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Tools for Community Self-determination

Omaha Metro, Nebraska
Local Farm & Food Economy

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

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February, 2025

Covers Douglas, Sarpy, & Washington Counties in Nebraska.
(3 Counties)

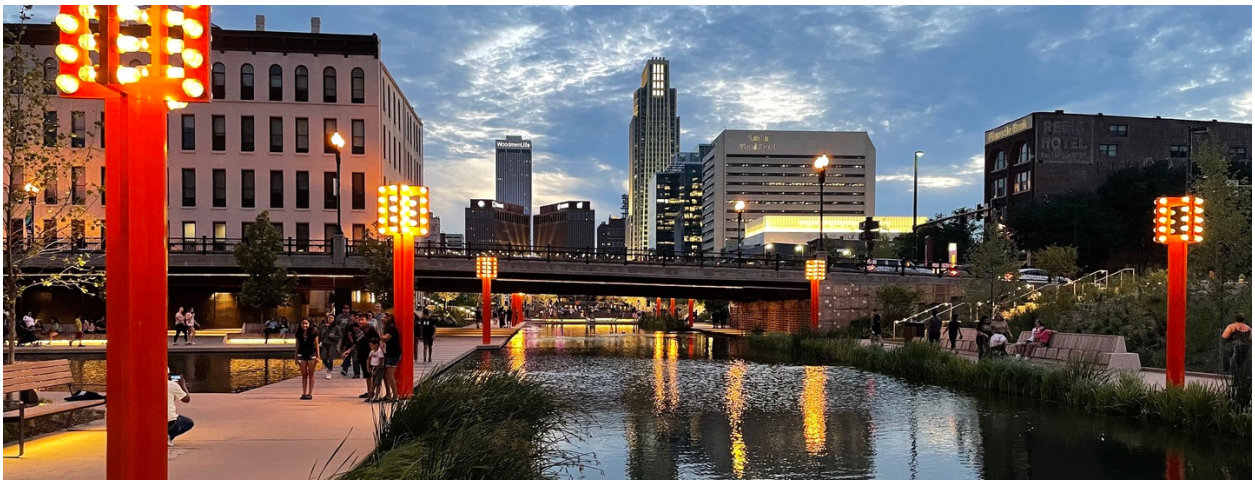

Photo Courtesy of Eric Williams

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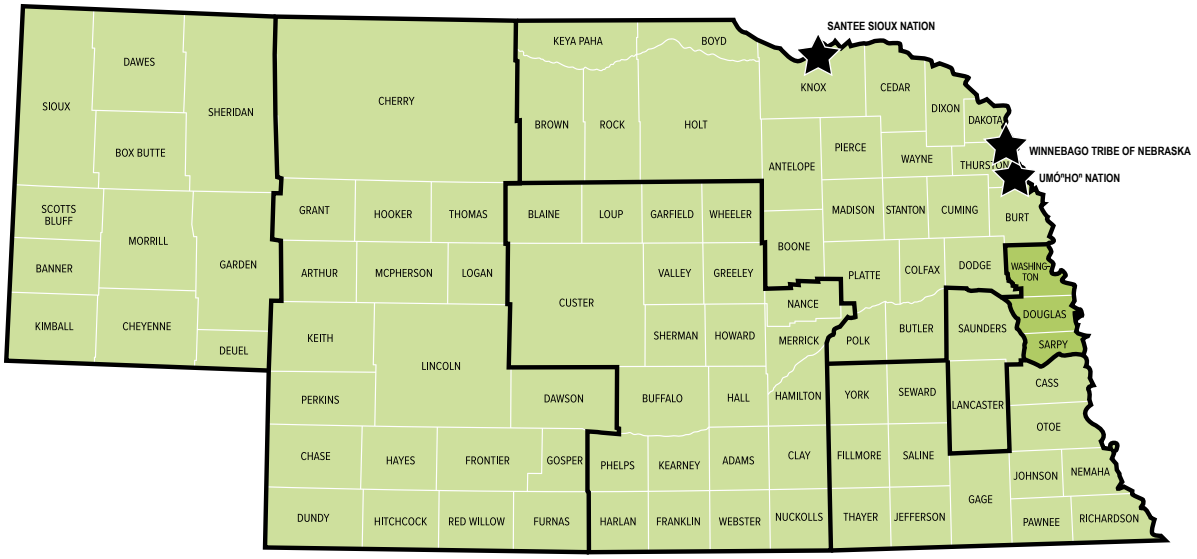


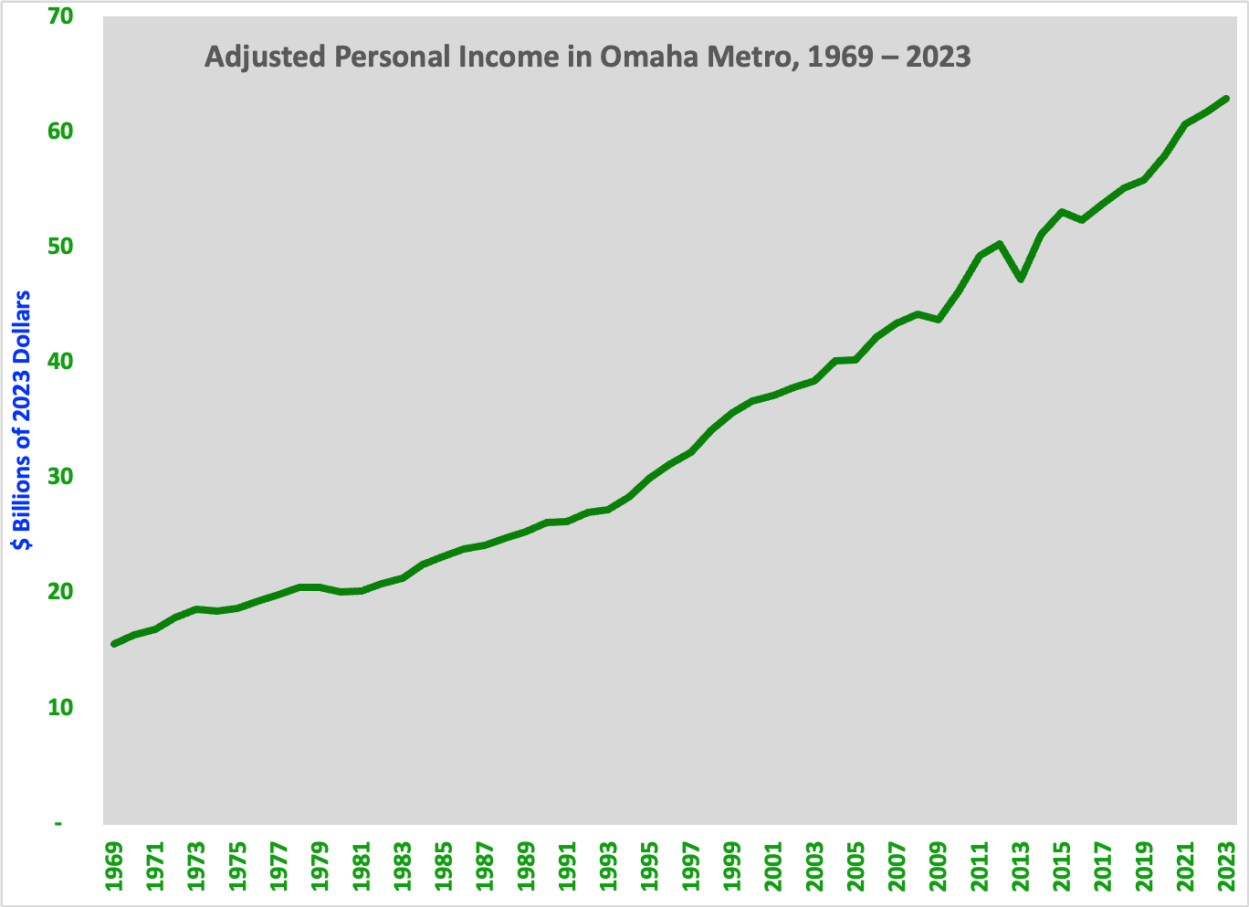
Map by Kylie Kai, Center for Rural Affairs

Personal Income, Poverty, & Food Insecurity

Personal Income in Omaha Metro

810,578 Omaha Metro residents received $63 billion of income in 2023 (See Chart 1). This was an increase of 304% from $15.6 billion in 1969, with dollars adjusted for inflation.

Chart 1: Adjusted Personal Income in Omaha Metro, 1969 – 2023



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

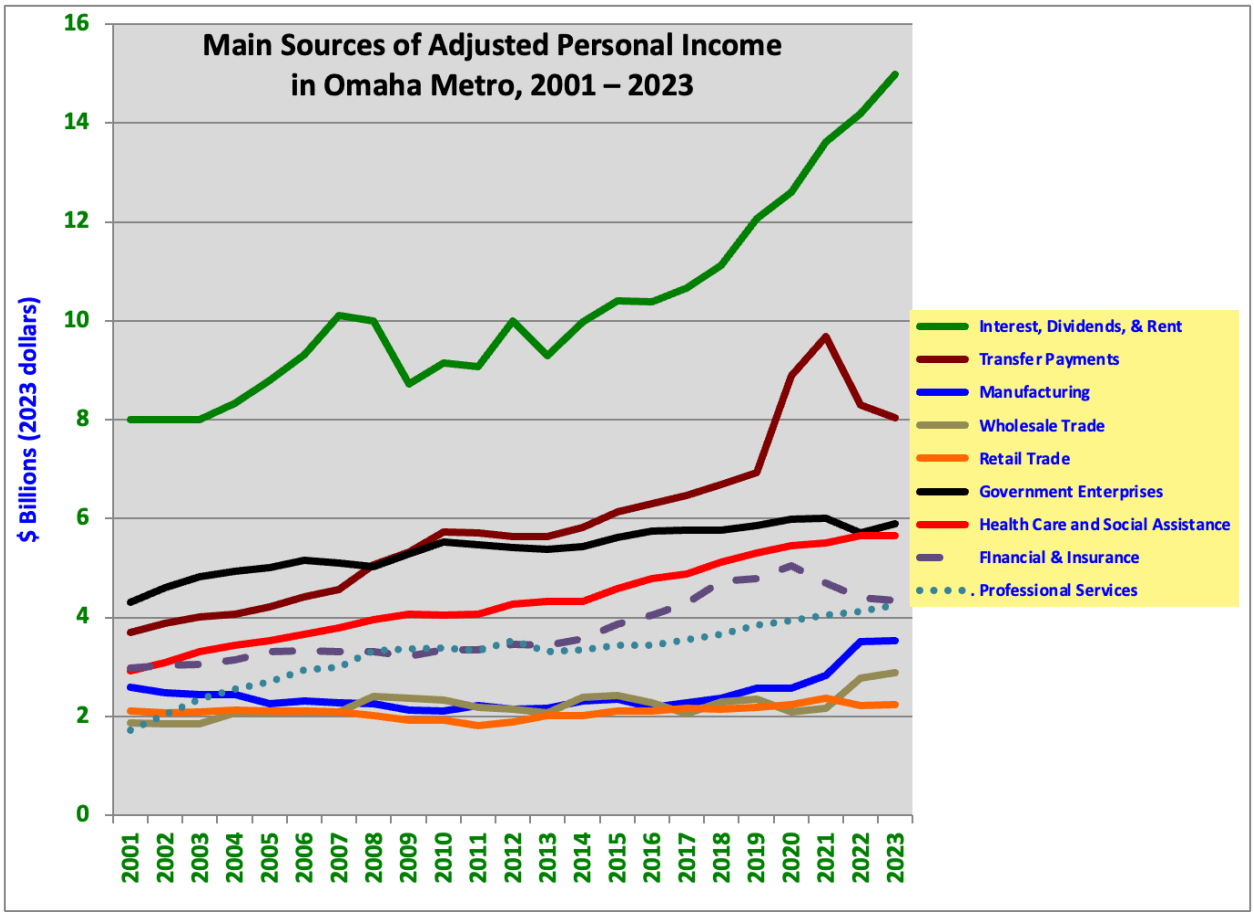
The largest source of personal income is capital income (from interest, rent, and dividends) at $14.9 billion (See Chart 2 below). Transfer payments (from government programs such as pensions) ranked second, at $8.0 billion. Government workers (including educational workers) ranked third at $5.9 billion. Health care workers earned another $5.7 billion. Finance and Insurance workers earned $4.3 billion, while Professional workers earned $4.2 billion. Manufacturing jobs accounted for $3.5 billion, and Construction workers earned $3.2 billion..

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 $1.2 billion of income earned by federal workers and $3.7 billion earned by state and local government workers. Military personnel earned $966 million of personal income.

Note that income from public sources (government jobs and transfer payments) makes up 22% of all personal income in the region.

Chart 2: Main Sources of Adjusted Personal Income in Omaha Metro, 2001 – 2023

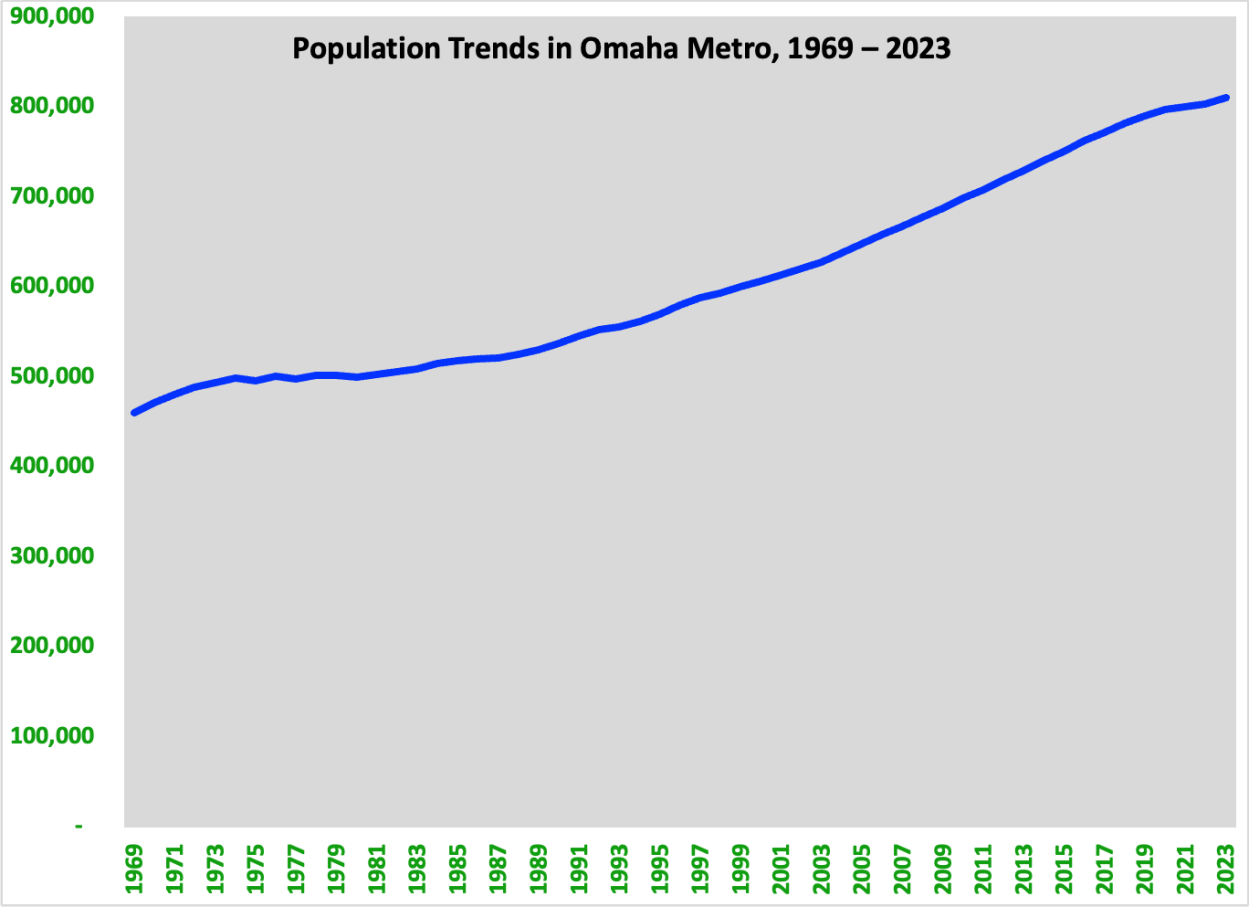


Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index.

Population of the Omaha Metro region increased 76% since 1969, as shown on Chart 3. Thus, personal income has risen four times the rate of population increase.

Although the metro area is close to important farming regions, there has been limited public planning to assure that residents have a secure and resilient food supply.

Chart 3: Population Trends in Omaha Metro, 1969 – 2023



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023.

Issues Affecting Low-Income Residents of the Omaha Metro region

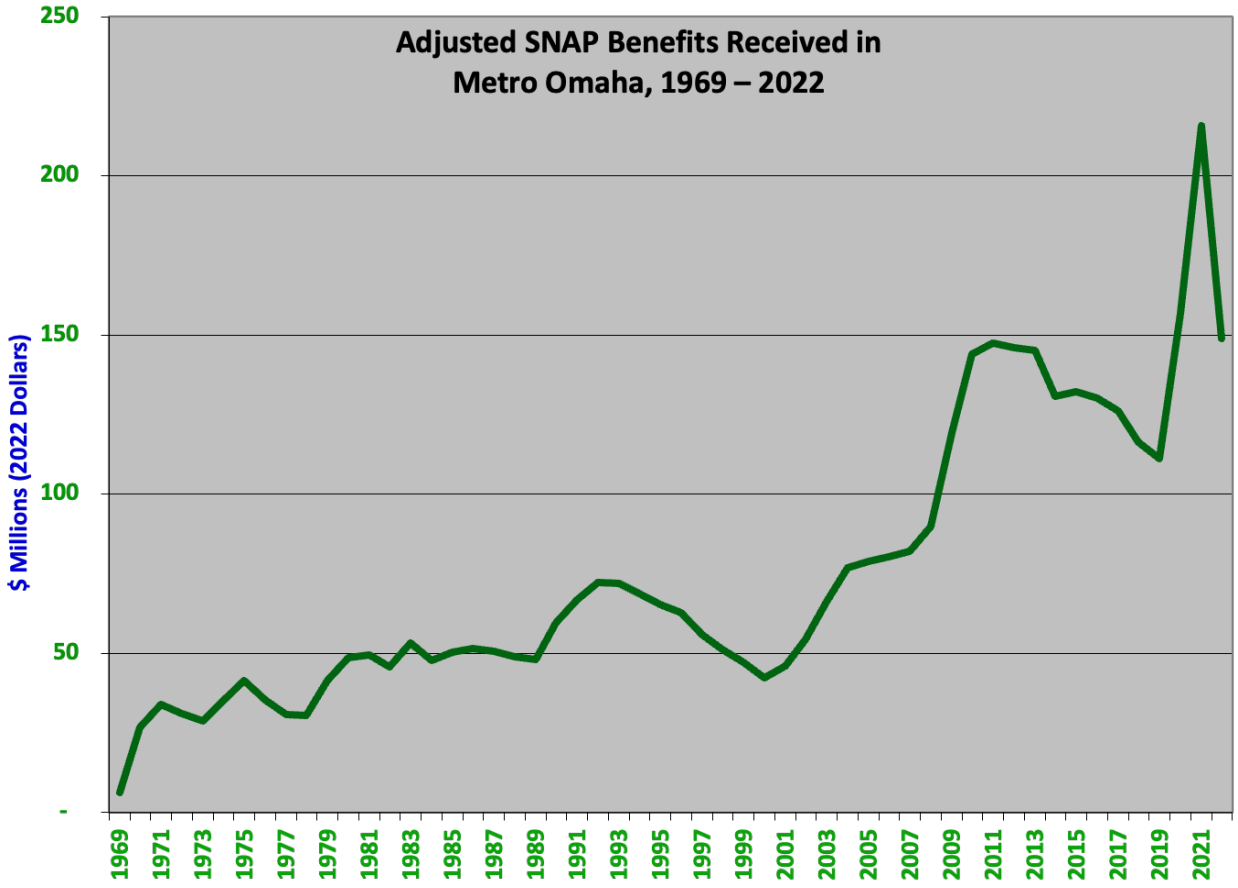
Despite rising income for the region as a whole, more than 168,000 residents (21%) earn less than 185% of federal poverty guidelines. At this level of income, children qualify for free or reduced-price lunch at school under federal programs. This poverty rate is lower than for Lincoln Metro (25%), the Mid-Plains (29%), or the Panhandle (30%). *Sources: Federal Census of 2019–2023; USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.*

4% percent of the region's households (about 31,000 residents) earn less than $10,000 per year. *Source: Federal Census of 2019–2023.*

About 77,000 residents (10%) collected $149 million in SNAP benefits in 2022, down from a pandemic peak of $216 million (See Chart 4). SNAP benefits averaged $88 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 Omaha Metro, 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.

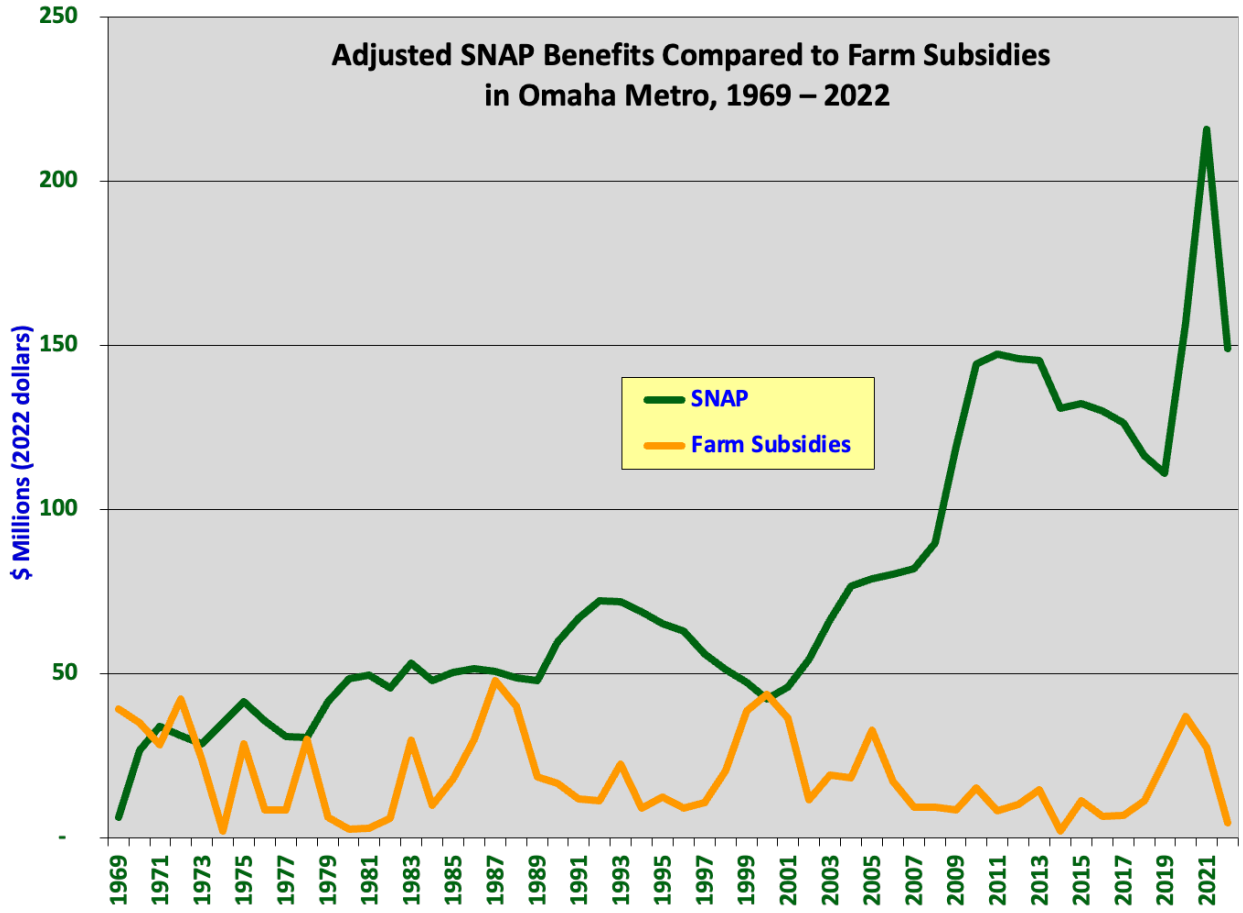
The rise in SNAP receipts since 2001 has been quite sharp. This raises the question of why a region that is so close to farms is experiencing such a rise in demand for food relief.

In light of concerns that have been expressed about SNAP benefits, it is useful to compare these benefits to federal subsidies for farmers. 395 (30%) of Omaha Metro farmers received a combined total of $3.7 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 is 1% of the subsidies given to Nebraska's farms. *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 Omaha Metro farmers received $4.5 million in subsidies in 2022. *Note that this is more than the total reported by the USDA NASS Census of Agriculture.* Average federal subsidies for Omaha Metro farmers were $16 million per year during the years 1989–2022. This is 18% of the amount allocated for SNAP benefits. Of course, farm subsidies are given to a far smaller number of farmers (395 farms; at $12,102 per farm) than SNAP (with 77,000 recipients; about $1,935 per person). This comparison is shown on Chart 5.

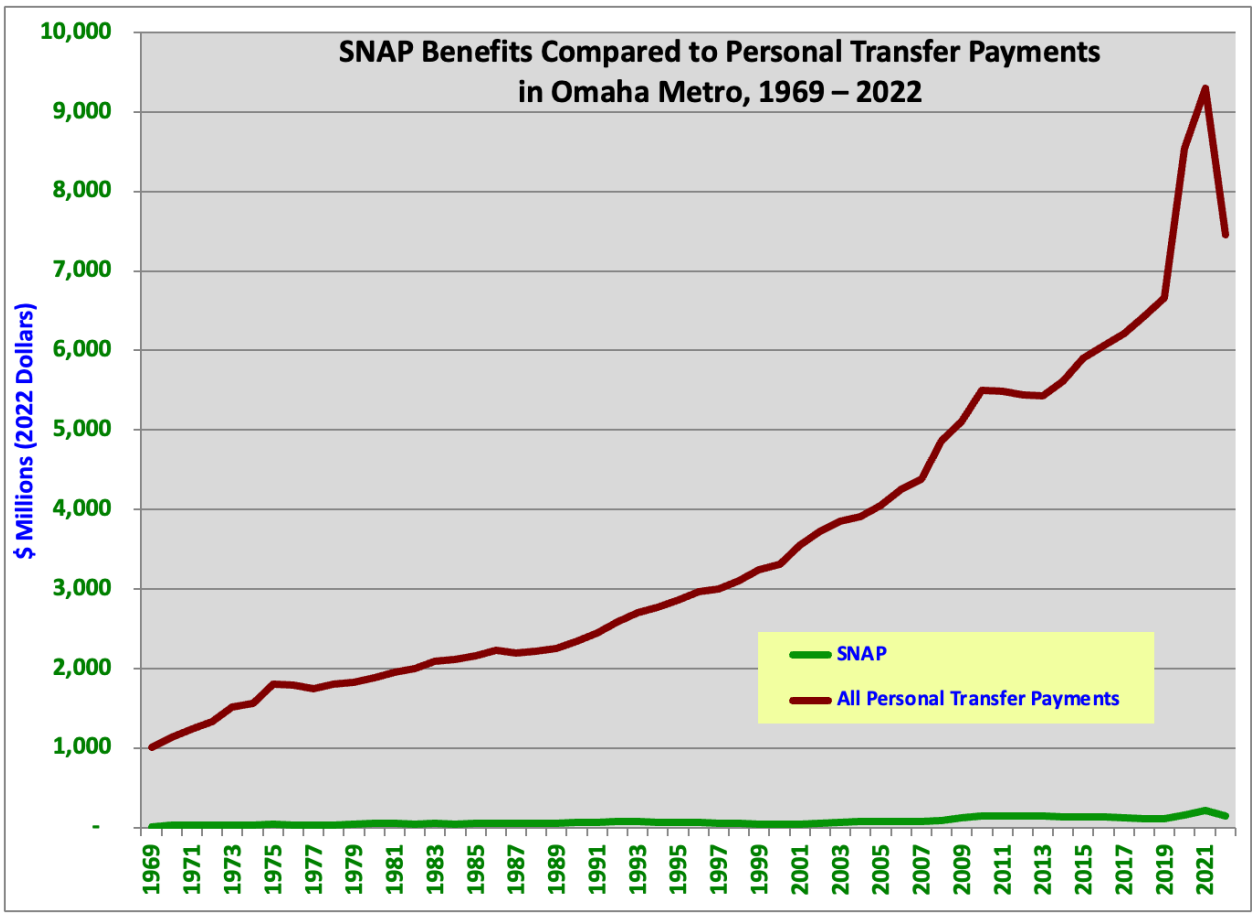
Chart 5: Adjusted SNAP Benefits Compared to Farm Subsidies in Omaha Metro, 1969 – 2022



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 Omaha Metro residents, as Chart 6 shows. SNAP benefits are included in the total transfer payments depicted on the chart, but are a small amount (2%) of transfer payment receipts of $7.5 billion.

Chart 6: Adjusted SNAP Benefits Compared to Personal Transfer Payments in Omaha Metro, 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 Omaha Metro 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 Omaha Metro 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.*

Omaha Metro'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

- 1,322 farms. This is 3% of Nebraska farms.
- Omaha Metro has 327,079 acres of farmland, 1% of Nebraska's total.
- Average size farm is 248 acres, 25% of the state average.
- Estimated market value of an average farm was $1,903,347 in 2022. This is 56% of the Nebraska average.
- 731 (55%) Omaha Metro farms are less than 50 acres in size. *See Table 1.*
- 80 (6%) of the region's farms are 1,000 acres or more. *See Table 1.*

Farm Product Sales

- Omaha Metro farms sold $285 million of crops and livestock in 2022, 1% of Nebraska's total.
- Of these sales, $228 million (80%) were crop sales, and $56 million (20%) were livestock. These amounted to 2% and 0.4% of the state total.
- 656 Omaha Metro farms sold less than $10,000 of products in 2022. This was 50% of the region's farms. *See Table 2.*
- 367 (28%) of the region's farms sold more than $100,000. *See Table 2.*
- 133 (10%) of the region's farms sold more than $500,000 of farm products. These farms sold $220 million of products, totaling 84% of the region's sales.
- 395 (30%) of the region's farmers received a combined total of $3.7 million in subsidies in 2022.
- 53% of Omaha Metro farms reported a net loss to the Census of Agriculture in 2022. This compares with the statewide average 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	183	14%
10–49 Acres	548	41%
50–179 Acres	248	19%
180–499 Acres	174	13%
500–999 Acres	89	7%
1,000 Acres or More	80	6%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Table 2: Farms by Sales Range

Sales Range	Farms	Pct of Region
Less than $2,500	402	30%
$2,500–$4,999	132	10%
$5,000–$9,999	122	9%
$10,000–$24,999	117	9%
$25,000–$49,999	79	6%
$50,000–$99,999	103	8%
$100,000 or More	367	28%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Production Expenses

The region's farmers spent $231 million to produce crops and livestock in 2022. Curiously, the largest single expense is write-offs for Depreciation. Seeds, Fertilizers, Cash Rents, and Hired Labor also rank high. Detailed expenses are listed below:

Table 3: Farm Production Expenses

	$ Millions
Depreciation	29.0
Seeds	25.7
Fertilizers & Conditioners	23.9
Cash Rents	23.8
Hired Farm Labor	23.4
Feed Purchased	20.0
Property Taxes	18.4
Chemicals	17.5
Maintenance & Repairs	16.6
Livestock Purchased	15.7
Other Expenses	14.6
Fuels & Oils	10.0
Interest Expense	8.1
Utilities	4.2
Custom Work	3.7
Contract Labor	1.8
Medical Supplies	1.8
Equipment Rental	1.7

Note that this list does not add up to the total value of farm expenses listed above. It is $29 million more, because Depreciation is not included in USDA expense totals. Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Major Crops and Livestock

As Table 4 shows, Omaha Metro crop farmers primarily grow corn, soybeans, and forage, the same crops that are favored in rural counties.

Table 4: Top Crops Produced on Omaha Metro Farms, 2022

	Farms	Acres
Corn for Grain	462	126,360
Soybeans	444	124,070
Forage	422	21,029
Wheat	8	389
Oats	3	N / A
Sorghum	1	N / A

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Hogs & Pigs and Cattle & Calves were the principal livestock for which inventories were reported, as Table 5 shows. *Note that these data are **minimum** values, since data were suppressed in each of the 3 counties that make up the region. All of the broiler farms and most hog farms are located in Washington County. (D) signifies that data were suppressed by USDA in an effort to protect the confidentiality of individual producers.*

Table 5: Major Livestock Inventories and Number Sold

Livestock	Farms	Inventory	Sold
Hogs & Pigs	40	29,022	73,862
Cattle & Calves	245	17,696	13,110
Laying Hens	164	2,249	N / A
Sheep & Lambs	64	1,963	N / A
Broilers	17	N / A	(D)

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. The Nursery & Greenhouse sector is more important than in rural counties. Unfortunately, growth in this sector often threatens farmland. As more rural acreage is developed for housing or commercial buildings, the demand for landscaping crops often increases.

Table 6: Omaha Metro's Top Farm Products in 2022

Note: Considerable data have been suppressed for all three of the counties in Omaha Metro region, as USDA attempts to protect the confidentiality of individual farms. This means that totals cannot be comprehensively reported. The data in the table and pie chart below represent ***minimum*** *values. This affects counts for Hogs & Pigs, Fruits & Nuts, Sheep & Goats, Wheat, Christmas Trees, & Other Grains.*

See also Chart 7 on next page.

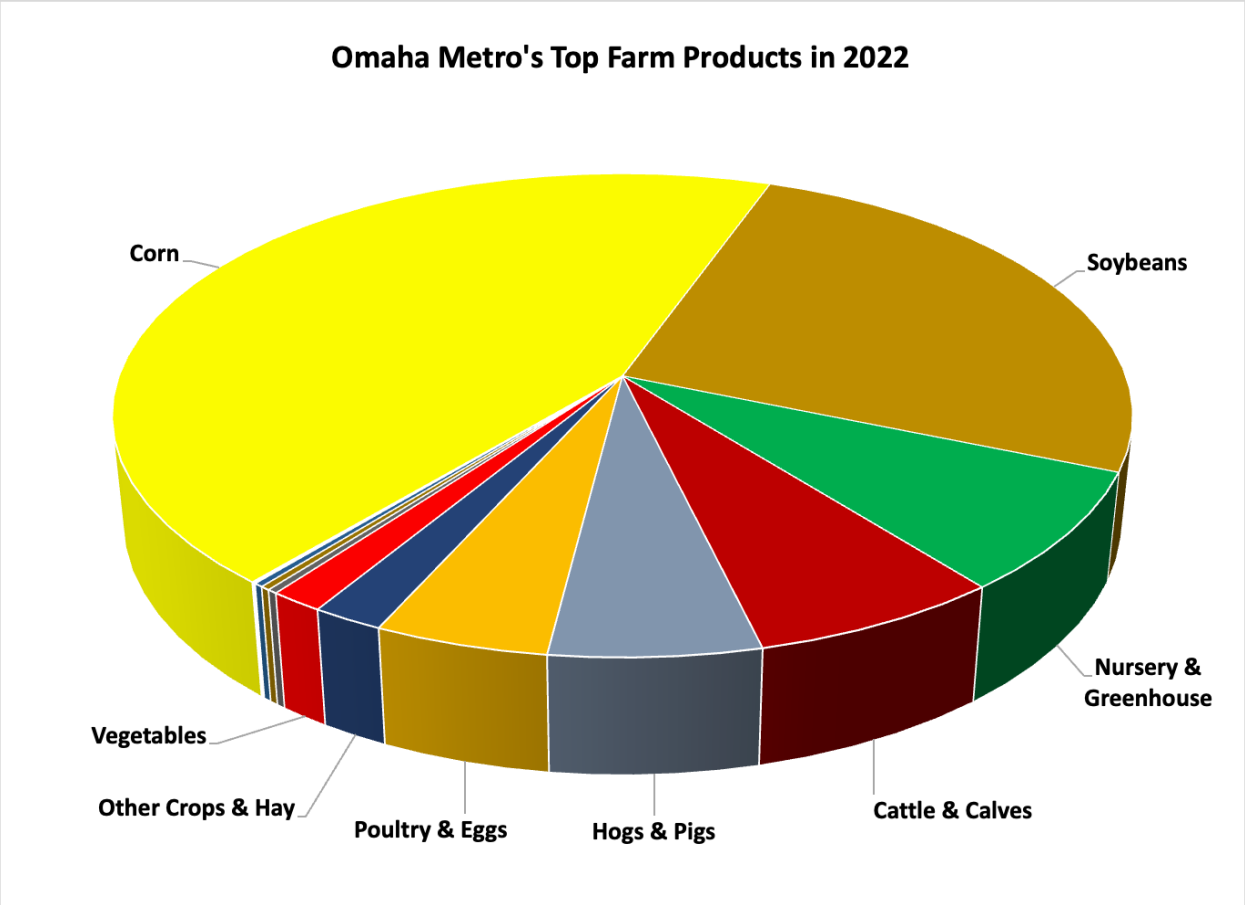
	Farms	$ Millions
Corn	462	123.4
Soybeans	444	71.7
Nursery & Greenhouse	56	22.3
Cattle & Calves	217	19.3
Hogs & Pigs	44	16.0
Poultry & Eggs	110	13.2
Other Crops & Hay	304	5.5
Vegetables & Potatoes	63	4.1
Fruits, Nuts, & Berries	53	0.8
Sheep & Goats	111	0.7
Horses & Ponies	45	0.7
Wheat	8	0.1
Christmas Trees	10	0.1
Other Livestock	47	0.1
Other Grains	7	-
Sorghum	1	-

Note that at $4.5 million, direct sales from farmers to household consumers, retail stores, institutions and food hubs as well as value-added products amount to just less than the 7th-ranking product, Other Crops & Hay. *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).

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Chart 7: Omaha Metro'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	91	2,041,000	80	375,000
Direct to Retail & Institutions	24	1,396,000	10	1,556,000
Value-Added Products	30	1,152,000	24	24,000

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022. Note once again that due to data suppression in Douglas and Sarpy counties, comprehensive findings cannot be reported. The numbers in the table above and narrative below are ***minimum*** *values. In particular, 2017 data were suppressed, so meaningful sales trends cannot be identified.*

91 (6.8%) of Omaha Metro farms sold at least $2.0 million of farm products directly to household consumers in 2022. This was 11 more farms than sold direct five years before. Either sales rose very rapidly, or 2017 data were incomplete.

24 (1.8%) farms sold $1.4 million of products directly to retailers, institutions, and food hubs, seemingly less than the 2017 sales.

30 (2.2 %) farms sold $1.1 million of value-added products in 2022, with six more farms selling than in 2017.

Vegetables, Potatoes, & Orchards

Omaha Metro has 13% of the state's vegetable farms, but only 4% of Nebraska's vegetable acreage. It has 13% of the state's orchards, and 11% of Nebraska's orchard acreage.

Table 8: Vegetables, Potatoes, & Orchards on Omaha Metro Farms

Crop	Farms	Acres
Vegetables	57	827
Potatoes	16	6
Orchards	46	134

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Organic Food Sales

Although sales data were suppressed by USDA for Sarpy & Washington counties, USDA lists 6 Omaha Metro farms as organic producers.

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Operator Characteristics

Race & Ethnicity

Omaha Metro'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	3	0.13%
Asian	-	0.00%
Black or African-American	4	0.17%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	-	0.00%
White	2,343	99.36%
More than One Race	8	0.34%
Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity	16	0.68%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Female Producers

Female producers are very important to Omaha Metro's farm community. 729 Farms (55%) have female producers. These women manage, or co-manage, 41% of the region's farm acreage.

Table 10: Female Producers

Farms	Female Producers	Acreage
729	822	133,872

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Young Producers

Omaha Metro has 171 young producers. This is 2% 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
171	2%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Active Military or Veteran Producers

Omaha Metro hosts 191 veteran or active military farmers.

Table 12: Active Military or Veteran Producers

Military/Veterans	Percent of Nebraska
191	3%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Ownership

Most (91%) Omaha Metro farms and 87% of farm acreage are owned by families or family corporations.

Table 13: Farm Ownership

Type of Ownership	Farms	Acres
Family or Individual	1,056	181,343
Partnership	82	38,118
Corporation (Family)	145	102,927
Corporation (Other)	22	3,071
Estate, Trust, Prison, Association, or Native Reservation, etc.	17	1,620

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Conservation Practices

As Table 14 shows, none of the Omaha Metro Farms rely upon Bureau of Reclamation Irrigation water. A greater percentage of farms harvested bioenergy, or operated an on-farm packing facility, than the region's share (3%) of Nebraska farms would suggest.

Table 14: Farms Adopting Conservation Practices in Omaha Metro, 2022

	Farms	Pct of Nebraska
Used Bureau of Reclamation Irrigation	-	-
Practiced Alley Cropping, Silvopasturing, or Riparian Buffers	8	2%
Harvested Biomass for Renewable Energy	19	8%
Practiced Rotational Grazing or Intensive Management	103	2%
Had On-farm Packing Facility	9	8%

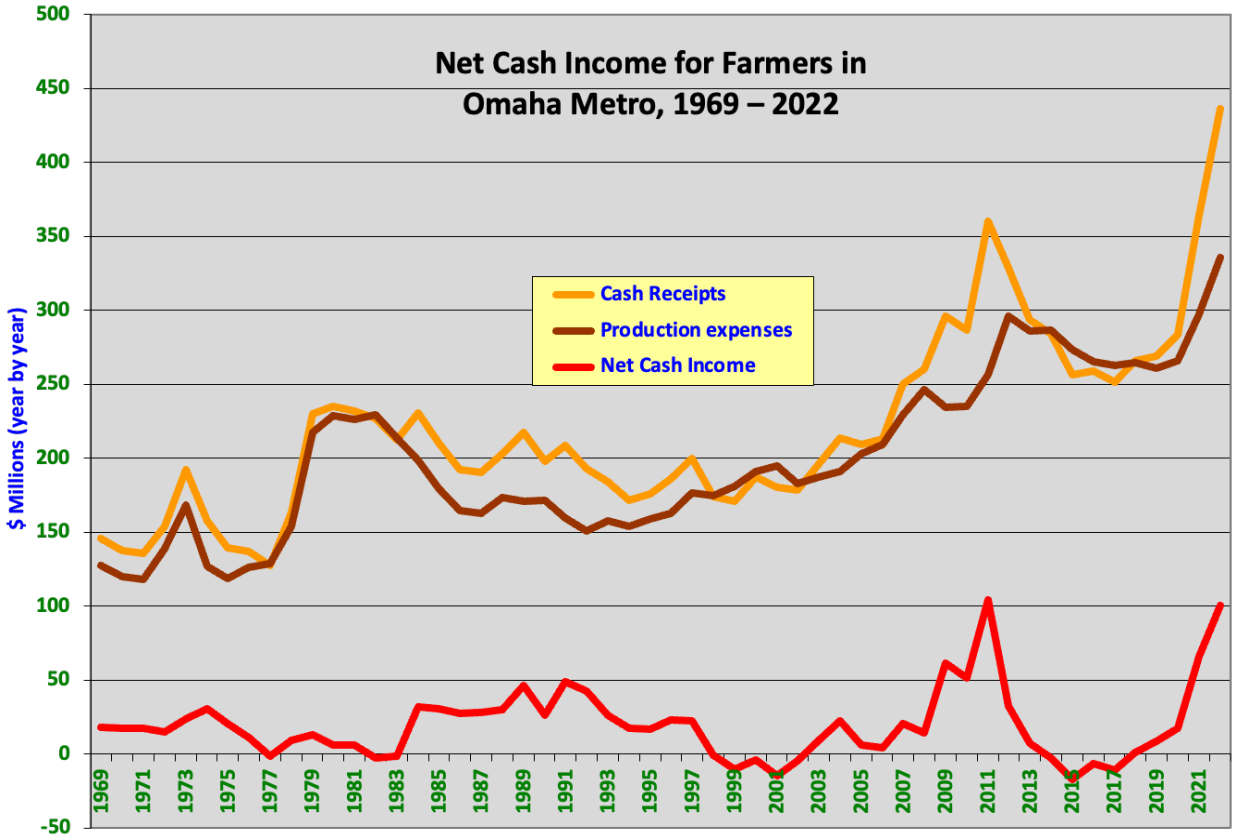
Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Income in Omaha Metro, Nebraska

Net Cash Income

The following section considers the Net Cash Income received by Omaha Metro 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 Omaha Metro, 1969 – 2022



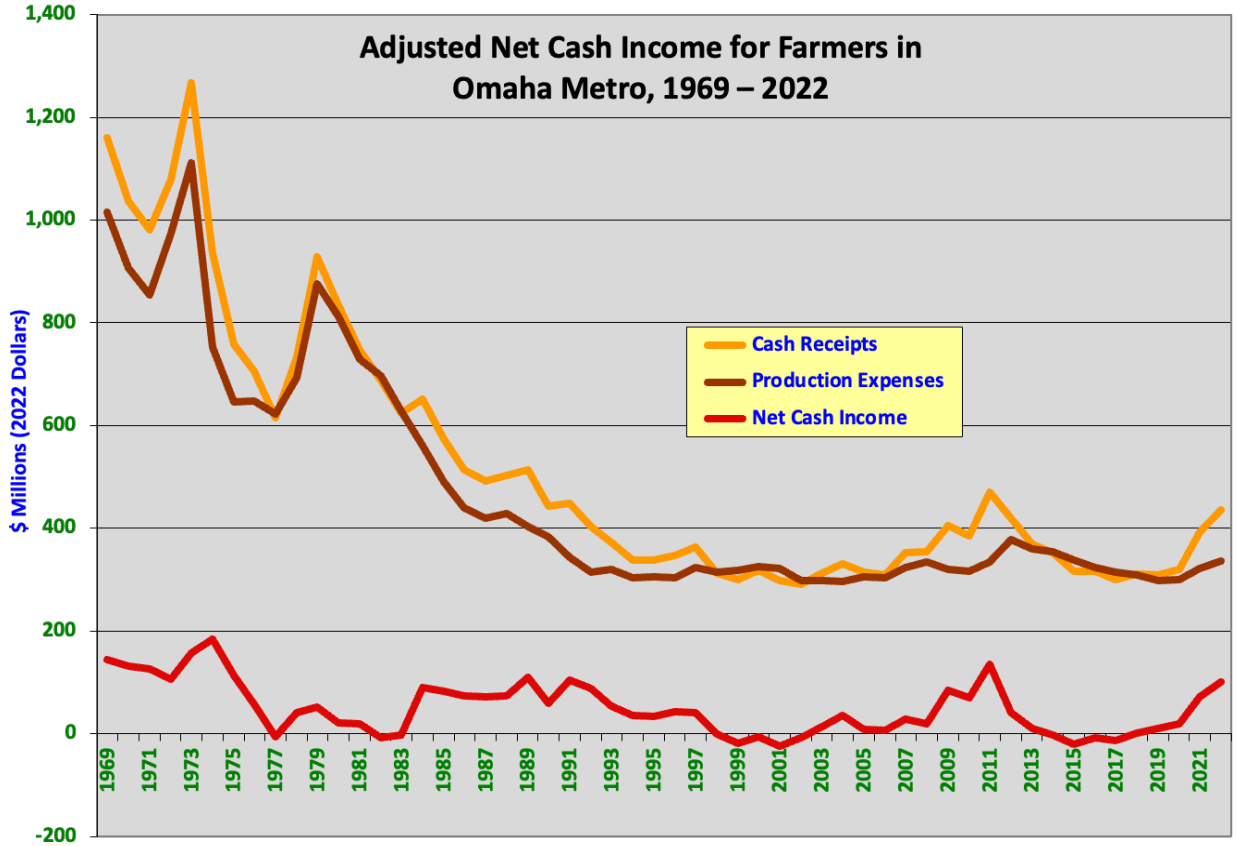
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Note that these data are no longer reported by BEA; 2023 data are not available.

Chart 8 shows that Omaha Metro farmers have increased sales over the past 54 years, from $146 million in 1969 to $436 million in 2022. That is a 3-fold increase, and signifies interesting growth in 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 8 of those 40 years, net cash income fell below zero for the Omaha Metro farm sector. Something dramatic happened in 2009 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 for four years, 2014–2017. It rose again to a surplus of $100 million in 2022. Thus, profitability for the farm sector is uncertain, particularly given development pressure on farmland. 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 Omaha Metro, 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.

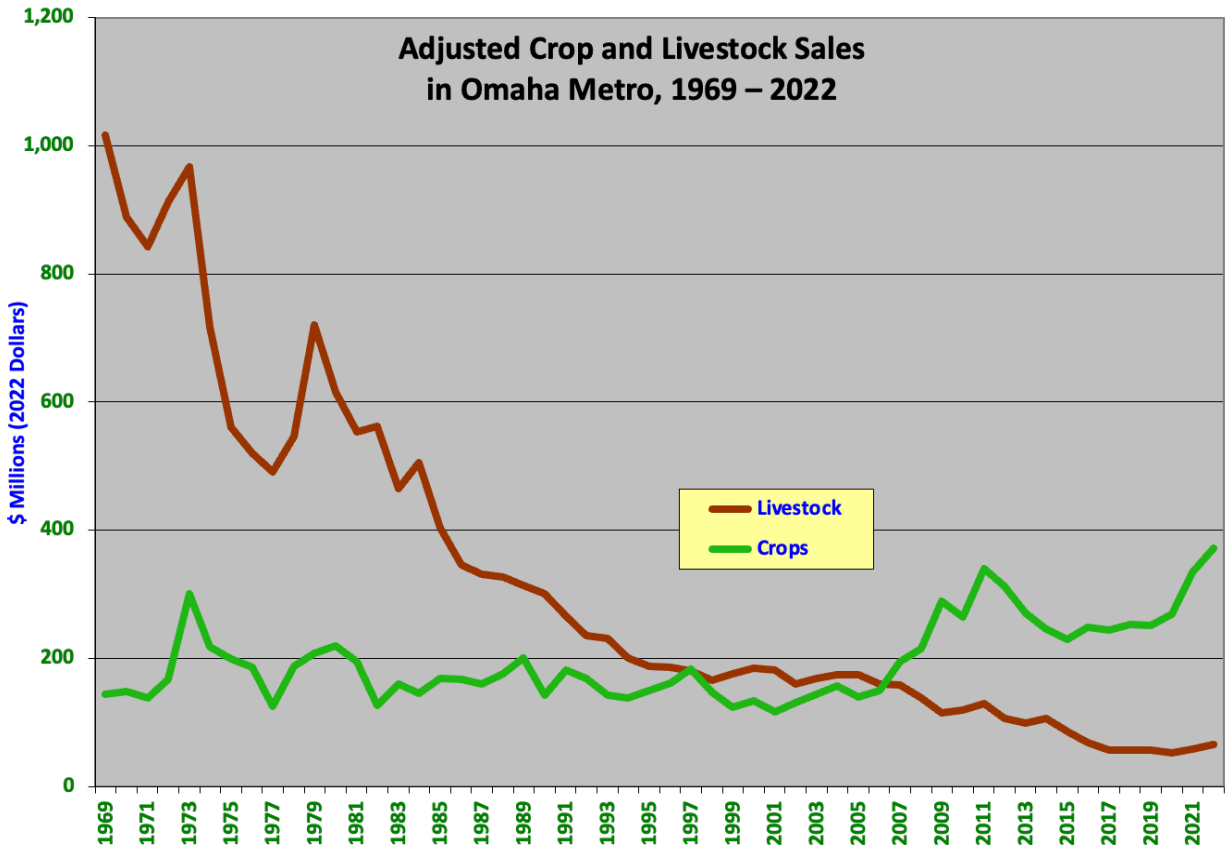
Once adjusted for inflation, it becomes clear that sales actually decreased. The value of cash receipts earned by the region's farmers fell 62% from $1.2 billion to $436 million in 2022 dollars. Net cash income hovered at low levels across this 54-year period, falling below zero for 12 years. Peak cash receipts were $1.3 billion in 1973, and peak margins were in 1974, at $184 million. These peaks resulted from 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. Currently, net cash income for Omaha Metro farmers is 30% lower than its 1969 level of $145 million.

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, Omaha Metro farmers averaged a net cash income of $33 million, despite suffering net losses in 9 years including 2014–2017. On average, the region's farmers sold $358 million of products, spending $325 million to raise them. This resulted in an aggregate surplus of $1.1 billion over those 34 years; a significant contribution to the regional economy.

It is unlikely that Omaha Metro farmers have suddenly become inefficient. What these patterns suggest is that the farm sector has shrunk substantially as development pressure took more and more land out of agriculture.

The next chart, Chart 10, offers a different perspective on these long-term trends. This chart shows that declining livestock sales led the drop in cash receipts, while crop income held fairly steady for 40 years. By 2007, enough livestock farms had closed that crop sales became the largest source of revenue. Whether the upward trend in cash receipts will persist is an open question at this point. *This chart is also expressed in inflation-adjusted dollars.*

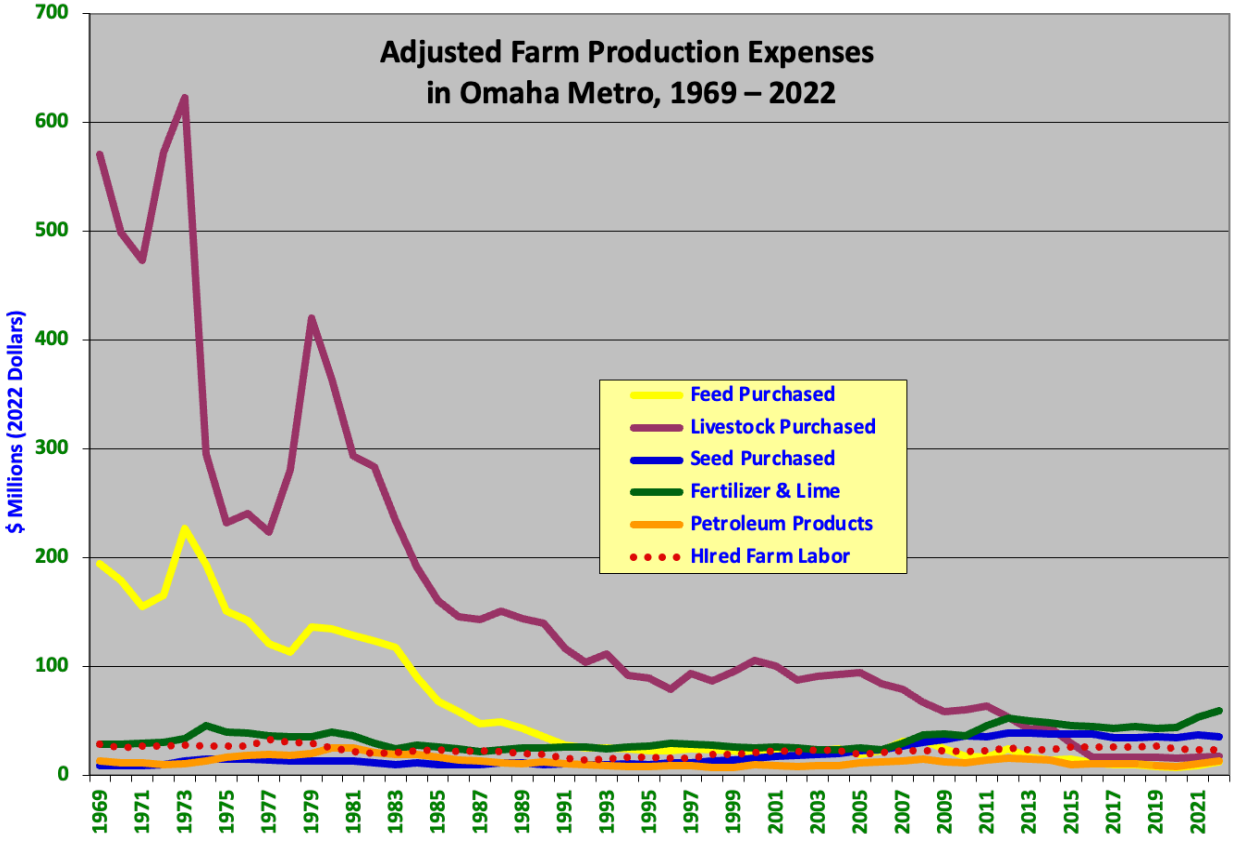
Chart 10: Adjusted Crop and Livestock Sales in Omaha Metro, 1969–2022



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. Simply put, as livestock farms fell out of production, farmers' purchasing for both livestock and feed fell as well. Otherwise, farmers have masterfully held costs very steady. *Once again, these have been adjusted for inflation.*

Chart 11: Adjusted Farm Production Expenses in Omaha Metro, 1969 – 2022



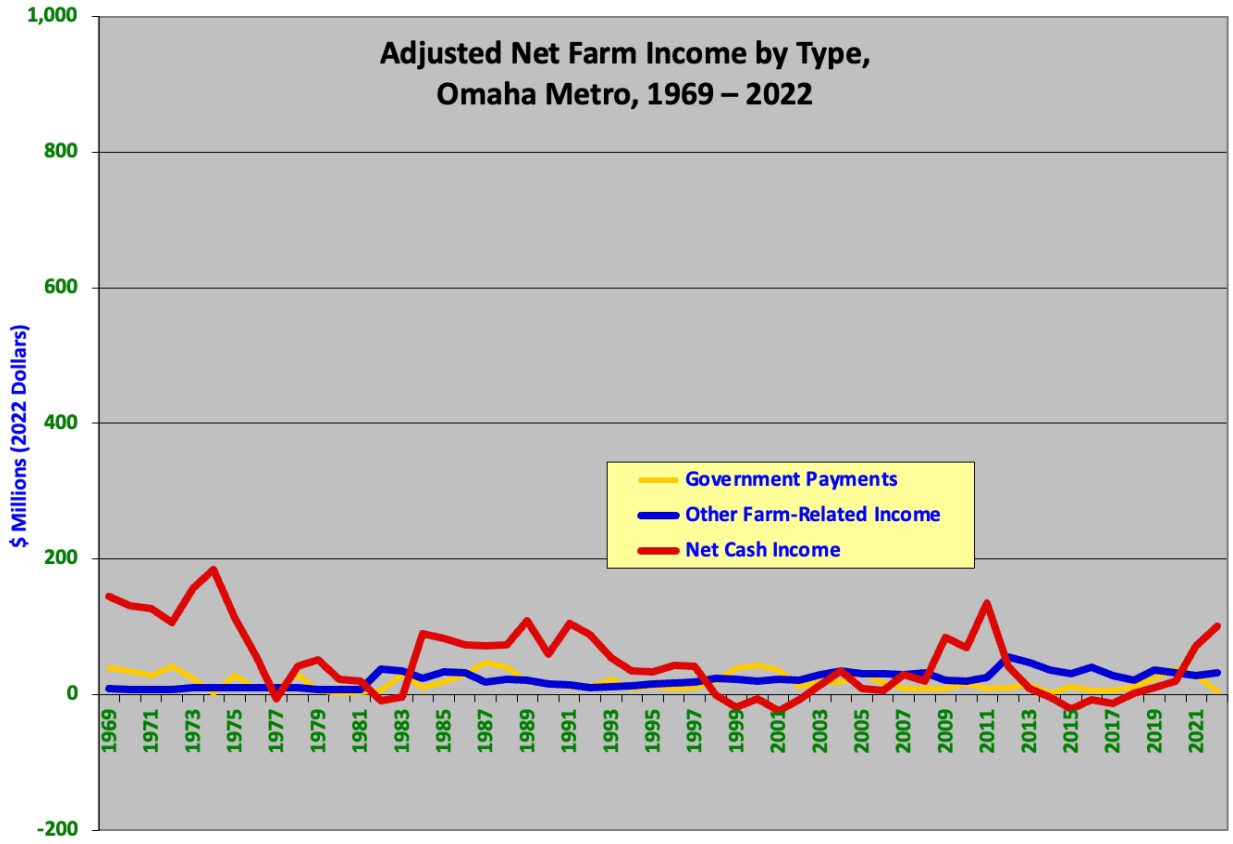
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index. Note that these data are no longer reported by BEA; 2023 data are not available.

Finally, it is useful to consider all forms of net income enjoyed by Omaha Metro farmers. These are shown on Chart 12. This chart shows that net cash income is the most important source of net income, averaging $33 million per year.

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 held at a fairly steady average of $26 million per year, with a noticeable bump upward in 2011 when farmers enjoyed higher cash receipts. These rents constitute 80% of net cash income. That suggests that when landowners saw that farmgate prices were high they charged their tenants higher rents. Most notably, cash rents are the most stable form of net income. Indeed, this source exceeded farming as a source of income for 19 of the past 34 years. For many landowners, it makes more sense to rent out land than to farm it, displacing the risks of farming onto someone else.

Government payments are a complementary source of net income. They averaged $16 million during the years 1989 to 2022, about half of what farmers earned by producing crops and livestock. The chart also shows that government payments surpassed net cash income in 16 of the past 34 years.

Chart 12: Adjusted Net Farm Income by Type, Omaha Metro, 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.

Omaha Metro Summary

1,322 Omaha Metro farmers sell an average of $358 million of food commodities per year (1989–2022 average), spending $325 million to raise them, for an average gain of $33 million each year. This is an average net cash income of $25,000 per farm. *Note that these sales figures compiled by the BEA may differ from cash receipts recorded by the USDA Census of Agriculture (above).*

Overall, farm producers earned a surplus of $1.1 billion by selling crops and livestock over the years 1989–2022. Yet farm production costs exceeded cash receipts for 9 years of that 34-year period. Moreover, 53% of the region's farms reported net losses in 2022.

Farmers and ranchers earn another $26 million per year of farm-related income — primarily custom field work, and land rental income (34-year average for 1989–2022). This is 80% of net cash income. Federal farm support payments are a complementary source of net income, averaging $16 million per year for the region for the same years. This is about half of 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 $150 million or more) away from the region. This is difficult to measure precisely.

Omaha Metro Consumers

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

810,578 Omaha Metro consumers spend $2.9 billion buying food each year, including $1.9 billion for home use. At least 90% of this food is produced outside the region, so consumers spend more than $2.6 billion per year buying food sourced outside Omaha Metro. This is vastly more than the net cash income that farmers earn. Only $2 million of food products (0.6% of farm cash receipts and 0.7% of the region's consumer market) are sold by farmers directly to household consumers.

Farm and Food Economy Summary

Farmers earn $33 million each year producing food commodities, while spending more than $100 million 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 $2.6 billion buying food sourced outside the region. If each Omaha Metro resident purchased (or had purchased for them) $5 of food each week directly from some farm in the region, this would generate $211 million of new farm income for the region. This would be more than half as much as the average sales earned by the region's farmers today.

Household Food Consumption

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

Omaha Metro

Table 15: 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:

	$ Millions
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, 59% of what they currently sell.

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 & 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.

Northeast Nebraska

Table 17: 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:

	$ Millions
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.

Southeast Nebraska

Table 18: Southeast Nebraska Markets for Food Eaten at Home (2023)

151,903 Southeast Nebraska residents purchase $556 million of food each year, including $350 million to eat at home. Home purchases break down in the following way:

	$ Millions
Meats, Poultry, Fish, & Eggs	72
Fruits & Vegetables	66
Cereals & Bakery Products	44
Dairy Products	33
"Other," incl. Sweets, Fats, & Oils	135

If Southeast Nebraska residents purchased (or had purchased for them) $5 of food for home use directly from farmers in the region, this would generate $39 million of new farm income for Southeast Nebraska.

State of Nebraska

Table 19: 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 & 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

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

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

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