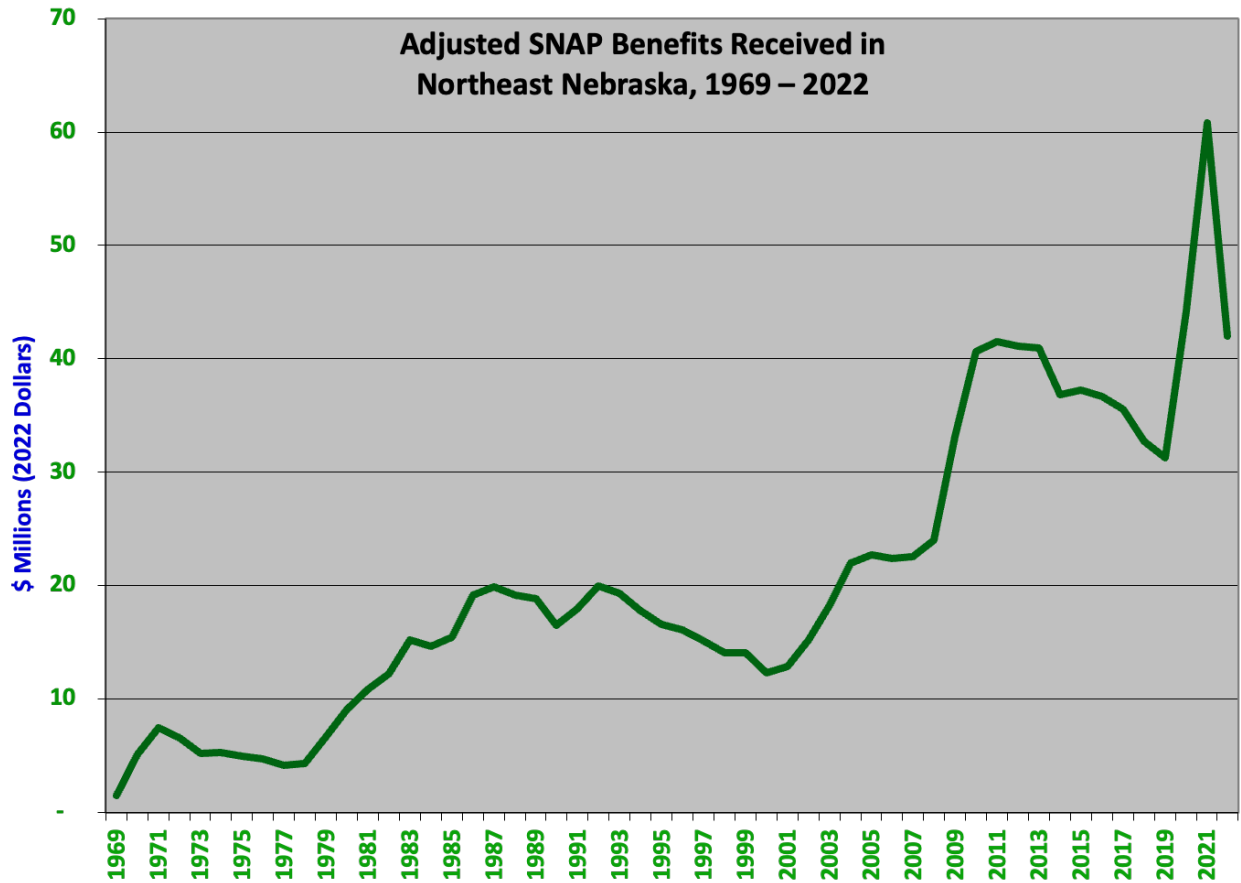
### Issues Affecting Low-Income Residents of the Northeast Nebraska region

Despite rising income for the region as a whole, nearly 61,000 residents (25%) 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%), and the same as Metro Lincoln (25%), but lower than the Mid-Plains (29%) or Panhandle (30%). *Sources: Federal Census of 2019–2023; USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

4% percent of the region’s households (about 9,400 residents) earn less than \$10,000 per year. *Source: Federal Census of 2019–2023.*

About 25,000 residents (10%) collected \$42 million in SNAP benefits in 2022, down from a pandemic peak of \$61 million (See Chart 4). SNAP benefits averaged \$27 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 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 Northeast 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.*

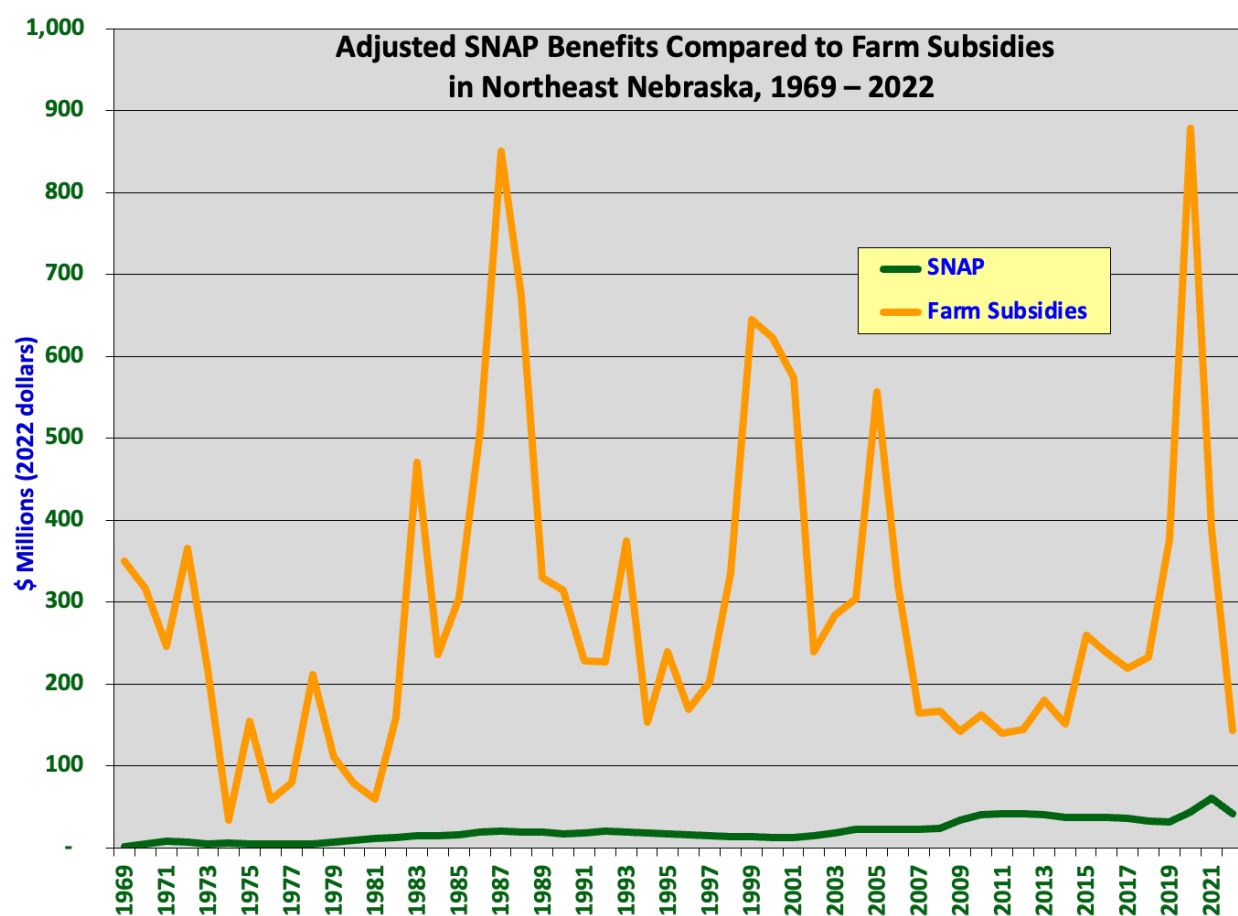
The rise in SNAP receipts since 2001 has been quite sharp. This raises the question of why a farming region is experiencing such a rise in demand for food relief.

In light of concerns that have been expressed about SNAP benefits, it is useful to compare these benefits to federal subsidies for farmers. 6,863 (53%) of Northeast Nebraska farmers received a combined total of \$134 million in subsidies in 2022, mostly to raise crops such as corn or soybeans that are sold as commodities, not to feed local residents. *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 6,863 Northeast Nebraska farmers received \$143 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 Northeast Nebraska farmers were \$297 million per year during the years 1989–2022. This is 11 times the amount allocated for SNAP benefits. This comparison is shown on Chart 5. Note that federal subsidies for farmers rose to \$879 million in 2020 slightly above the 1987 peak during the Farm Credit Crisis.

**Chart 5: Adjusted SNAP Benefits Compared to Farm Subsidies in Northeast Nebraska, 1969 – 2022**



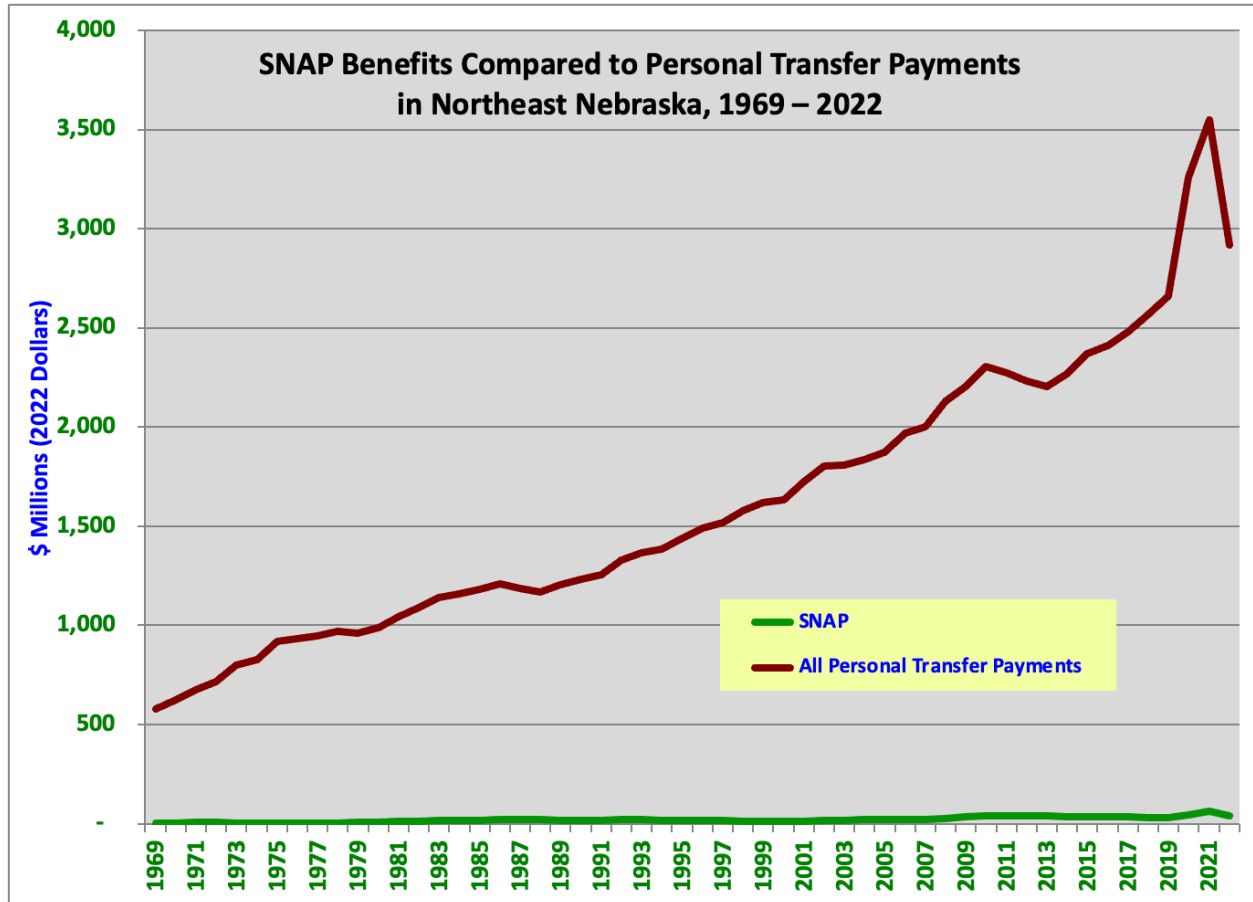
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index. Farm income and SNAP data for 2023 are not available because BEA no longer publishes these data.

It is also useful to compare SNAP benefits to the total of transfer payments received by Northeast Nebraska residents, as Chart 6 shows. SNAP benefits are included in the total transfer payments



depicted on the chart, but are a small amount (1.4%) of 2022 transfer payment receipts of \$2.9 billion.

**Chart 6: Adjusted SNAP Benefits Compared to Personal Transfer Payments in Northeast 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 counties in the Northeast Nebraska region, 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 Northeast 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.*

## Northeast 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

- 12,848 farms. This is 29% of Nebraska farms.
- Northeast Nebraska has 9,173,166 acres of farmland, 21% of Nebraska's total.
- Average size is 714 acres, 72% of the state average.
- Estimated market value of an average farm was \$3,571,766 in 2022. This is 105% of the Nebraska average.
- 2,875 (22%) Northeast Nebraska farms are less than 50 acres in size. *See Table 1.*
- 2,351 (18%) of the region's farms are 1,000 acres or more. *See Table 1.*

## Farm Product Sales

- Northeast Nebraska farms sold \$10.5 billion of crops and livestock in 2022, 36% of Nebraska's total. This far surpasses the region's importance in both acreage and number of farms.
- Of these sales, \$4.3 billion (41%) were crop sales, and \$6.2 billion (59%) were livestock. These amounted to 31% and 40% of the state total, respectively, both larger than the percentage of the state's farms in Northeast Nebraska (29%).
- 3,296 Northeast Nebraska farms sold less than \$10,000 of products in 2022. This was 26% of the region's farms. *See Table 2.*
- 6,542 (51%) of the region's farms sold more than \$100,000. *See Table 2.*
- 2,927 (24%) of the region's farms sold more than \$500,000 of farm products. These farms sold \$9.1 billion of products, totaling 90% of the region's sales.
- 6,863 (53%) of the region's farmers received a combined total of \$134 million in subsidies in 2022.
- 34% of Northeast Nebraska farms reported a net loss to the Census of Agriculture in 2022. This compares with the statewide average of 38%. Rates per county ranged from 7% to 44%.

## 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	852	6.6%
10–49 Acres	2,023	15.7%
50–179 Acres	2,940	22.9%
180–499 Acres	2,818	21.9%
500–999 Acres	1,864	14.5%
1,000 Acres or More	2,351	18.3%

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

**Table 2: Farms by Sales Range**

Sales Range	Farms	Pct of Region
Less than \$2,500	2,322	18.1%
\$2,500–\$4,999	440	3.4%
\$5,000–\$9,999	534	4.2%
\$10,000–\$24,999	887	6.9%
\$25,000–\$49,999	939	7.3%
\$50,000–\$99,999	1,184	9.2%
\$100,000 or More	6,542	50.9%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

### Farm Production Expenses

The region's farmers spent \$8.3 billion to produce crops and livestock in 2022. Detailed expenses are listed in Table 3.

**Table 3: Farm Production Expenses**

	\$ Millions
Livestock Purchased	2,390.2
Feed Purchased	1,849.7
Depreciation	627.8
Cash Rents	600.4
Fertilizers & Conditioners	591.9
Seeds	407.6
Maintenance & Repairs	361.7
Chemicals	336.5
Hired Farm Labor	308.0
Other Expenses	279.9
Fuels & Oils	265.1
Interest Expense	224.0
Property Taxes	200.4
Medical Supplies	137.5
Utilities	131.7
Custom Work	122.1
Equipment Rental	47.0
Contract Labor	32.7

*Note that this list does not add up to the total value of farm expenses listed above. This list totals about \$595 million more, largely because Depreciation costs are not included in USDA totals. Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

### Major Crops and Livestock

As Table 4 shows, Northeast Nebraska crop farmers primarily grow corn, soybeans, and forage.

**Table 4: Top Crops Produced on Northeast Nebraska Farms, 2022**

	Farms	Acres
Corn for Grain	6,590	2,545,180
Soybeans	5,788	1,952,233
Forage	4,707	678,121
Wheat	125	11,376
Sorghum for Grain	53	5,411
Oats	79	3,767

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

By far the largest livestock industry in Northeast Nebraska was broiler chickens, with 52 million sold by 86 operations, an average of more than 600,000 birds per operation. 7.3 million Hogs and Pigs, and 2.5 million Cattle and Calves, were also sold. This is shown in Table 5.

Note that substantial data were suppressed by USDA in an effort to protect the confidentiality of individual operations. For example, broiler sales data were suppressed for 12 of the 23 counties. Nonetheless, Northeast Nebraska represents 58% of the state's total of 90.8 million broilers sold. Strongest broiler sales were reported from Butler and Platte counties.

Sales data for Hog & Pigs sold were suppressed for 4 counties, but the sales total reported in Table 5 is still 50% of the Nebraska total. Largest counts of Hogs & Pigs sold came from Antelope, Cuming, Holt, and Platte Counties.

No sales data were suppressed for Cattle and Calf sales. Cuming County was the largest single county reporting. The regional total was 33% of Cattle & Calves sold in Nebraska.

**Table 5: Major Livestock Inventories and Number Sold**

	<b>Farms</b>	<b>Inventory</b>	<b>Number Sold</b>
Broiler Chickens	86	N / A	52,751,716
Hogs & Pigs	448	1,730,474	7,313,323
Cattle & Calves	5,101	1,989,694	2,481,596
Sheep & Lambs	248	15,287	N / A
Laying Hens	716	659,814	N / A

*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: Top Products Sold by Northeast Nebraska Farms, 2022**

*Note: Considerable data have been suppressed for several of the counties in the Northeast region, as USDA attempts to protect the confidentiality of individual farms. This means that totals cannot be comprehensively reported for the region. The data in the Table 6 and pie chart below represent **minimum** values.*

*Note that sales data were suppressed for 3 counties selling Cattle & Calves, 9 counties selling Hogs & Pigs, and 11 counties selling Poultry & Eggs. Nonetheless, reported sales accounted for 30%, 45%, and 48% of sales reported from Nebraska farms. It is also noteworthy that although the region's farms sold more than 52 million broilers, Poultry & Egg sales figures are relatively low compared to larger livestock.*

*See also Chart 7 on next page.*

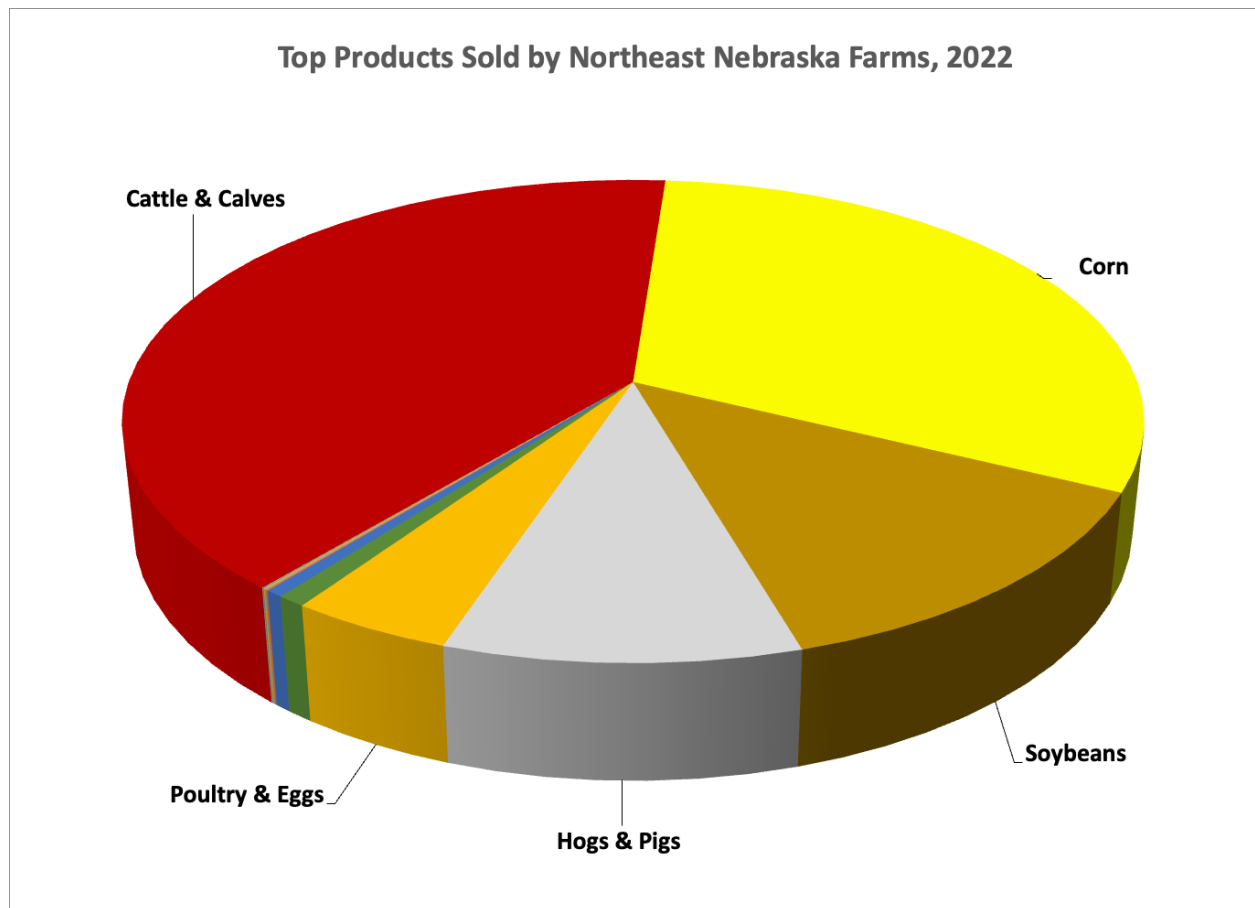
	<b>Farms</b>	<b>\$ Millions</b>
Cattle & Calves	4,855	3,515.8
Corn	6,367	2,721.3
Soybeans	5,488	1,160.0
Hogs & Pigs	509	852.1
Poultry & Eggs	434	390.9
Hay	2,549	69.6
Other Grains	235	43.6
Other Animals	136	5.9
Wheat	119	3.8
Sheep & Goats	349	3.0
Sorghum	72	2.2
Horses	200	1.7
Nursery & Greenhouse	55	1.6
Vegetables & Melons	92	0.2
Fruits, Nuts, & Berries	56	0.1

Note that at \$5.2 million, direct sales from farmers to household consumers, retail stores, institutions and food hubs, and value-added products amount to more than the value of the 9th-ranking product, Wheat. *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 \$22 million, could have ranked as the 8<sup>th</sup>-largest product if this were a single item.

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

### **Chart 7: Top Products Sold by Northeast Nebraska Farms, 2022**

*Data from Table 6 on previous page. Note that this data set is incomplete due to data suppression, as outlined above.*



*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	220	2,581,000	245	1,518,000
Direct to Retail & Institutions	74	782,000	47	711,000
Value-Added Products	73	2,040,000	51	1,491,000

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022. Note once again that due to data suppression in 10 counties, reliable sales trends since 2017 could not be reported. The numbers in Table 7 above and narrative below are **minimum** values.*

220 (1.8%) of Northeast Nebraska farms sold \$2.6 million of farm products directly to household consumers in 2022. This was 10% fewer farms than five years before.

74 (0.6%) farms sold \$782,000 of products directly to retailers, institutions, and food hubs.

73 (0.6%) farms sold \$2.0 million of value-added products in 2022.

### Vegetables, Potatoes, & Orchards

At least 93 acres of the region's farmland is devoted to vegetable production. Potatoes are planted on 5 acres. The region has at least 74 acres of orchards. *Note that due to data suppression, these are **minimum** figures.*

**Table 8: Vegetables, Potatoes, & Orchards on Northeast Nebraska Farms**

Crop	Farms	Acres
Vegetables	103	93
Potatoes	30	5
Orchards	48	74

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

**Note:** *Once again, it should be kept in mind that data from 12 rural counties in the Northeast region were suppressed to protect confidentiality. Most of the vegetable production shown in Table 8 came from Butler, Knox, & Madison Counties. Holt County hosted more than half of the orchard acreage, & Cedar County also had substantial orchard acreage. Actual totals could be considerably higher than what is shown here.*

### Organic Food Sales

Although sales data were suppressed by USDA for 4 counties, 71 Northeast Nebraska farms reported selling at least \$22 million of organic products. Sales were strongest in Butler, Knox, Pierce, and Thurston Counties.

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

## Farm Operator Characteristics

### Race & Ethnicity

Northeast 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	30	0.13%
Asian	5	0.02%
Black or African-American	-	0.00%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	3	0.01%
White	22,908	99.66%
More than One Race	40	0.17%
Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity	168	0.73%

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

### Female Producers

Female producers are very important to Northeast Nebraska's farm community. 6,457 farms (50%) have female producers. These women manage, or co-manage, 47% of the region's farm acreage.

**Table 10: Female Producers**

Farms	Female Producers	Acreage
6,457	7,165	4,326,465

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

## Young Producers

Northeast Nebraska has 2,860 young producers. This is 32% 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
2,860	32%

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

## Active Military or Veteran Producers

Northeast Nebraska hosts 1,568 veteran or active military farmers.

**Table 12: Active Military or Veteran Producers**

Military/Veterans	Percent of Nebraska
1,568	27%

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

## Farm Ownership

Most (92%) Northeast Nebraska farms and 84% of farm acreage are owned by families or family corporations.

**Table 13: Farm Ownership**

Type of Ownership	Farms	Acres
Family or Individual	10,760	5,312,730
Partnership	808	1,081,966
Corporation (Family)	1,003	1,149,293
Corporation (Other)	87	42,628
Estate, Trust, Prison, Association, or Native Reservation, etc.	190	70,044

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

## Conservation Practices

As Table 14 shows, Northeast Nebraska Farms were less likely to rely upon Bureau of Reclamation Irrigation water than farmers in the rest of the state. The proportion of farms practicing special cropping techniques was largely in line with the region's share of Nebraska farms. The region has one-fifth of the state's on-farm packing facilities.

**Table 14: Farms Adopting Conservation Practices in Northeast Nebraska, 2022**

	<b>Farms</b>	<b>Pct of Nebraska</b>
Used Bureau of Reclamation Irrigation	56	6%
Practiced Alley Cropping, Silvopasturing, or Riparian Buffers	109	30%
Harvested Biomass for Renewable Energy	65	28%
Practiced Rotational Grazing or Intensive Management	1,497	27%
Had On-farm Packing Facility	17	20%

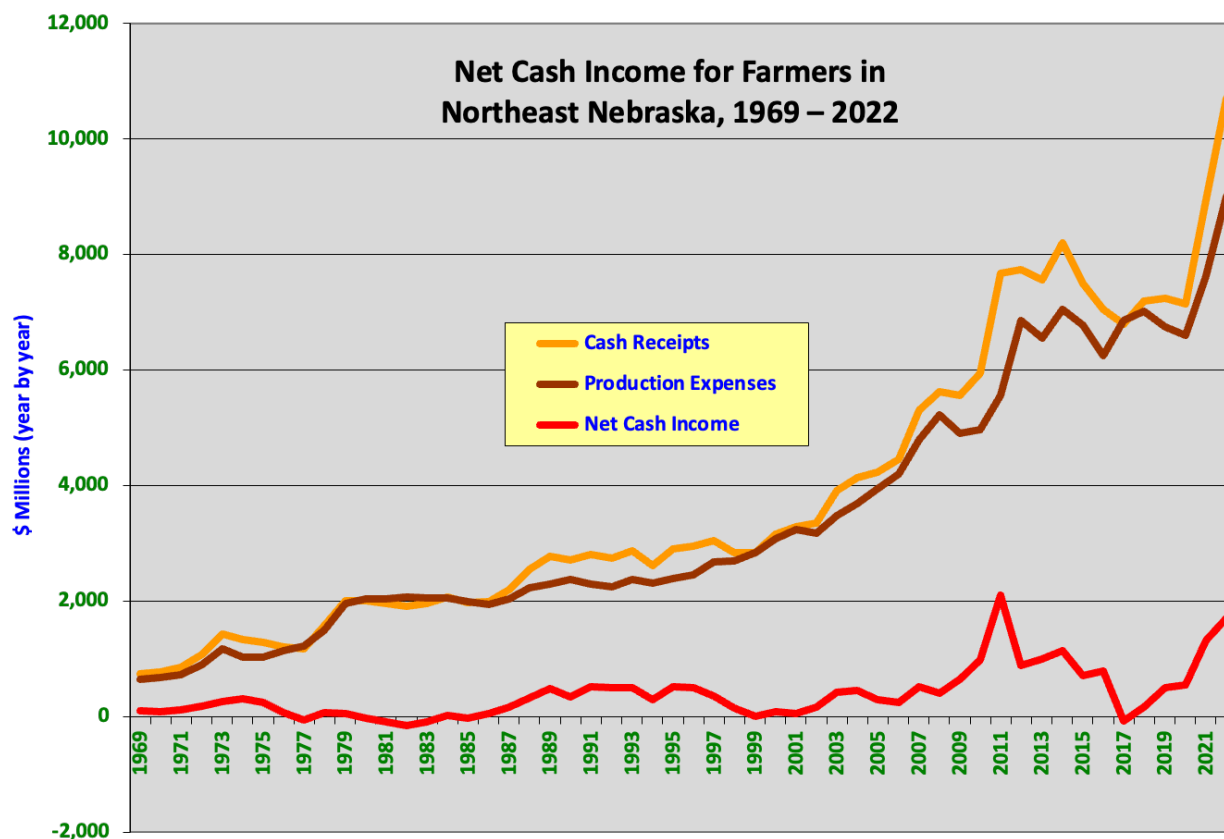
*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

## Farm Income in Northeast Nebraska

### Net Cash Income

The following section considers the Net Cash Income received by Northeast 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 Net Cash Income 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 Northeast Nebraska, 1969 – 2022**



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

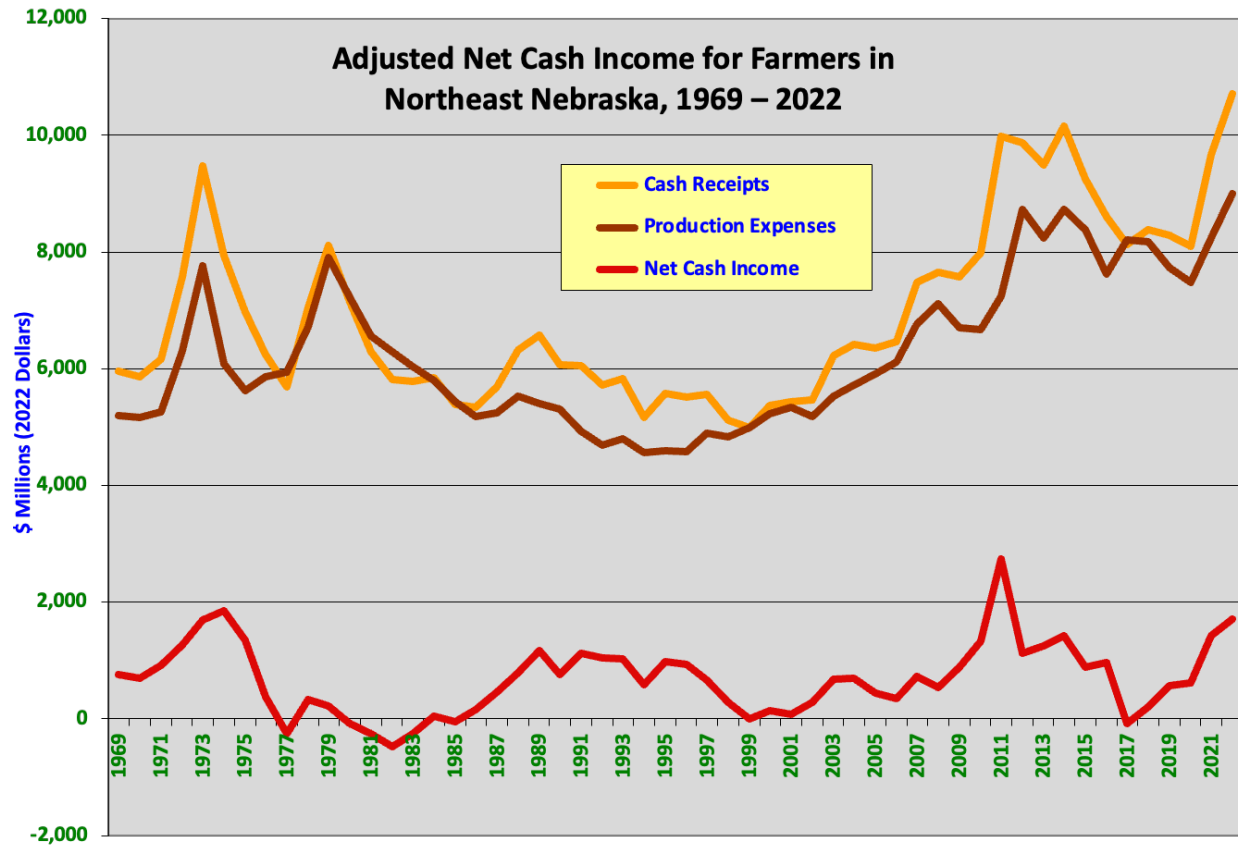
Chart 8 shows that Northeast Nebraska farmers have significantly increased sales over the past 54 years, from \$746 million in 1969 to \$10.7 billion in 2022. That is a 14-fold increase, and signifies tremendous gains in revenue. *Note that BEA no longer reports farm income data, so no 2023 data are 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 2008, then, the net cash income earned by farmers held fairly steady at low levels. In 7 of those 40 years, net cash income fell below zero for the entire Northeast Nebraska farm sector. Margins increased dramatically starting in 2009 as a result of the global housing finance crisis, in which investors drove up the price of commodities. Yet even after the 2011 peak over \$2 billion, net cash income fell below zero again in 2017. It rose again to a surplus of \$1.7 billion in 2022. This shows that 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 Northeast 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 80% from \$6 billion to \$10.7 billion in 2022 dollars. However, sales, dipped to low levels in the 1990s.

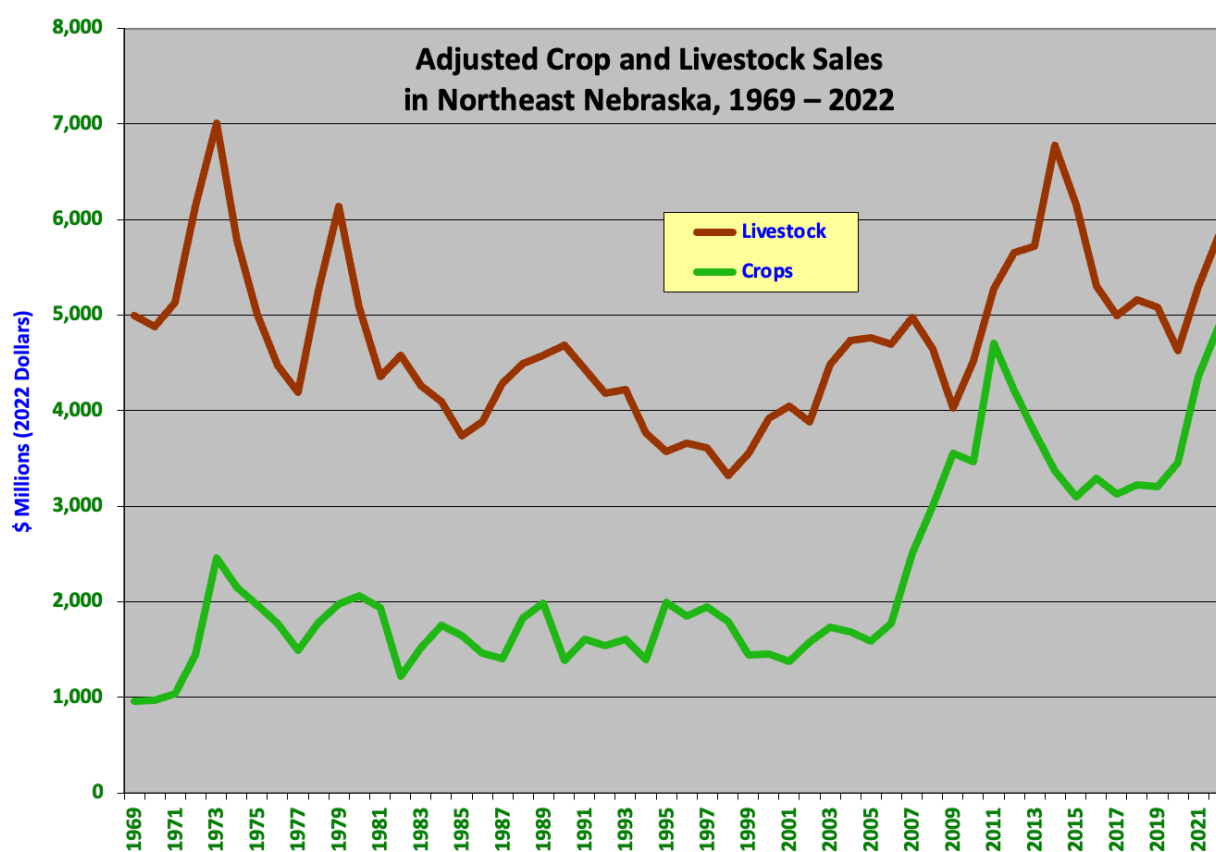
Net cash income held fairly steady across this 54-year period, but still fell below zero for 8 years. Peak income of \$2.7 billion was realized in 2011, well above the \$1.8 billion peak experienced in 1974 during the OPEC energy crisis, when US farmers enjoyed rising prices for a couple of years. These years of peak prosperity, however, are always short-lived; middling returns are common.

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, Northeast Nebraska farmers averaged a net cash income of \$811 million, despite suffering an overall loss in 2017. On average, the region's farmers sold \$7.2 billion of products, spending \$6.4 billion to raise them. This resulted in an aggregate surplus of \$27 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. Crop sales were fairly level from 1969 to 2005, and then rose rapidly to a peak in 2022. A few years later, livestock sales rose, perhaps because buyers were willing to pay more for meat even though feed costs rose. In 2012, crop sales fell for several years, but have now recovered to a peak of \$4.9 billion in 2022. Livestock sales followed similar cycles after a few years' delay. They now stand at \$5.8 billion. The peak was \$7 billion in 1973. *This chart is also expressed in inflation-adjusted dollars.*

**Chart 10: Adjusted Crop and Livestock Sales in Northeast Nebraska, 1969 – 2022**

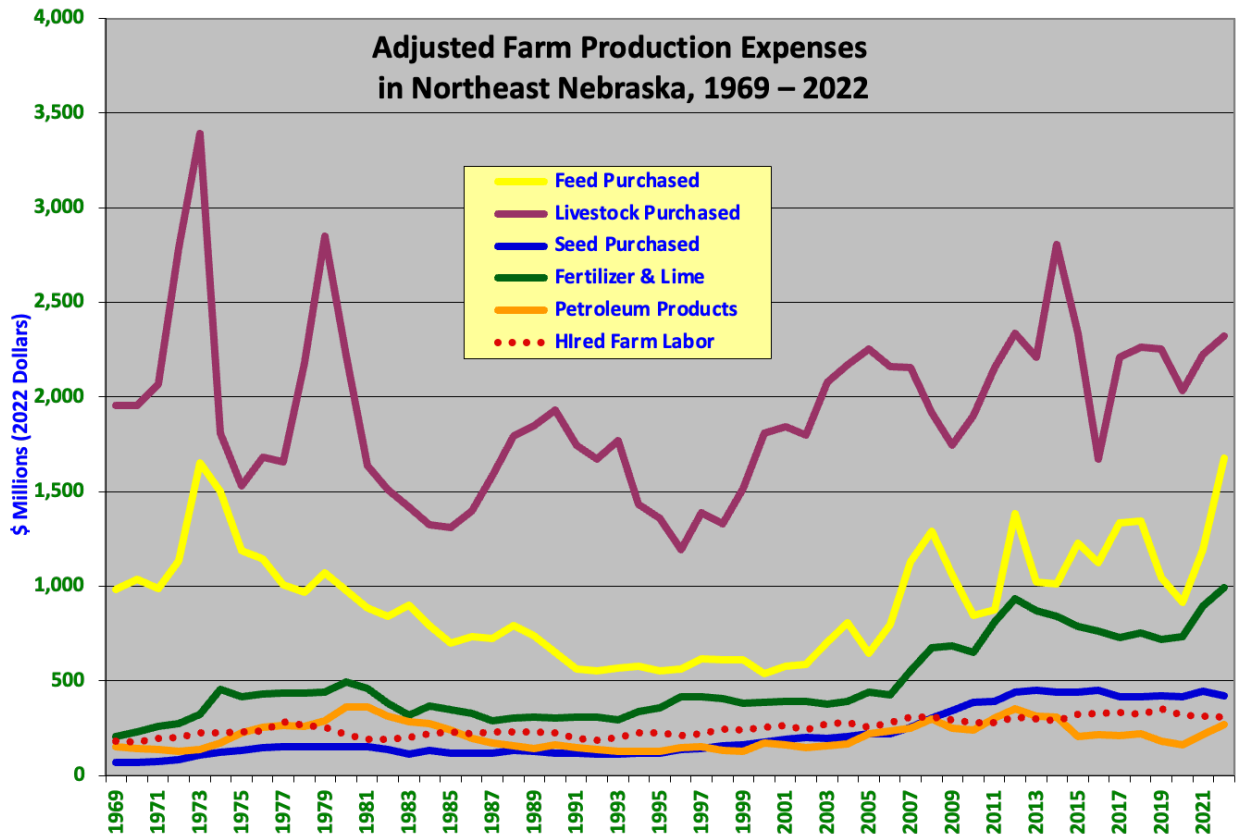


Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index. Note that these data are no longer reported by BEA; 2023 data are not available.

A still more complete picture emerges once we consider the costs of production, shown on Chart 11. Rising production costs have been led by rising expenditures for livestock, feed, and fertilizers. Rising seed costs also play a lesser role. Still, all costs have increased. Farmers have held labor costs quite steady, but they are 80% higher than in 1969. Farmers largely reduced fuel and oil use following the OPEC crisis, but in the past two years these have begun to rise again. *Once again, these have been adjusted for inflation.*



**Chart 11: Adjusted Farm Production Expenses in Northeast 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.

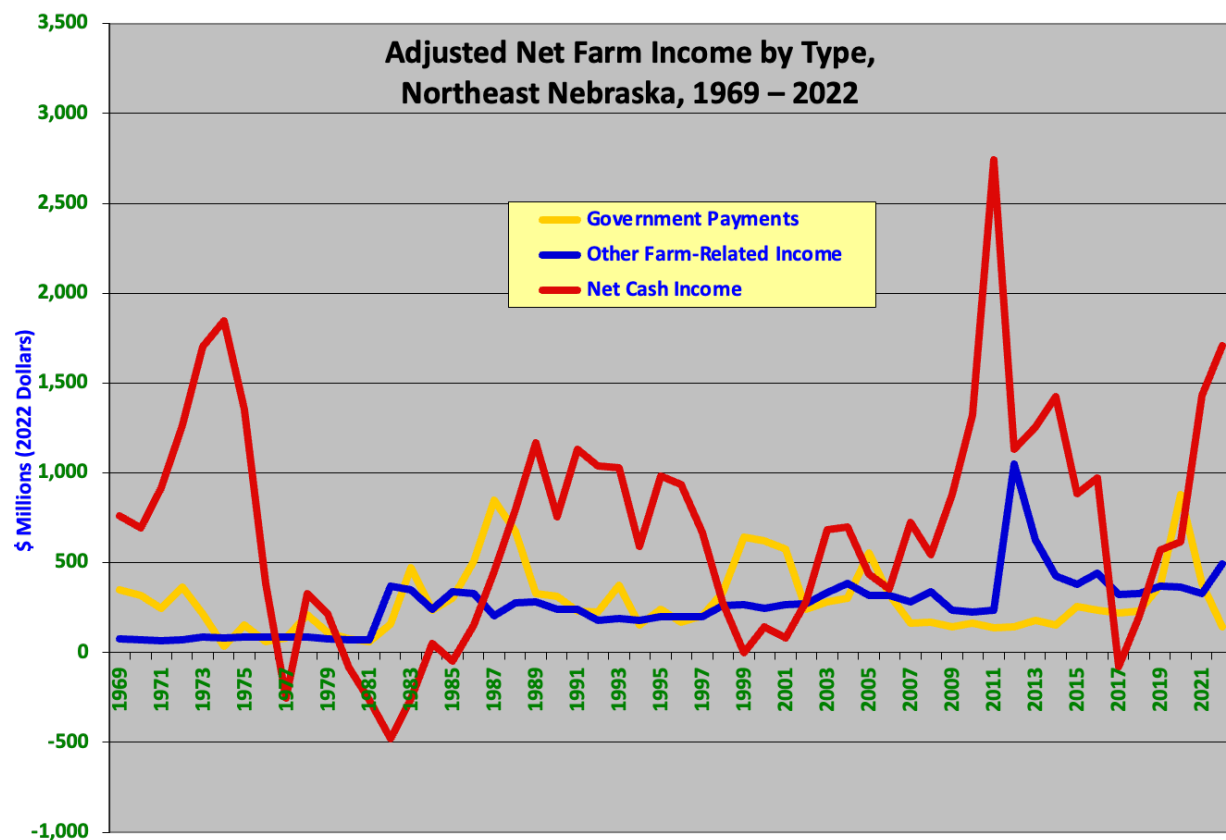
From the perspective of farm laborers, however, steady labor costs means that labor is largely not benefitting from the increased sales farmers have enjoyed. From the perspective of the region as a whole, many of the rising costs are expenses for purchasing inputs sourced outside of the region, sending perhaps \$3 billion or more out of Northeast Nebraska. But such losses are difficult to measure.

Finally, it is useful to consider all forms of net income enjoyed by Northeast Nebraska farmers. These are shown on Chart 12. This chart shows that net cash income, averaging \$811 million per year, is the strongest form of net income, but deeply erratic.

The second most important 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 been a steadier source of income than production. This averages \$324 million per year, 40% of net cash income, 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. Since cash rents are the most stable form of net income, many landowners calculate that it makes more sense to rent out land than to farm it, displacing the risks of farming onto someone else.

Government payments are a relatively discrete source of income. Nonetheless they averaged \$297 million during the years 1989 to 2022, 37% of the \$811 million earned in net cash income. The chart also shows that government payments surpassed net cash income in 8 of the past 34 years.

**Chart 12: Adjusted Net Farm Income by Type, Northeast 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.

### Northeast Nebraska Summary

12,848 Northeast Nebraska farmers sell an average of \$7.2 billion of food commodities per year (1989–2022 average), spending \$6.4 billion to raise them, for an average gain of \$811 million each year. This is an average net cash income of \$63,000 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 \$27 billion by selling crops and livestock over the years 1989–2022. Yet farm production costs exceeded cash receipts for 2 years of that 34-year period. Moreover, 34% of the region's farms reported net losses in 2022.

Farmers and ranchers earn another \$324 million per year of farm-related income — primarily custom field work, and land rental income (34-year average for 1989–2022). This is 40% of net cash income. Federal farm support payments are a complementary source of net income, averaging \$297 million per year for the region for the same years. This is 37% 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 \$2 billion or more) away from the region. This is difficult to measure precisely.

The region's farmers spent twice as much feeding livestock (\$1.8 billion) as would be required to feed the entire Northeast Nebraska population for a year (\$910 million). Indeed, there are 8 times as many cattle living in Northeast 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 Northeast Nebraska residents.

### **Northeast Nebraska Consumers**

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

248,585 Northeast Nebraska consumers spend \$910 million buying food each year, including \$573 million for home use. At least 90% of this food is produced outside the region, so consumers spend more than \$800 million per year buying food sourced outside Northeast Nebraska. This is just about the same as the net cash income that farmers earn. Only \$2.6 million of food products (0.025% of farm cash receipts and 0.28% of the region's consumer market) are sold by farmers directly to household consumers.

### **Farm & Food Economy Summary**

Farmers earn \$811 million each year producing food commodities, while spending more than \$2 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 \$800 million buying food sourced outside the region. If each Northeast Nebraska resident purchased (or had purchased for them) \$5 of food each week directly from some farm in the region, this would generate \$65 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.*

### Northeast Nebraska

**Table 15: Northeast Nebraska Markets for Food Eaten at Home (2023)**

248,585 Northeast Nebraska residents purchase \$910 million of food each year, including \$573 million to eat at home. Home purchases break down in the following way:

	<b>\$ Millions</b>
Meats, Poultry, Fish, & Eggs	118
Fruits & Vegetables	107
Cereals & Bakery Products	72
Dairy Products	54
“Other,” incl. Sweets, Fats, & Oils	221

If Northeast Nebraska residents purchased (or had purchased for them) \$5 of food for home use directly from farmers in the region, this would generate \$65 million of new farm income for Northeast Nebraska.

Although the prevailing food system infrastructure is far more efficient at routing food to metro areas than to Northeast Nebraska residents, the market for food in the region is 31% of the Omaha market, and 70% of the Metro Lincoln market as Tables 16 and 17 show.

### Omaha Metro

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

810,578 Omaha Metro residents purchase \$2.9 billion of food each year, including \$1.9 billion to eat at home. Home purchases break down in the following way:

	<b>\$ Millions</b>
Meats, Poultry, Fish, & Eggs	386
Fruits & Vegetables	350
Cereals & Bakery Products	236
Dairy Products	176
“Other,” incl. Sweets, Fats, & Oils	722

If Metro Omaha residents purchased (or had purchased for them) \$5 of food for home use directly from farmers in the region, this would generate \$211 million of new income for the region’s farms.

## Lincoln Metro

**Table 17: 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:

	<b>\$ Millions</b>
Meats, Poultry, Fish, & Eggs	167
Fruits & Vegetables	151
Cereals & 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 18: 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:

	<b>\$ Millions</b>
Meats, Poultry, Fish, & Eggs	942
Fruits & Vegetables	854
Cereals & 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**

<https://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](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:

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

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