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Tools for Community Self-determination

Southeast 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 Cass, Fillmore, Gage, Jefferson, Johnson, Nemaha, Otoe, Pawnee, Richardson,
Saline, Seward, Thayer, & York Counties in Nebraska.
(13 Counties)*

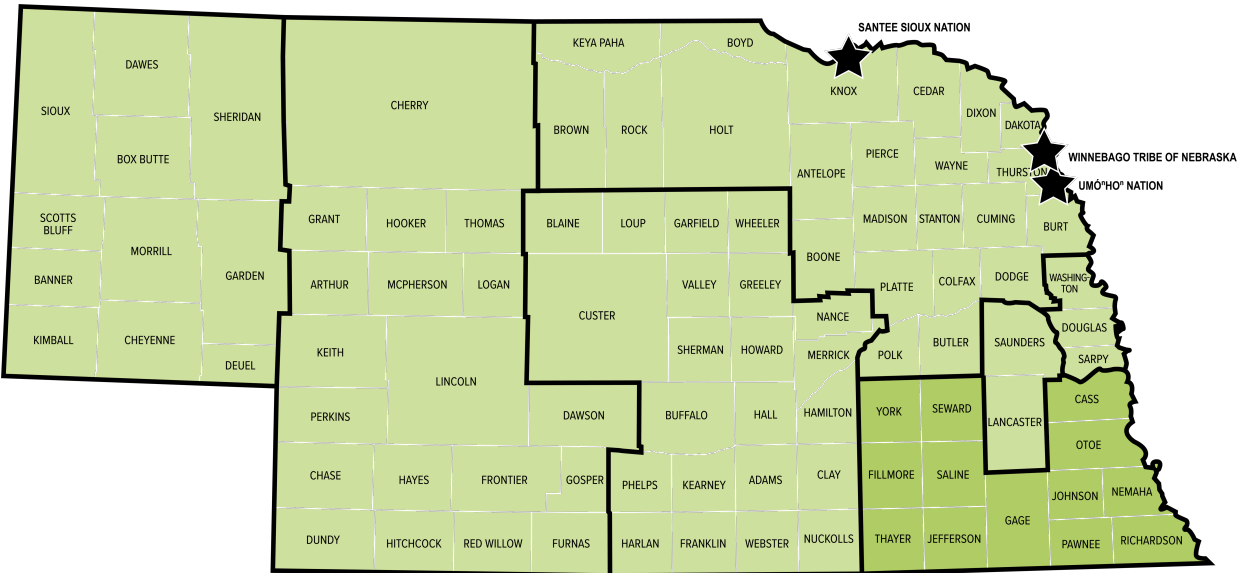


Photo by Kylie Kai, Center for Rural Affairs

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Southeast Nebraska



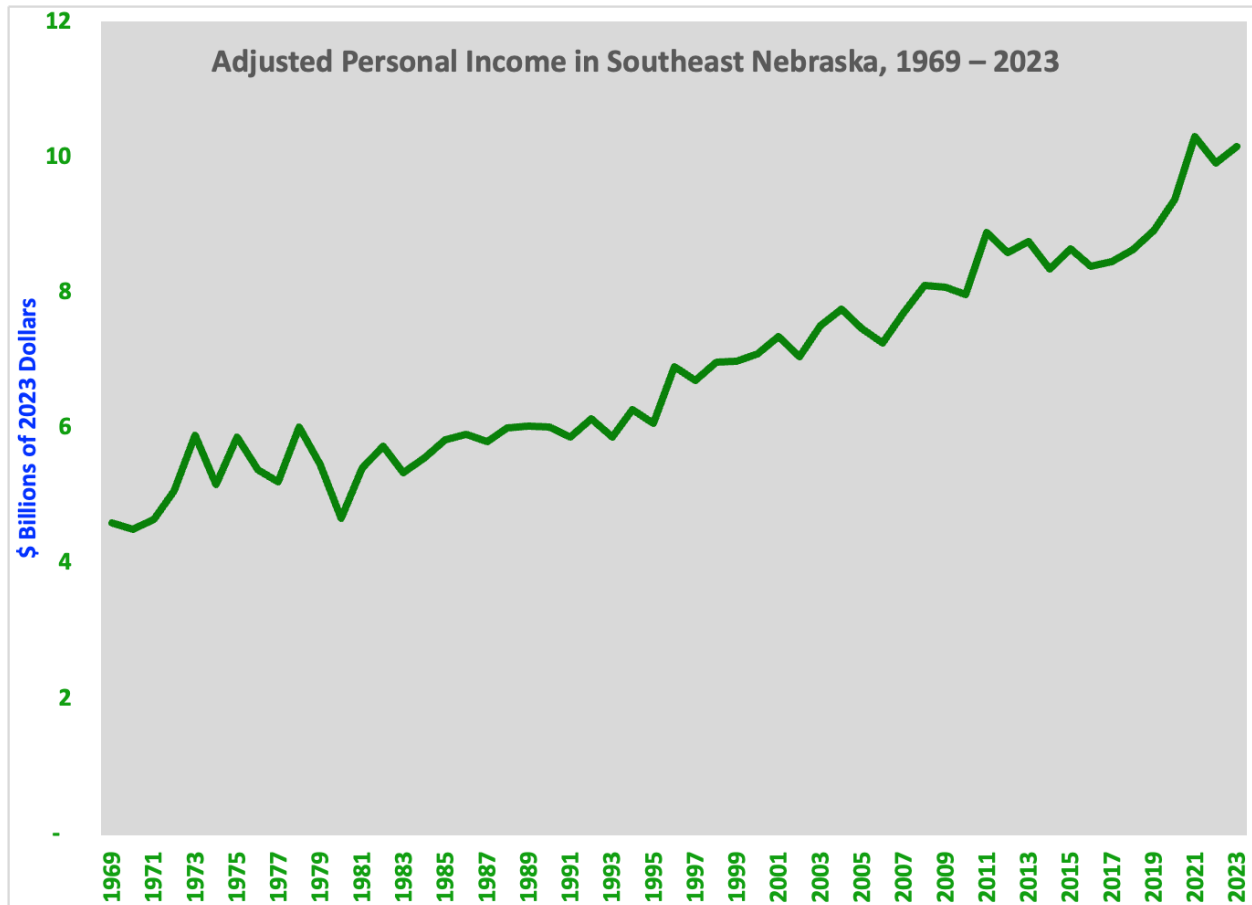
Map by Kylie Kai, Center for Rural Affairs

Personal Income, Poverty, & Food Insecurity

Personal Income in Southeast Nebraska

151,903 Southeast Nebraska residents received \$10.2 billion of income in 2023 (See Chart 1). This was an increase of 121% over \$4.6 billion in 1969, with dollars adjusted for inflation.

Chart 1: Adjusted Personal Income in Southeast 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), at \$2.1 billion. Capital income (from interest, rent, and dividends) ranked just below at \$1.8 billion (See Chart 2 below). Government workers (including educational workers) ranked third at \$1.3 billion. Manufacturing jobs accounted for \$1.1 billion, with a sudden rise since 2021. Health care workers earned another \$332 million. Wholesale and retail workers fell below this level.

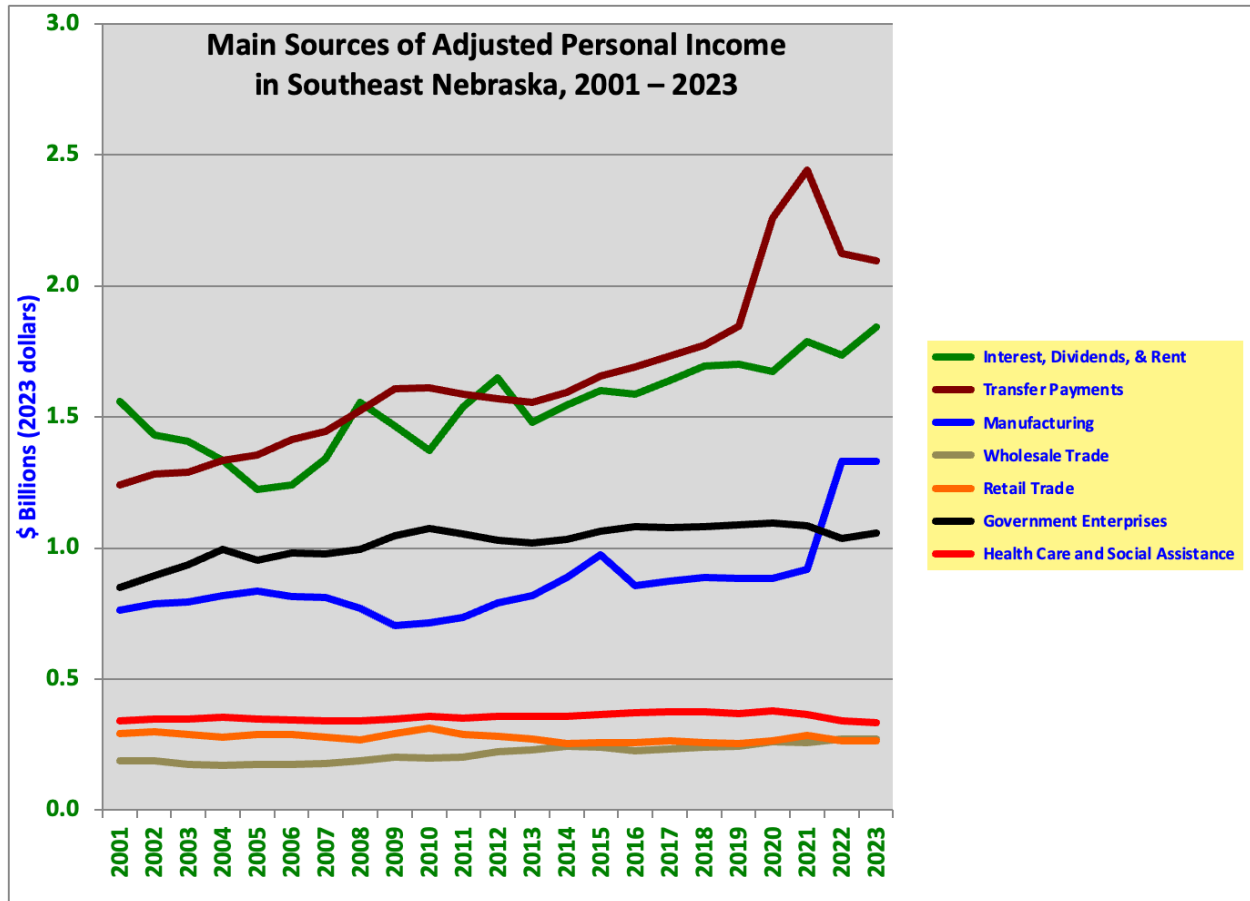
Income earned from personal transfer payments includes retirement and disability insurance benefits, medical benefits, income maintenance benefits, unemployment insurance; and veterans'

benefits. Unfortunately, the Bureau of Economic Analysis stopped publishing detailed estimates of transfer payment sources for counties and states in September, 2024 so these data are not available.

Government income includes \$51 million of income earned by federal workers and \$987 million earned by state and local government workers. Military personnel earned \$20 million of personal income.

Note that income from public sources (government jobs and transfer payments) makes up 31% of all personal income in the region.

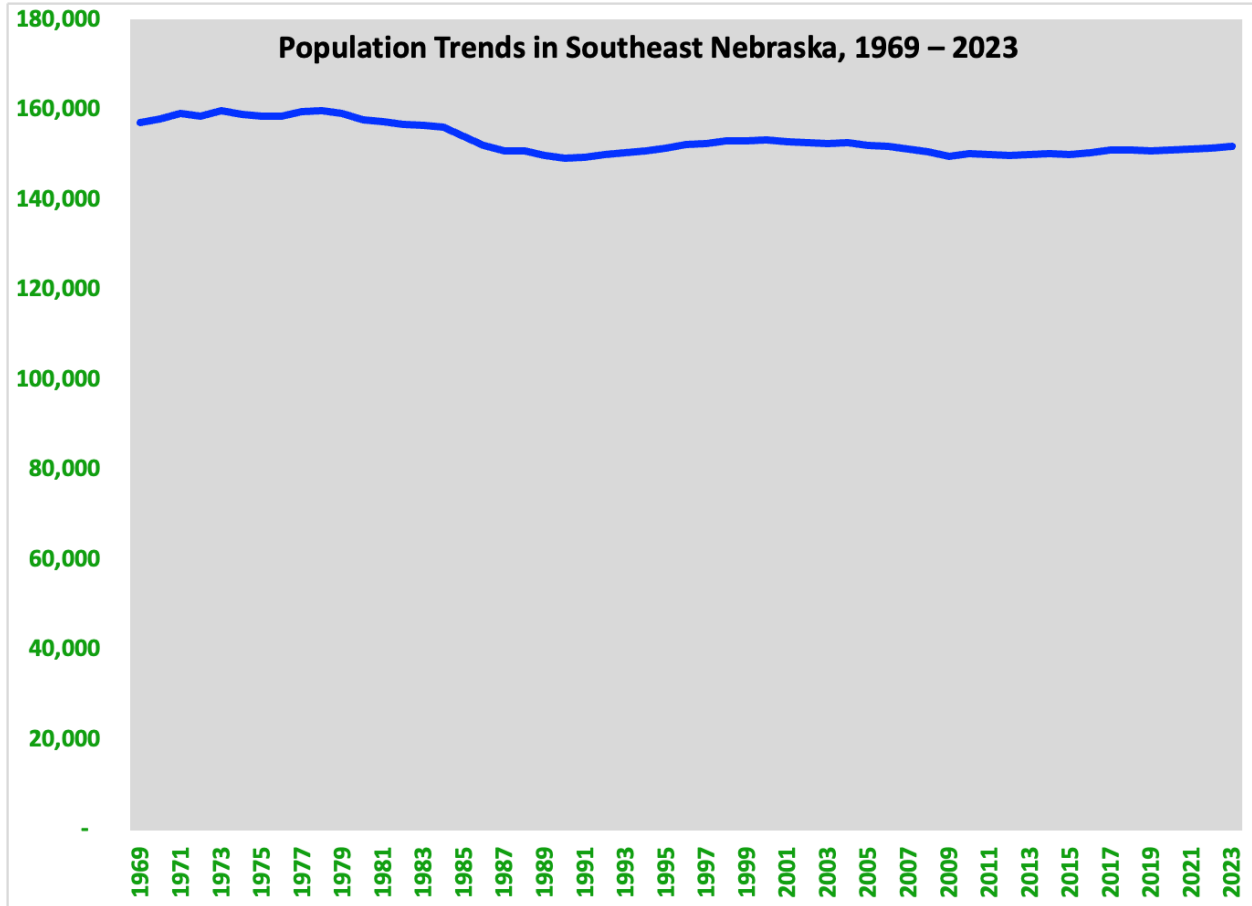
Chart 2: Main Sources of Adjusted Personal Income in the Southeast Nebraska



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

Population of the Southeast Nebraska region decreased 3.4% since 1969, after peaking in 1973, as shown on Chart 3. 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 for Southeast Nebraska residents.

Chart 3: Population Trends in Southeast Nebraska, 1969 – 2023



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023.

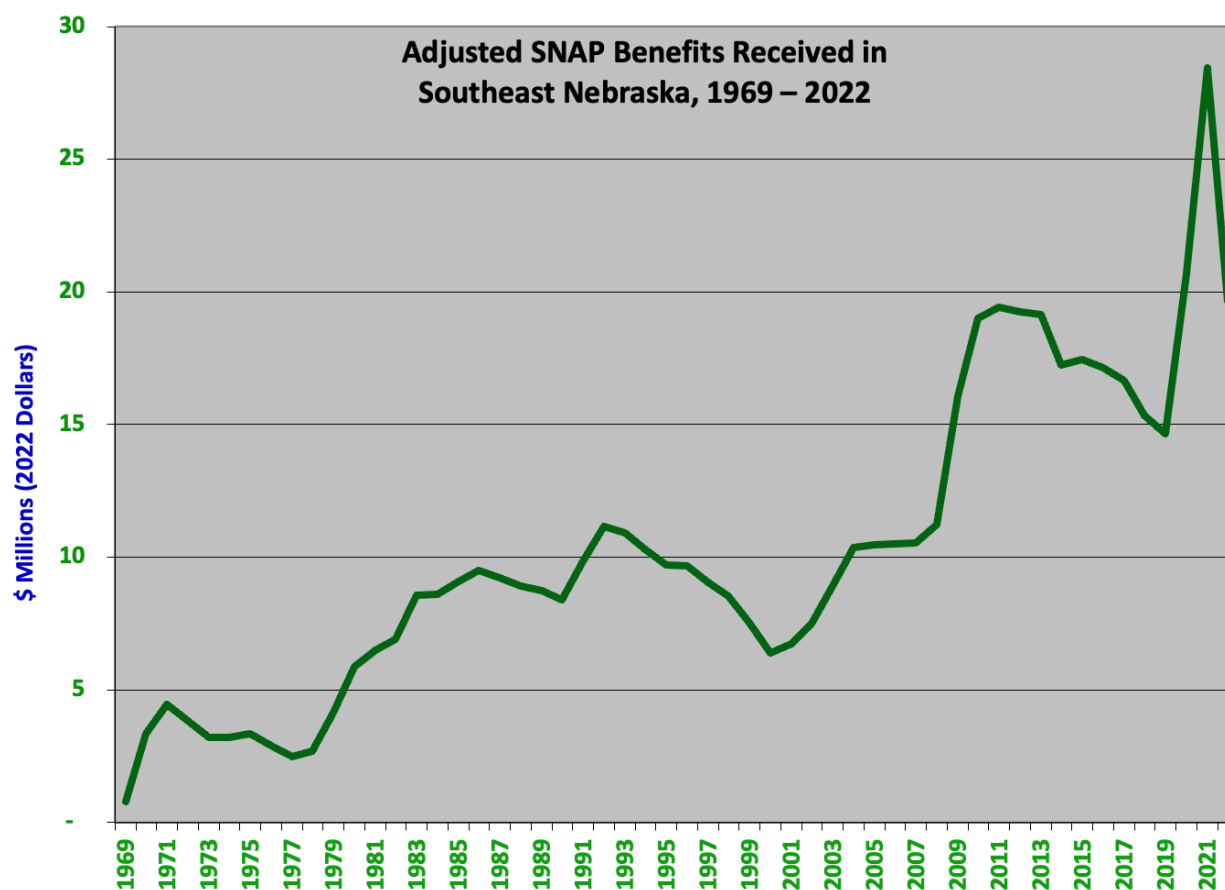
Issues Affecting Low-Income Residents of the Southeast Nebraska region

Despite rising income for the region as a whole, nearly 31,600 residents (22%) 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 similar to the poverty rate for Metro Omaha (21%) and lower than Metro Lincoln (25%), the Mid-Plains (29%) or Panhandle (30%). *Source: Federal Census of 2019–2023.*

3.6% percent of the region’s households (about 5,500 residents) earn less than \$10,000 per year. *Source: Federal Census of 2019–2023.*

About 10,000 residents (7%) collected \$20 million in SNAP benefits in 2022, down from a pandemic peak of \$28 million (See Chart 4). SNAP benefits averaged \$13 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 NASS 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 Southeast Nebraska, 1969 – 2022



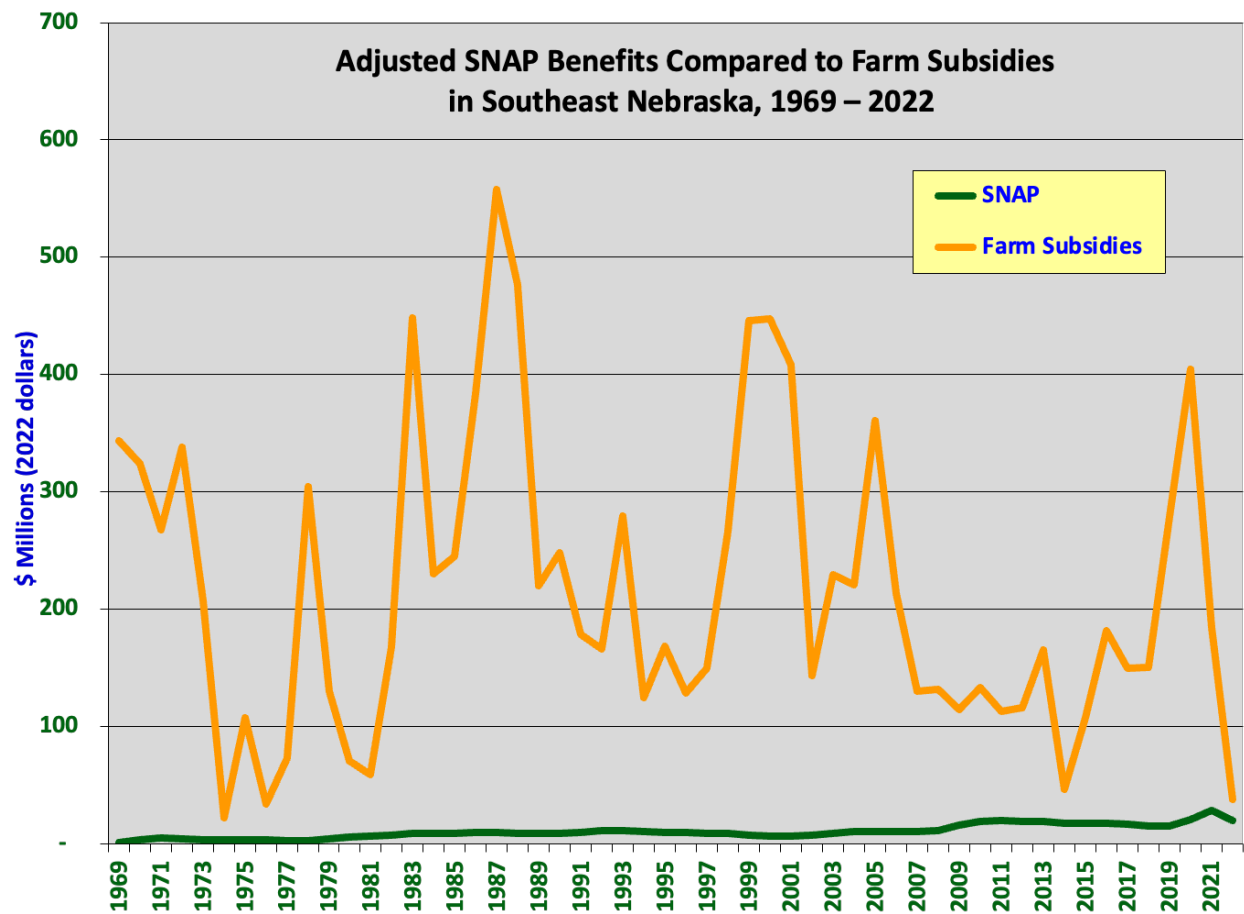
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index. SNAP data for 2023 are not available because BEA no longer publishes these reports.

The rise in SNAP receipts since 2001 has been quite sharp. This poses the question of why a farming region experiencing such a dramatic 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. 3,450 (42%) of Southeast Nebraska farmers received a combined total of \$36 million in subsidies in 2022, mostly to raise crops such as corn or soybeans that are sold as commodities, not to feed local residents. *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 Southeast Nebraska farmers received \$38 million in subsidies in 2022. *Note that this is slightly more than the total reported by the Census of Agriculture.* Average federal subsidies to Southeast Nebraska farmers were \$201 million per year during the years 1989–2022. This is 15 times the amount allocated for SNAP benefits. This comparison is shown on Chart 5. Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis.

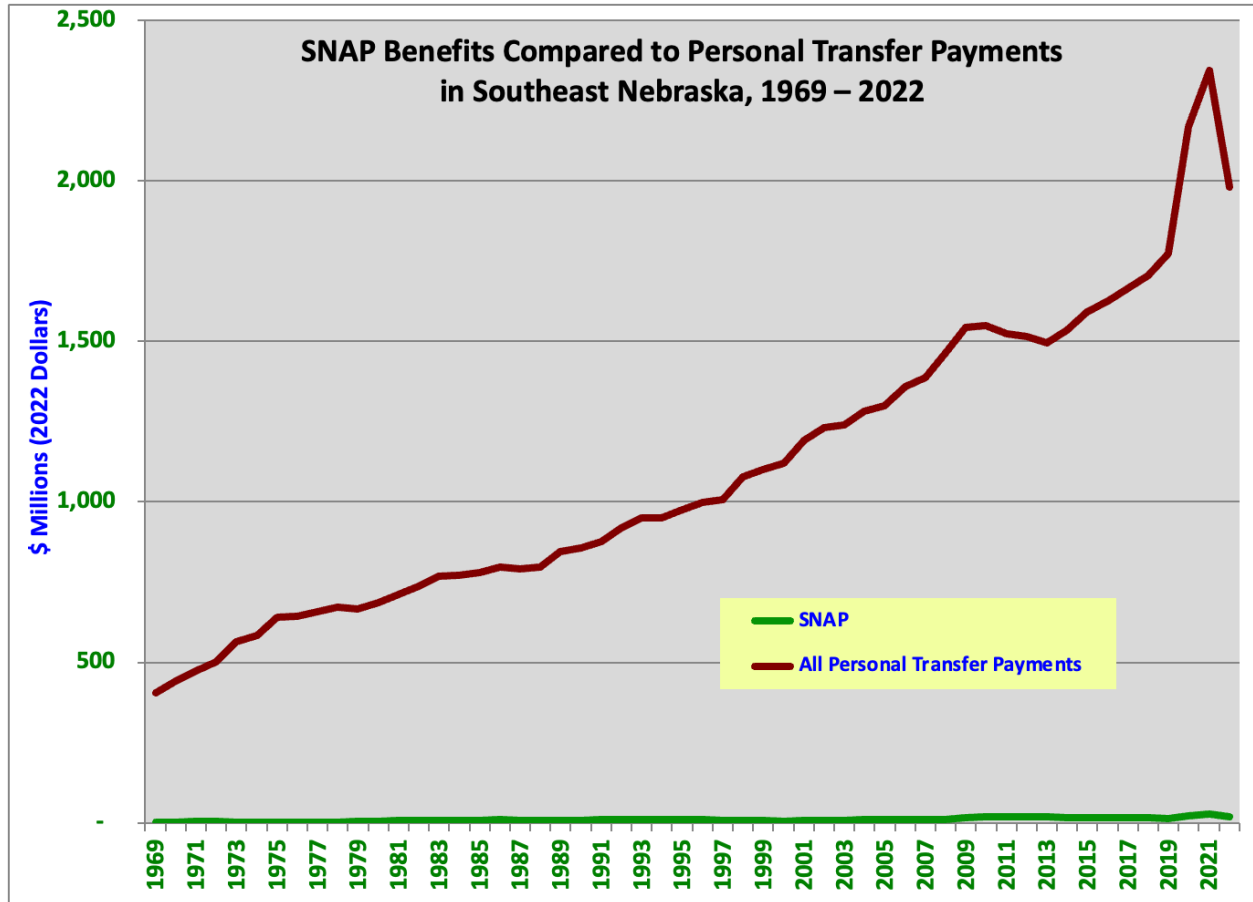
Chart 5: Adjusted SNAP Benefits Compared to Farm Subsidies in Southeast Nebraska, 1969 – 2022



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 Southeast 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%) of transfer payment receipts of \$1.9 billion.

Chart 6: Adjusted SNAP Benefits Compared to Personal Transfer Payments in Southeast 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 Southeast 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 administration in February, 2025.

Food-Related Health Conditions

No specific counts for Southeast 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 administration 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.*

Southeast 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

- 8,208 farms. This is 18% of Nebraska farms.
- Southeast Nebraska has 4,062,108 acres of farmland, 9% of Nebraska's total.
- Average size is 495 acres, 50% of the state average.
- Estimated market value of an average farm was \$3,062,675 in 2022. This is 90% of the Nebraska average.
- 2,029 (25%) Southeast Nebraska farms are less than 50 acres in size. *See Table 1.*
- 1,222 (15%) of the region's farms are 1,000 acres or more. *See Table 1.*

Farm Product Sales

- Southeast Nebraska farms sold \$3.6 billion of crops and livestock in 2022, 12% of Nebraska’s total.
- Of these sales, \$2.7 billion (75%) were crop sales, and \$936 million (25%) were livestock. These amounted to 19% and 6% of the state total, respectively. This means that the proportion of crop sales was roughly equivalent to the region’s ratio of farms (18%), but livestock sales were far lower.
- 2,706 Southeast Nebraska farms sold less than \$10,000 of products in 2022. This was 33% of the region’s farms. *See Table 2.*
- 3,550 of the region’s farms sold more than \$100,000, 43% of the region’s farms. *See Table 2.*
- 1,601 (20%) of the region’s farms sold more than \$500,000 of farm products. These farms sold \$3.0 billion of products, totaling 84% of the region’s sales.
- 3,450 (42%) of the region’s farmers received a combined total of \$36 million in subsidies in 2022.
- 2,780 (34%) of Southeast Nebraska 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	501	6%
10–49 Acres	1,528	19%
50–179 Acres	2,257	27%
180–499 Acres	1,685	21%
500–999 Acres	1,015	12%
1,000 Acres or More	1,222	15%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Table 2: Farms by Sales Range

Sales Range	Farms	Pct of Region
Less than \$2,500	1,882	22.9%
\$2,500–\$4,999	368	4.5%
\$5,000–\$9,999	456	5.6%
\$10,000–\$24,999	671	8.2%
\$25,000–\$49,999	542	6.6%
\$50,000–\$99,999	739	9.0%
\$100,000 or More	3,550	43.3%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Production Expenses

The region's farmers spent \$2.6 billion to produce crops and livestock in 2022. Detailed expenses are listed below:

Table 3: Farm Production Expenses

	\$ Millions
Fertilizers & Conditioners	331,629
Depreciation	293,645
Livestock purchased	291,363
Feed Purchased	275,669
Seeds	266,894
Cash Rents	266,048
Chemicals	239,242
Maintenance & Repairs	178,187
Other Expenses	137,030
Fuels & Oils	130,790
Hired Farm Labor	126,893
Property Taxes	125,660
Interest Expense	94,608
Utilities	48,072
Custom Work	44,900
Equipment Rental	23,424
Medical Supplies	18,445
Contract Labor	15,082

Note that this list does not add up to the total value of farm expenses listed above. This list totals about \$294 million more, because Depreciation is not included in USDA totals. Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture

Major Crops and Livestock

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

Table 4: Top Crops Produced on Southeast Nebraska Farms, 2022

	Farms	Acres
Corn for Grain	4,397	1,640,511
Soybeans	4,139	1,428,657
Forage	2,696	112,850
Wheat	258	23,485
Sorghum	160	9,177
Oats	46	751

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Broiler chickens were the principal livestock raised, as Table 5 shows. Cattle & Calves and Hogs & Pigs were also significant livestock for the region's farms.

Table 5: Major Livestock Inventories and Number Sold

Livestock	Farms	Inventory	Sold
Broiler Chickens	26	N / A	6,696,224
Cattle & Calves	2,323	294,025	309,684
Hogs & Pigs	177	281,696	885,811
Sheep & Lambs	199	7,751	N / A
Laying Hens	440	6,802	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: Southeast Nebraska's Top Farm Products in 2022

*Note: Considerable data have been suppressed for several of the counties in Southeast region, as USDA attempts to protect the confidentiality of individual farms. This means that totals cannot be comprehensively reported for the Southeast Nebraska region. This is especially true for poultry, where data from 7 of the 13 counties have been suppressed. The data in Table 6 and the pie chart below represent **minimum** values.*

See also Chart 7 on next page.

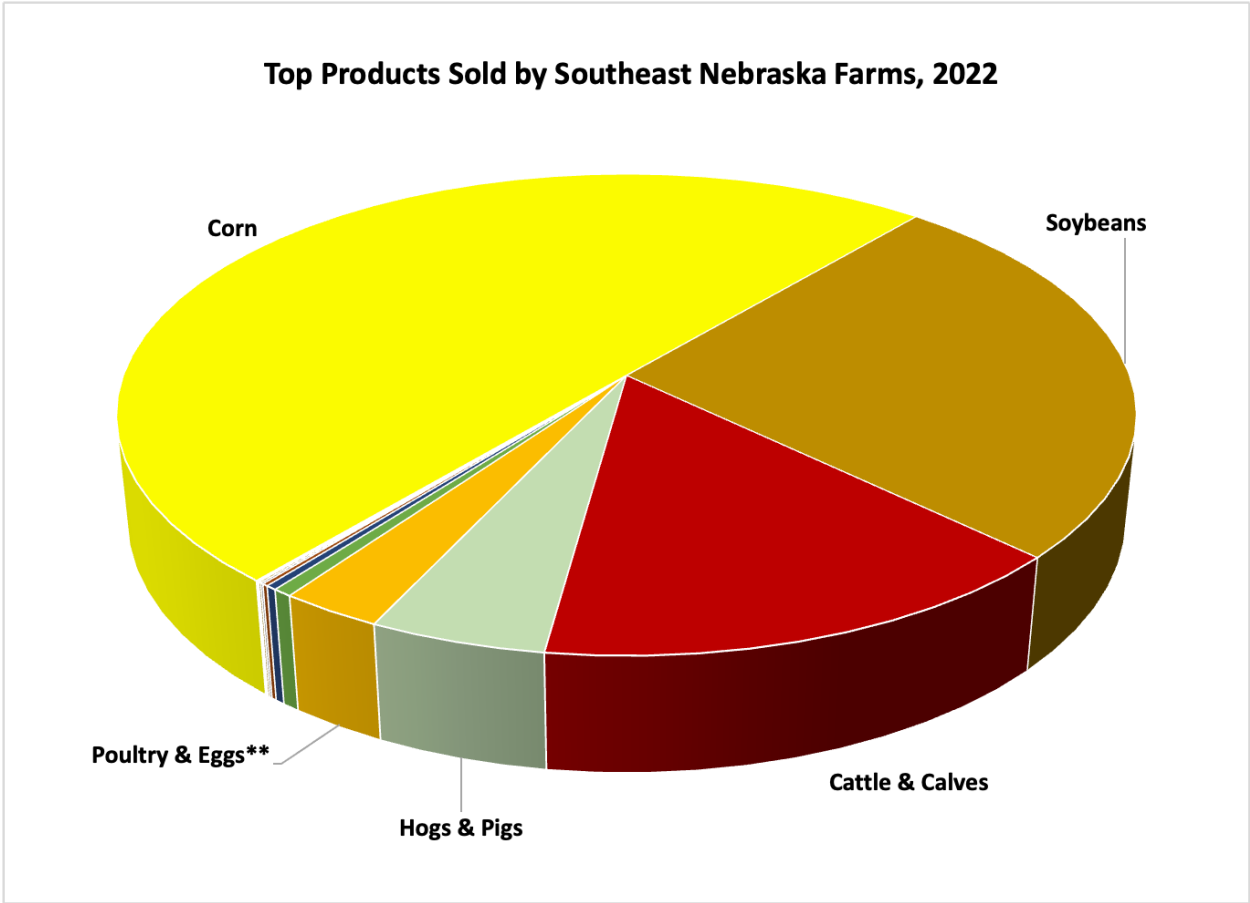
	Farms	\$ Millions
Corn for Grain	4,415	1,731.1
Soybeans	4,139	895.4
Cattle & Calves	2,140	520.7
Hogs & Pigs	190	167.3
Poultry & Eggs	291	**97.5
Other Crops & Hay	1,790	18.6
Wheat	258	10.5
Other grains	75	5.7
Sorghum	169	2.8
Nursery & Greenhouse	48	2.8
Fruits, Nuts & Berries	79	1.5
Sheep & Goats	223	1.3
Vegetables	81	0.5

Note that at \$4.4 million, direct sales from farmers to household consumers, retail stores, institutions and food hubs, along with value-added products, amount to more than the value of the 9th-ranking product, sorghum. *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 \$1.8 million, surpassed the fruit crop in value.

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022. **Note that data have been suppressed for poultry sales in 7 of the region's 13 counties.*

Chart 7: Southeast 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. In particular, data for Poultry & Egg sales were suppressed for 7 of the region’s 13 counties.



Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022. ** Note that data for Poultry & Egg sales were suppressed for 7 of the region’s 13 counties.

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	203	2,459,000	225	1,924,000
Direct to Retail & Institutions	64	201,000	43	306,000
Value-Added Products	81	1,754,000	43	770,000

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022. Note once again that due to data suppression in 8 counties, satisfying sales trends cannot be reported. The numbers in the table above and narrative below are **minimum** values.*

203 (2.5%) Southeast Nebraska farms sold \$2.5 million of farm products directly to household consumers in 2022. This was fewer farms than the 225 that sold directly five years before.

64 (0.8%) farms sold \$201,000 of products directly to retailers, institutions, and food hubs, 34% less the \$306,000 sold by 43 farms in 2017. Interestingly, the number of farms that reported selling to these channels rose 49%.

81 (1%) farms sold \$1.8 million of value-added products in 2022, 128% of the \$770,000 sold by 43 farms in 2017. The number of farms selling value-added products rose 88%.

Vegetables, Potatoes, & Orchards

At least 81 Southeast Nebraska farms raise at least 173 acres of vegetables. 26 farms raise at least 4 acres of potatoes. 83 farms in region hold at least 346 acres of orchard. Note that USDA suppresses certain data to protect the confidentiality of individual producers, so data from 5 counties is not available. Most of the vegetable production is reported in Cass, Seward, Thayer, & York Counties. Otoe County reported most of the orchard acreage.

Table 8: Vegetables, Potatoes, & Orchards on Southeast Nebraska Farms

Crop	Farms	Acres
Vegetables	81	173
Potatoes	26	4
Orchards	83	346

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Note: Once again, it should be kept in mind that data from 5 counties in the Southeast region were suppressed. Most of the vegetable production shown in Table 8 came from Cass, Seward, Thayer, & York Counties. Otoe County reported most of the 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, at minimum 30 Southeast Nebraska farms reported selling at least \$1.8 million of organic products. This is 10% of the organic farms in Nebraska, and 8% of the state's organic sales. Seward County farms accounted for most of the region's sales.

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Operator Characteristics

Race & Ethnicity

Southeast 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	17	0.12%
Asian	5	0.03%
Black or African-American	1	0.01%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	-	0.00%
White	14,453	99.61%
More than One Race	33	0.23%
Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity	100	0.69%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Female Producers

Female producers are very important to Southeast Nebraska’s farm community. 4,044 Farms (49%) have female producers. These women manage, or co-manage, 49% of the region’s farm acreage.

Table 10: Female Producers

Farms	Female Producers	Acreage
4,044	4,484	1,589,369

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Young Producers

Southeast Nebraska has 1,447 young producers. This is 16% 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
1,447	16%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Active Military or Veteran Producers

Southeast Nebraska hosts 1,086 veteran or active military farmers.

Table 12: Active Military or Veteran Producers

Military/Veterans	Percent of Nebraska
1,086	19%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Ownership

Most (91%) Southeast Nebraska farms are owned by families or family corporations. These families own 87% of the region's farm acreage, as shown in Table 13.

Table 13: Farm Ownership

Type of Ownership	Farms	Acres
Family or Individual	6,788	2,672,457
Partnership	508	395,549
Corporation (Family)	647	679,435
Corporation (Other)	58	19,774
Estate, Trust, Prison, Association, or Native Reservation, etc.	207	63,840

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Conservation Practices

As Table 14 shows, Southeast Nebraska Farms were far less likely to rely upon Bureau of Reclamation Irrigation water than farmers in the rest of the state, with only one farm drawing upon this irrigation source. Special cropping techniques were generally practiced, with less attention to rotational grazing.

Table 14: Farms Adopting Conservation Practices in Southeast Nebraska, 2022

	Farms	Pct of Nebraska
Used Bureau of Reclamation Irrigation	1	0%
Practiced Alley Cropping, Silvopasturing, or Riparian Buffers	99	28%
Harvested Biomass for Renewable Energy	49	21%
Practiced Rotational Grazing or Intensive Management	689	13%
Had On-farm Packing Facility	15	18%

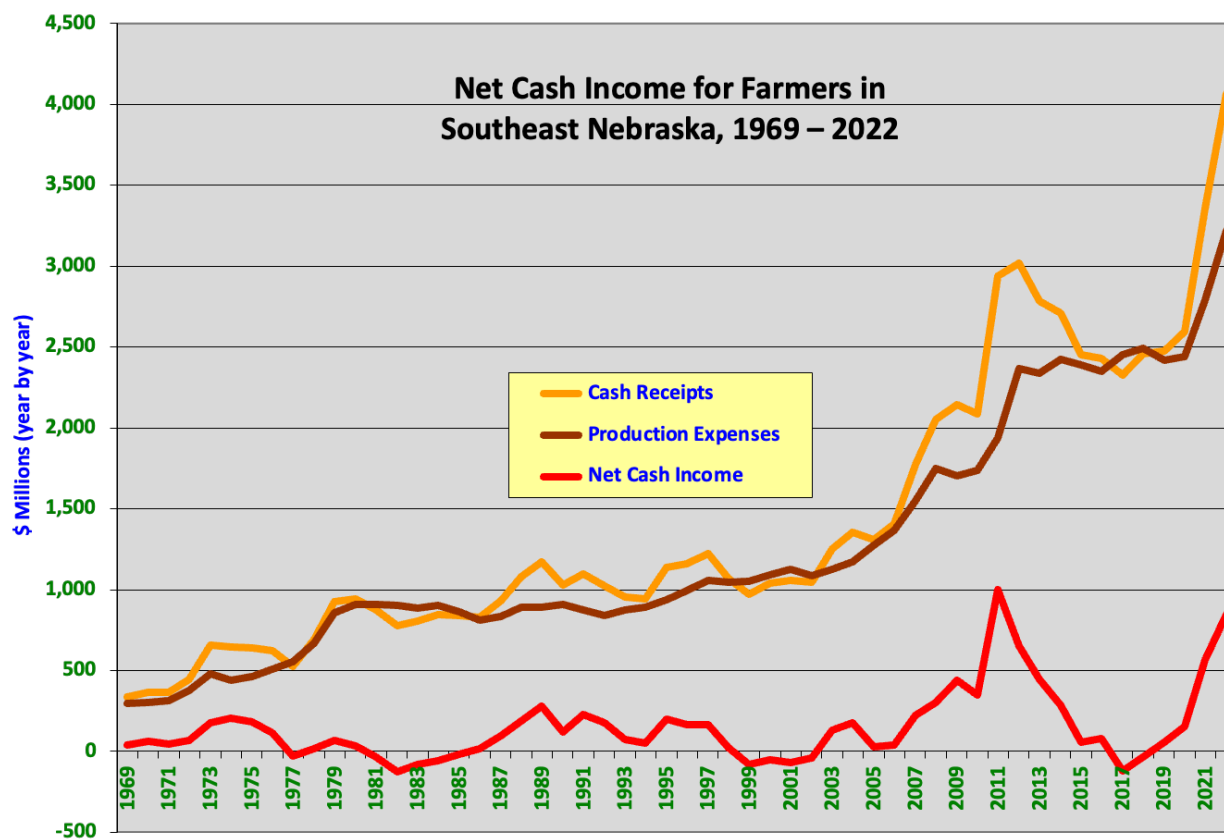
Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Income in Southeast Nebraska

Net Cash Income

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



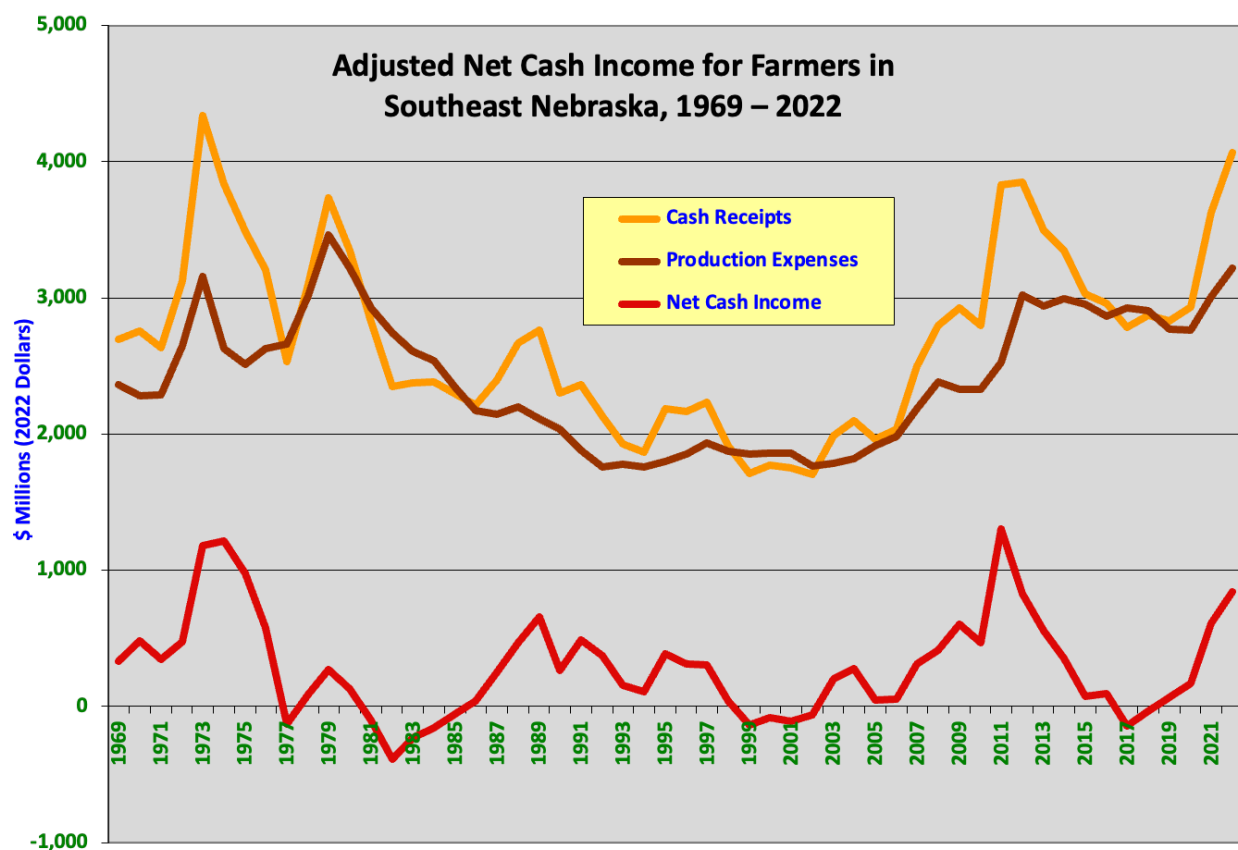
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Note that these data are no longer reported by BEA; 2023 data are not available.

Chart 8 shows that Southeast Nebraska farmers have dramatically increased sales over the past 54 years, from \$338 million in 1969 to \$4 billion in 2022. That is a 11-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 2005, then, the net cash income earned by farmers held fairly steady at low levels. In 8 of those 37 years, net cash income fell below zero for the entire Southeast 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 and 2018. It then rose to a surplus of \$844 million in 2022. Clearly, 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 Southeast 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. In fact, it could be stated that cash receipts are about the same as 54 years ago, but unsteady over that period of time. Indeed, average cash receipts of \$2.7 billion are the same as the 1969 value. Clearly, 2011 and 2022 were good years for sales. The peak year for cash receipts was 1973 during the OPEC Energy Crisis, when grain prices were artificially high. 2003 was the low point.

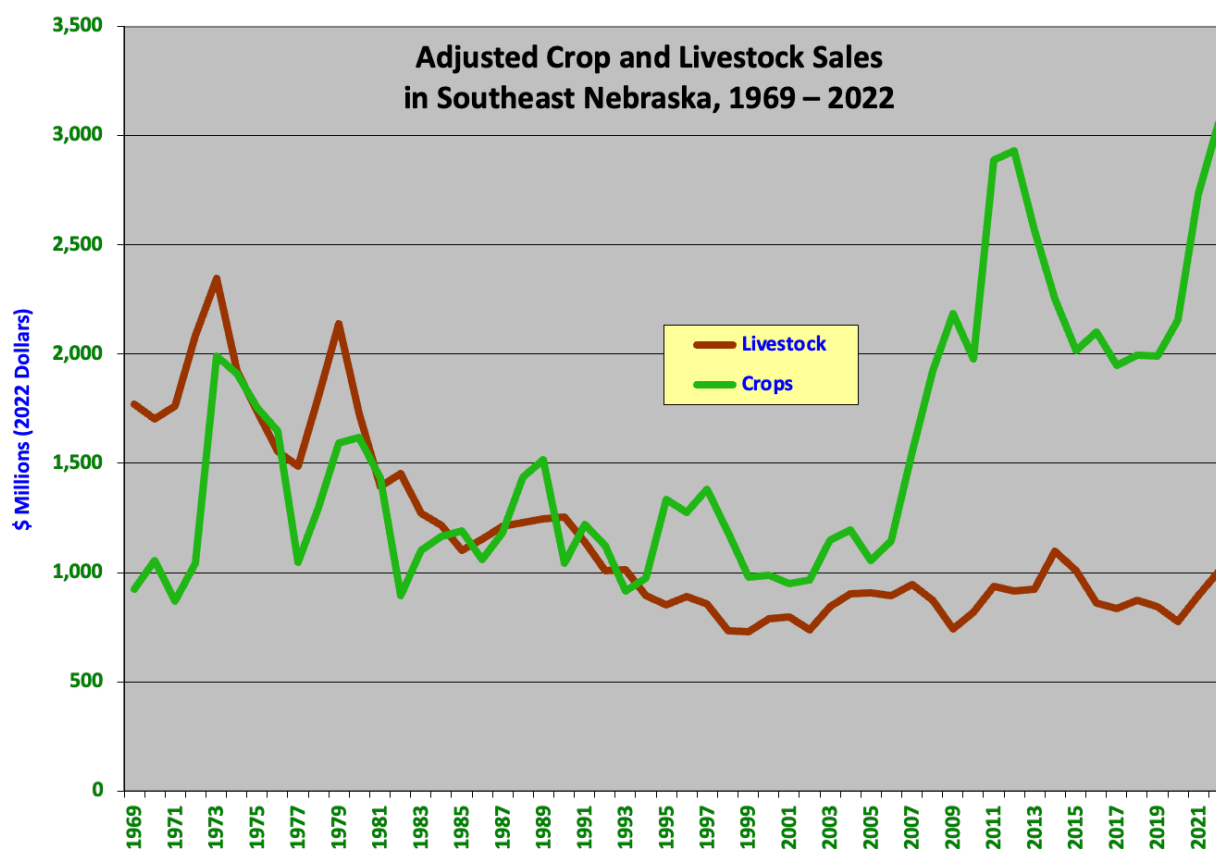
Net cash income held fairly steady across this 54-year period, at an average of \$278 million, even though it fell below zero for 12 of those years. Although the peak income of \$1.3 billion was realized in 2011, this was just barely above the peak experienced in 1974. The chart shows that these years of peak prosperity are always short-lived.

To better 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, Southeast Nebraska farmers averaged a net cash income of \$287 million, despite suffering overall losses for 6 of those years. On average, the region's farmers sold \$2.6 billion of products, spending \$2.3 billion to raise them. This resulted in an aggregate surplus of \$9.8 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 crops beginning in 2005. This offset a steady decline in livestock sales. Of course, this also means that Southeast Nebraska farmers paid more to feed livestock because grain prices were high. Overall, the regional farm economy has switched from livestock to crop production.

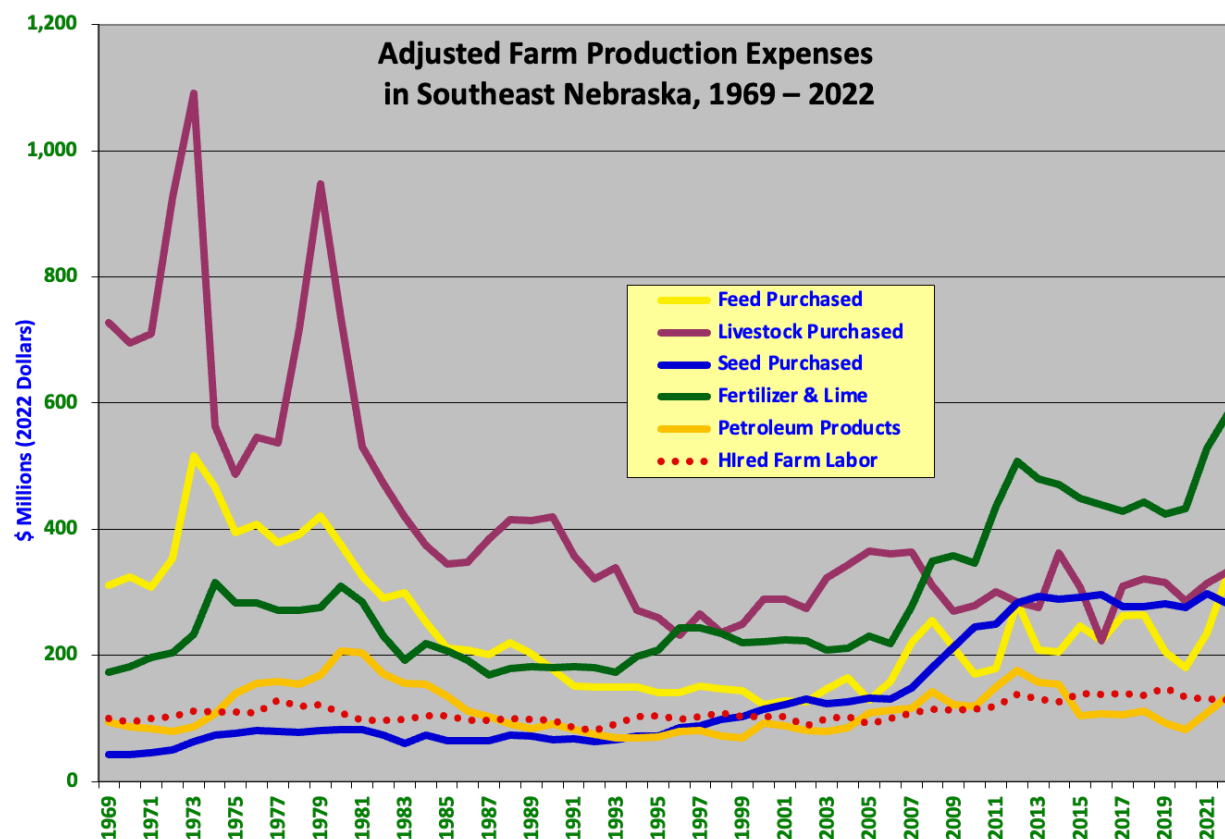
Chart 10: Adjusted Crop and Livestock Sales in Southeast Nebraska, 1969–2022



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, as Chart 11 shows. Farmers now spend less purchasing livestock, and on feed for these animals than before. Meanwhile, costs for fertilizer and seed have increased. Farmers have effectively held labor costs quite steady, while reducing fuel and oil use. *Once again, these data have been adjusted for inflation.*

Chart 11: Adjusted Farm Production Expenses in Southeast 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.

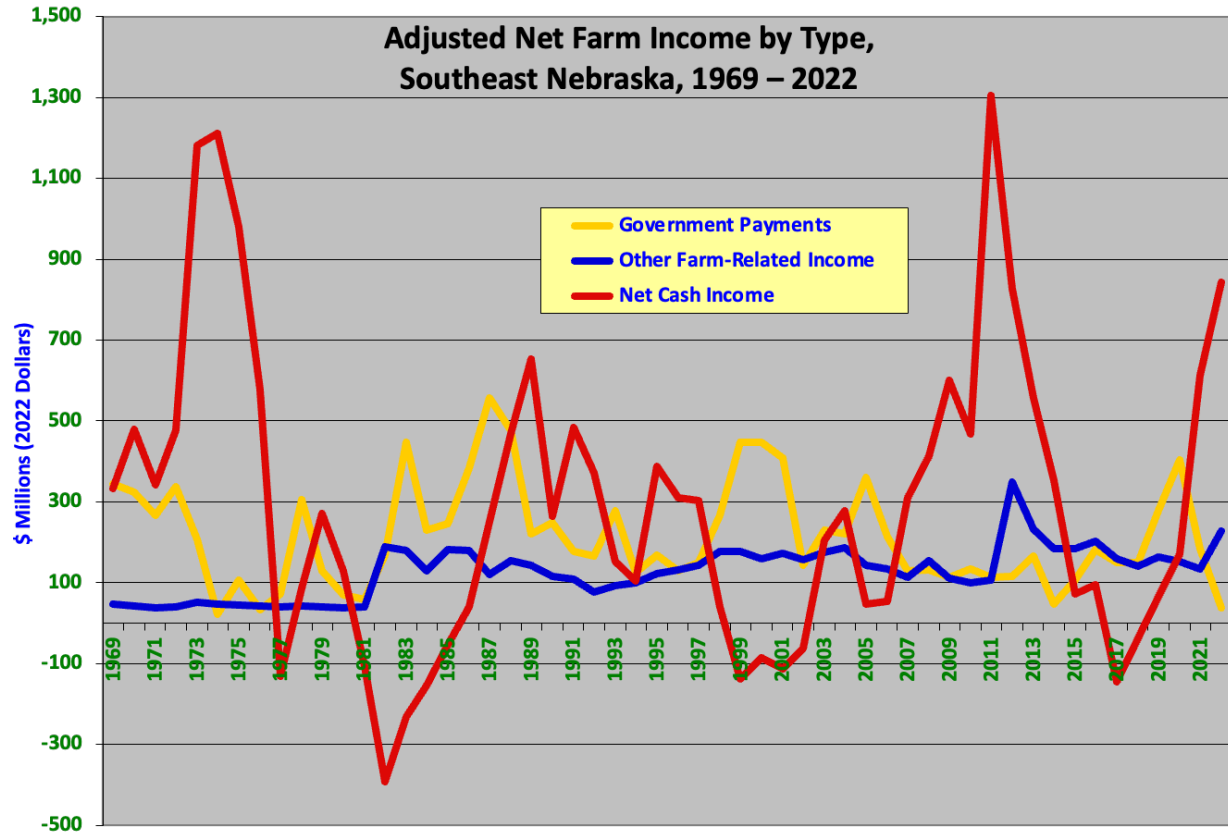
From the perspective of farm laborers, however, steady labor costs means that labor is largely not benefitting from the increased sales farmers have enjoyed. From the perspective of the region as a whole, many of the rising costs are expenses for purchasing inputs sourced outside of the region, sending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

Finally, it is useful to consider all forms of net income enjoyed by Southeast Nebraska farmers. These are shown on Chart 12. This chart shows that government payments are a relatively discrete source of income. As countercyclical payments, they are meant to fill gaps left by uncertain markets. Nonetheless they averaged \$201 million during the years 1989 to 2022, 70% of the \$287 million earned in net cash income. Moreover, the chart also shows that government payments surpassed net cash income in 16 of the past 34 years — nearly half.

The next 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 \$154 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. Most notably, cash rents are the most stable form of net income,

and hold 54% of the value 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, Southeast 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 had been reported for each county and state in the U.S., and were 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.

Southeast Nebraska Summary

8,208 Southeast Nebraska farmers sell an average of \$2.6 billion of food commodities per year (1989–2022 average), spending \$2.3 billion to raise them, for an average gain of \$287 million each year. This is an average net cash income of \$35,000 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 \$9.8 billion by selling crops and livestock over the years 1989–2022. Yet farm production costs exceeded cash receipts for 16 years of that 34-year period. Moreover, 34% of the region's farms reported net losses in 2022.

Federal farm support payments are a complementary source of net income, averaging \$201 million per year for the region for the same years. This is 70% the value of net cash income. Farmers and ranchers earn another \$154 million per year of farm-related income — primarily custom field work, and land rental income (34-year average for 1989–2022). These two sources combined (\$355 million) surpass the net cash income of farm production.

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 almost half as much to feed livestock (\$276 million) than would be required to feed the entire Southeast Nebraska population for a year (\$556 million). Indeed, there are twice as many cattle living in Southeast 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 Southeast Nebraska residents.

Southeast Nebraska Consumers

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

151,903 Southeast Nebraska consumers spend \$556 million buying food each year, including \$350 million for home use. At least 90% of this food is produced outside the region, so consumers spend more than \$500 million per year buying food sourced outside Southeast Nebraska. This is more than the net cash income that farmers earn. Only \$2.5 million of food products (0.07% of farm cash receipts and 0.44% of the region's consumer market) are sold by farmers directly to household consumers.

Farm and Food Economy Summary

Farmers earn \$287 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 \$500 million buying food sourced outside the region. If each Southeast Nebraska resident purchased (or had purchased for them) \$5 of food each week directly from some farm in the region, this would generate \$39 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.

Southeast Nebraska

Table 15: 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.

Although the prevailing food system infrastructure is far more efficient at routing food to metro areas than to Southeast Nebraska residents, the market for food in the region is nearly half of the Metro Lincoln market, as Table 17 shows.

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:

	\$ 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.

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:

	\$ 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.

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:

	\$ 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

<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>

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

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