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Tools for Community Self-determination

Lincoln 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 Lancaster & Saunders Counties in Nebraska.
(2 Counties)*

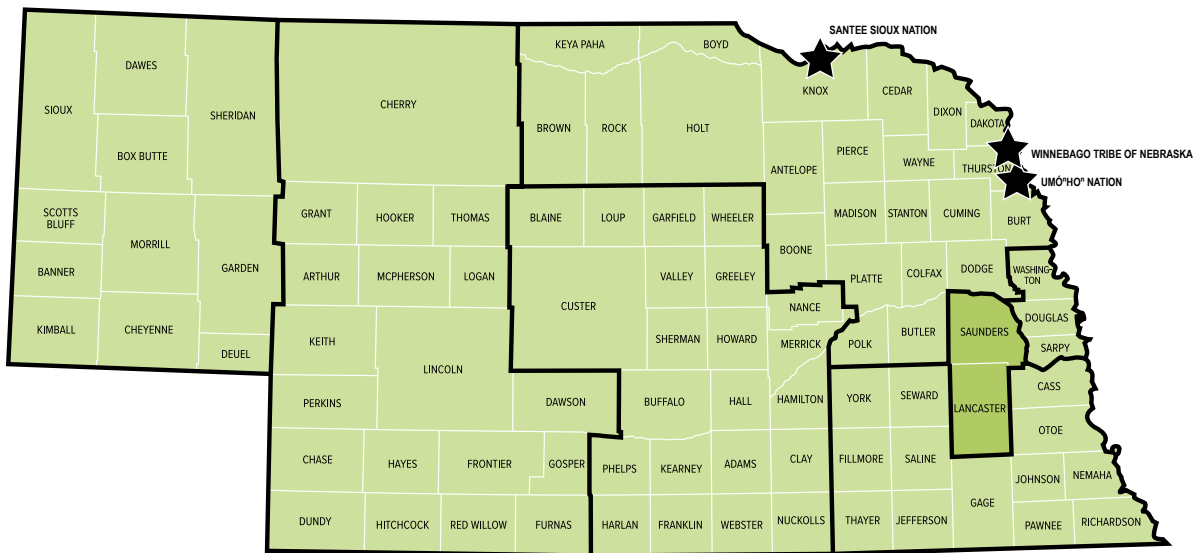


Photo Courtesy of the City of Lincoln

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Lincoln Metro



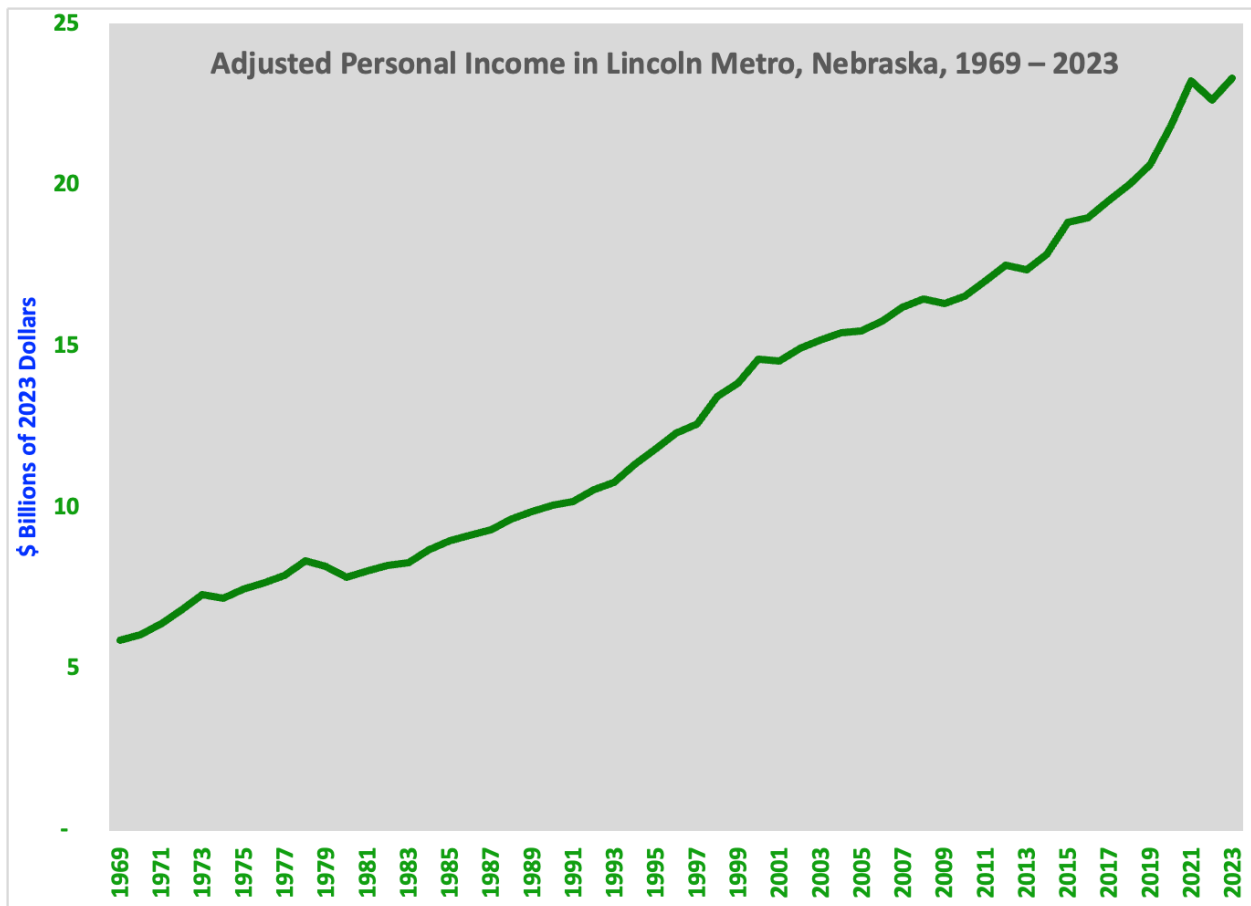
Map by Kylie Kai, Center for Rural Affairs

Personal Income, Poverty, & Food Insecurity

Personal Income in Lincoln Metro

350,179 Lincoln Metro residents received \$23.3 billion of income in 2023 (See Chart 1). This was a four-fold increase over \$5.9 billion 1969, with dollars adjusted for inflation.

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



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

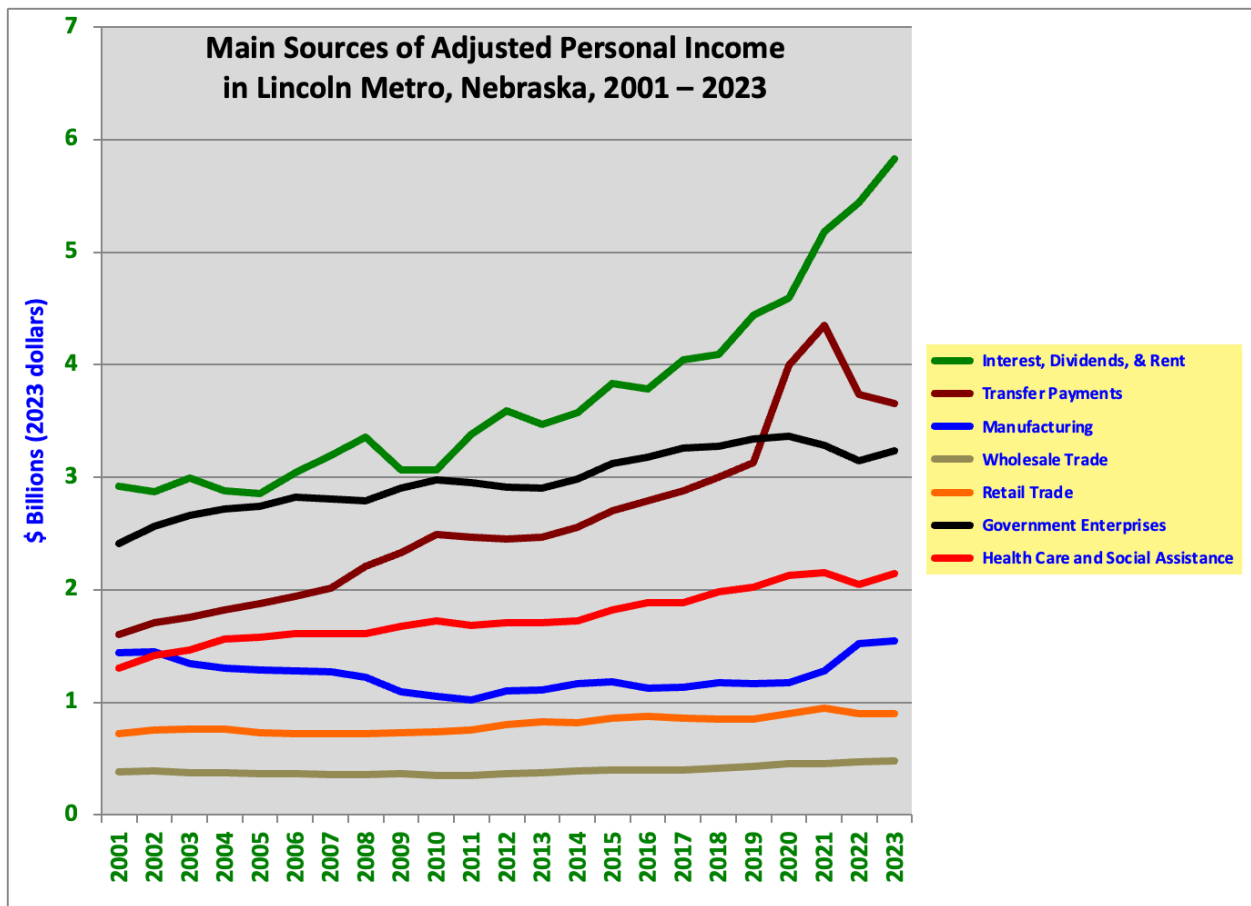
The largest source of personal income is capital income (from interest, rent, and dividends) at \$5.8 billion (See Chart 2 below). Transfer payments (from government programs such as pensions) ranked second, at \$3.6 billion. Government workers (including educational workers) ranked third at \$3.2 billion. Health care workers earned another \$2.1 billion. Manufacturing jobs accounted for \$1.5 billion. Retail and Wholesale workers earned \$900 million and \$483 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 stopped publishing detailed estimates of transfer payment sources for counties and states in September, 2024.

Government income includes \$434 million of income earned by federal workers and \$2.7 billion earned by state and local government workers. Military personnel earned \$54 million of personal income.

Note that income from public sources (government jobs and transfer payments) makes up 30% of all personal income in the region.

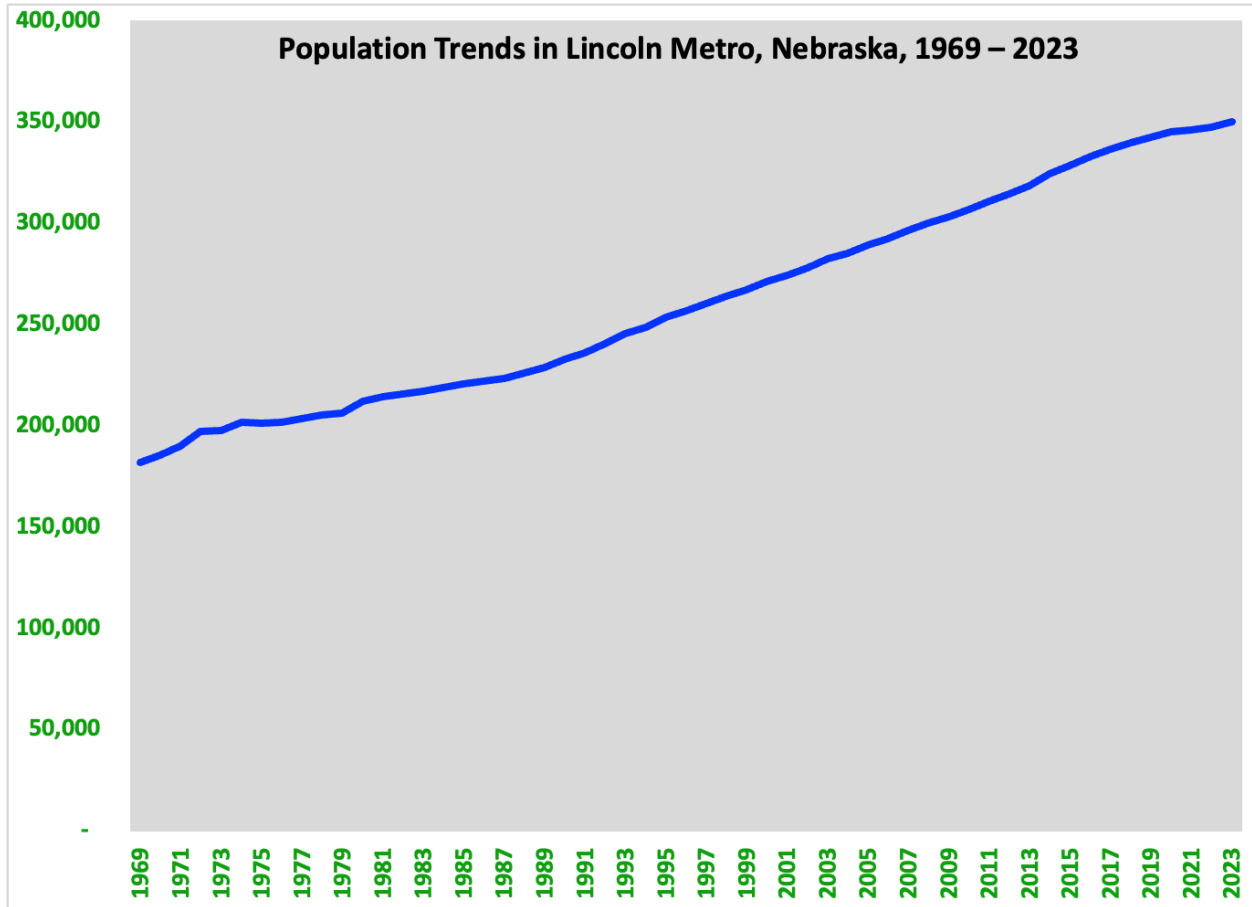
Chart 2: Main Sources of Adjusted Personal Income in the Lincoln Metro, Nebraska



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

Population of the Lincoln Metro region increased 92% since 1969, as shown on Chart 3. Thus, personal income has risen twice as fast as the population. Although serving as the state capital located in an important farming region, there has been limited public planning to assure that residents have a secure and resilient food supply.

Chart 3: Population Trends in Lincoln Metro, Nebraska 1969 – 2023



Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2023.

Issues Affecting Low-Income Residents of the Lincoln Metro region

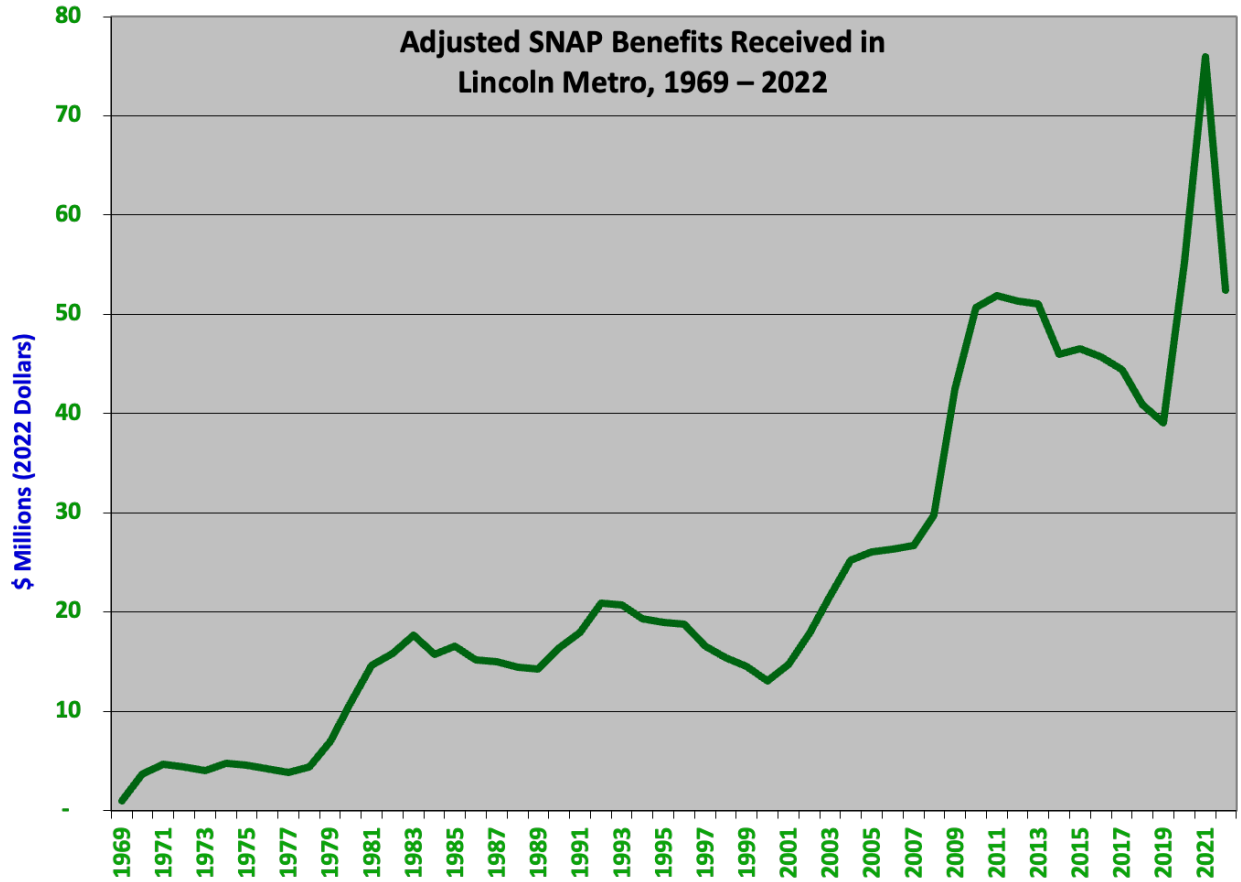
Despite rising income for the region as a whole, about 83,000 residents (25%) earn less than 185% of federal poverty guidelines. At this level of income, children qualify for free or reduced-price lunch at school under federal programs. This is a higher poverty rate than for Metro Omaha (21%), but lower than the Mid-Plains (29%) or Panhandle (30%). Sources: Federal Census of 2019-2023; USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

5% percent of the region’s households (about 15,500 residents) earn less than \$10,000 per year. Source: Federal Census of 2019-2023.

About 40,000 residents (12%) collected \$52 million in SNAP benefits in 2022, down from a pandemic peak of \$76 million (See Chart 4). SNAP benefits averaged \$29 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 Lincoln 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.

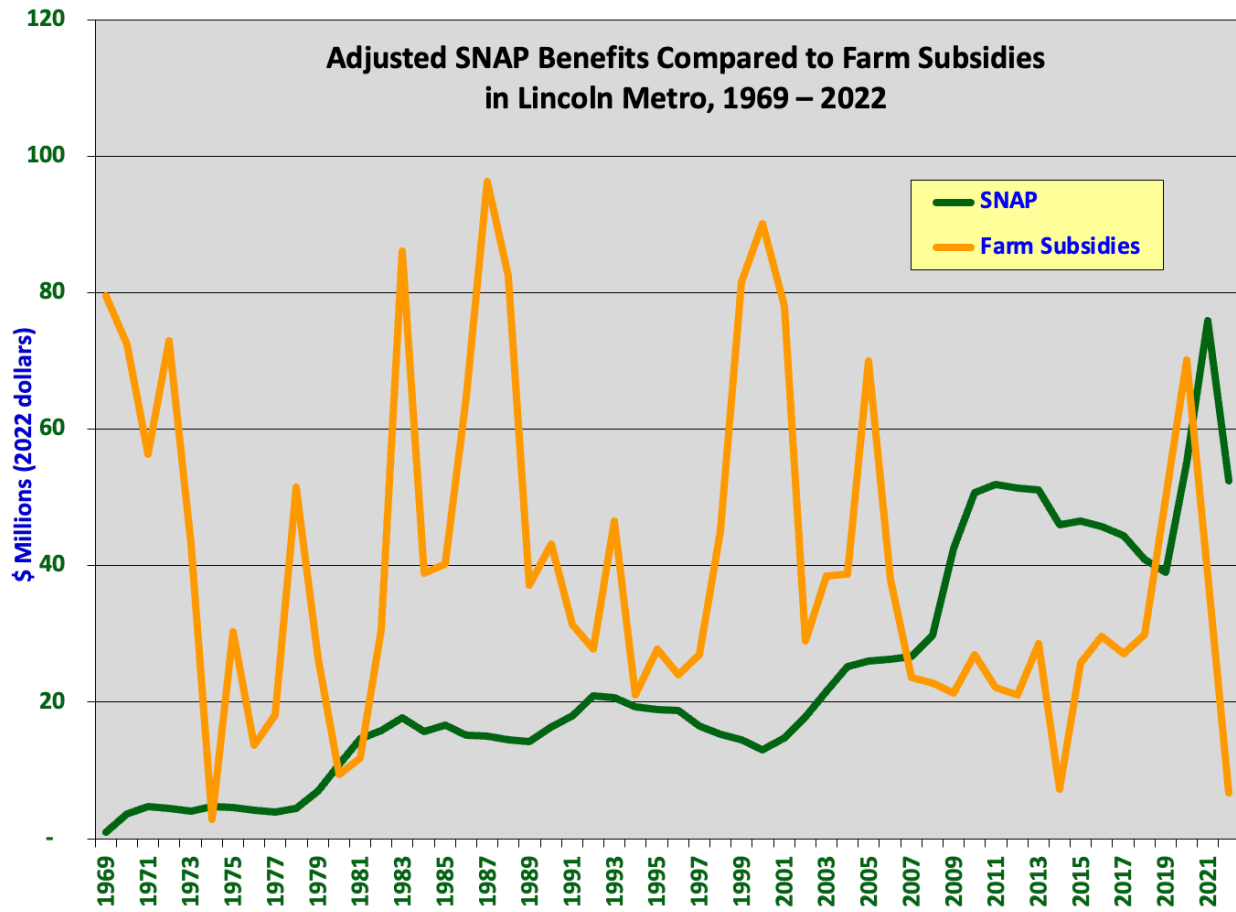
The rise in SNAP receipts since 2001 has been quite sharp. This raises the question of why a farming region is experiencing such a strong rise in demand for food relief.

In light of concerns that have been expressed about SNAP benefits, it is useful to compare these benefits to federal subsidies for farmers. 832 (29%) of Lincoln Metro farmers received a combined total of \$6.8 million in subsidies in 2022, mostly to raise crops such as corn or soybeans that are sold as commodities, not to feed local residents. The region’s farmers collected 2% of the state’s farm subsidies, although the Lincoln Metro region has 7% of the state’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 Lincoln Metro farmers received \$6.8 million in subsidies in 2022. *Note that this figure is the same as*

the total reported by the USDA NASS Census of Agriculture. Average federal subsidies to Lincoln Metro farmers were \$36 million per year during the years 1989–2022. That is 125% the amount allocated for SNAP benefits. This comparison is shown on Chart 5. Considering just the year 2022, when both SNAP receipts and farm subsidies were far below average levels, each low-income household received about \$1,300, while each farm family received \$8,000 in subsidies, six times as much.

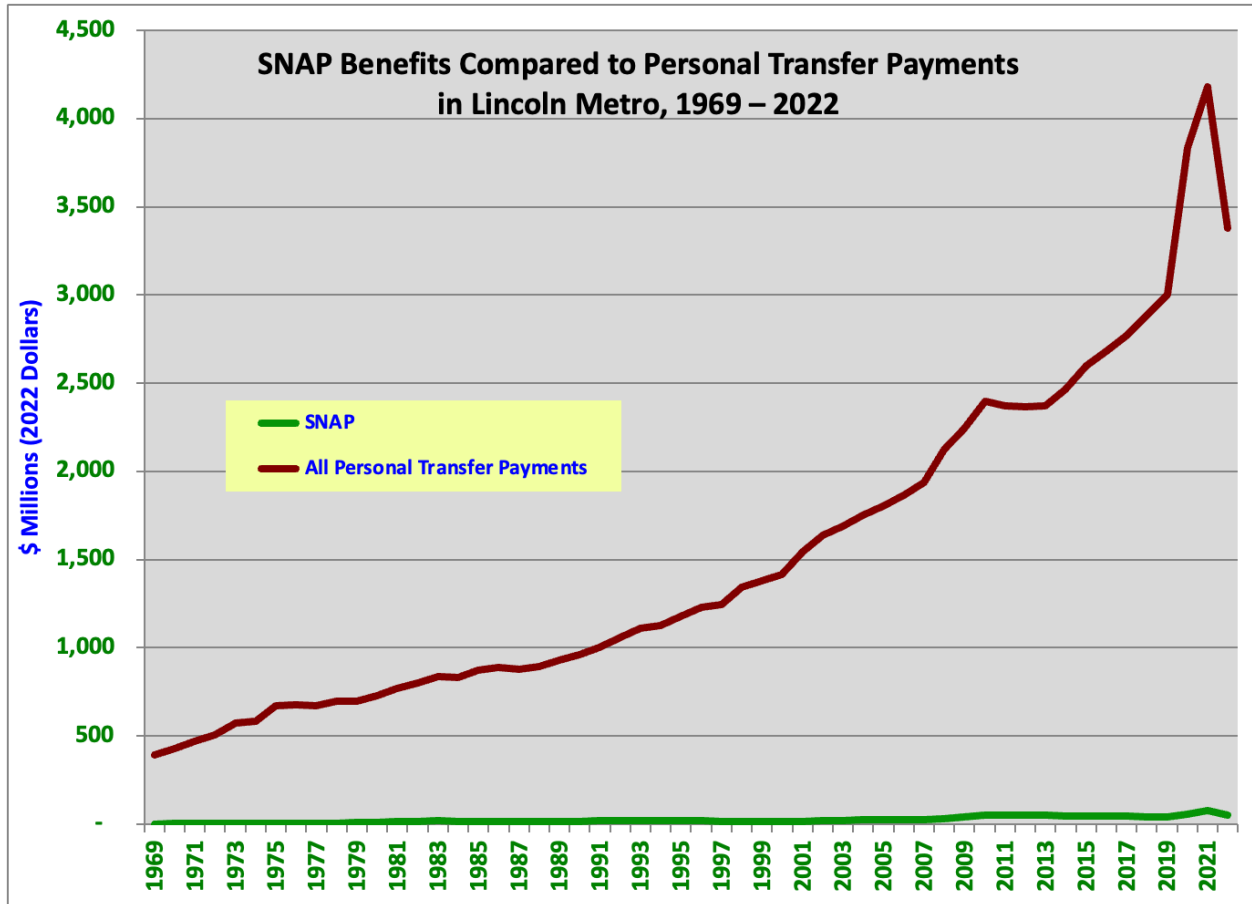
Chart 5: Adjusted SNAP Benefits Compared to Farm Subsidies in Lincoln Metro, 1969 – 2022



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 Lincoln Metro residents, as Chart 6 shows. SNAP benefits are included in the total transfer payments depicted on the chart, but are a small amount (1.6%) of transfer payment receipts of \$3.4 billion.

Chart 6: Adjusted SNAP Benefits Compared to Personal Transfer Payments in Lincoln 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 Lincoln 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 Lincoln 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.*

Lincoln Metro 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

- 2,914 farms. This is 7% of Nebraska farms.
- Lincoln Metro has 883,225 acres of farmland, 2% of Nebraska’s total.
- Average size is 303 acres, 31% of the state average.
- Estimated market value of an average farm was \$ 2,128,069 in 2022. This is 63% of the Nebraska average.
- 1,305 (45%) Lincoln Metro farms are less than 50 acres in size. *See Table 1.*
- 251 (9%) of the region’s farms are 1,000 acres or more. *See Table 1.*

Farm Product Sales

- Lincoln Metro farms sold \$779 million of crops and livestock in 2022, 3% of Nebraska’s total.
- Of these sales, \$533 million (68%) were crop sales, and \$246 million (32%) were livestock. These amounted to 4% and 2% of the state total, respectively.
- 1,275 Lincoln Metro farms sold less than \$10,000 of products in 2022. This was 44% of the region’s farms. *See Table 2.*
- 822 (28%) of the region’s farms sold more than \$100,000. *See Table 2.*
- 362 (12%) of the region’s farms sold more than \$500,000 of farm products. These farms sold \$640 million of products, 82% of the region’s sales.
- 832 (29%) of the region’s farmers received a combined total of \$6.8 million in subsidies in 2022.
- 49% of Lincoln 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	275	9.4%
10–49 Acres	1,030	35.3%
50–179 Acres	710	24.4%
180–499 Acres	418	14.3%
500–999 Acres	230	7.9%
1,000 Acres or More	251	8.6%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Table 2: Farms by Sales Range

Sales Range	Farms	Pct of Region
Less than \$2,500	771	26.5%
\$2,500–\$4,999	255	8.8%
\$5,000–\$9,999	249	8.5%
\$10,000–\$24,999	303	10.4%
\$25,000–\$49,999	266	9.1%
\$50,000–\$99,999	248	8.5%
\$100,000 or More	822	28.2%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Production Expenses

The region’s farmers spent \$597 million to produce crops and livestock in 2022. The largest expense was purchasing livestock, with fertilizer expenses ranking second. Write-offs for depreciation was the third largest expense. Detailed expenses are listed below:

Table 3: Farm Production Expenses

	\$ Millions
Livestock Purchased	93.6
Fertilizers & Conditioners	67.4
Depreciation	67.2
Feed Purchased	67.0
Seeds	54.9
Cash Rents	51.3
Chemicals	49.0
Maintenance & Repairs	40.4
Property Taxes	36.5
Hired Farm Labor	34.3
Fuels & Oils	26.1
Other Expenses	24.4
Interest Expense	21.9
Utilities	10.5
Custom Work	8.4
Medical Supplies	6.2
Equipment Rental	3.4
Contract Labor	2.0

Note that this list does not add up to the total value of farm expenses listed above. It is about \$67 million more, because USDA does not include Depreciation in the overall total. Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture.

Major Crops and Livestock

As Table 4 shows, Lincoln Metro crop farmers primarily grow corn, soybeans, and forage.

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

	Farms	Acres
Corn for Grain	1,270	352,984
Soybeans	1,188	331,018
Forage	1,106	39,190
Wheat	67	5,051
Sorghum	10	724
Oats	5	97

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022. Sales data for Lancaster County oat farmers were suppressed.

Broiler chickens were the principal livestock raised, as Table 5 shows. Cattle & Calves and Hogs & Pigs were also important products.

Table 5: Major Livestock Inventories and Number Sold

Livestock	Farms	Inventory	Animals Sold
Cattle & Calves	608	80,058	91,622
Hogs & Pigs	21	12,904	108,047
Layers	267	7,659	N / A
Sheep & Lambs	55	1,879	N / A
Broilers	21	N / A	7,305,180

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: Lincoln Metro’s Top Farm Products in 2022

Curiously, given the Lincoln Metro’s substantial population, the top farm products reflect the same commodity agriculture as found in rural regions. One difference is the greater attention paid to landscaping, nursery, and greenhouse products, yet these often signify that land is being removed from production for new development.

Note: Data covering sorghum sales were suppressed for the Lincoln Metro region, as USDA attempts to protect the confidentiality of individual farms. The symbol (D) signifies this.

See also Chart 7 on next page.

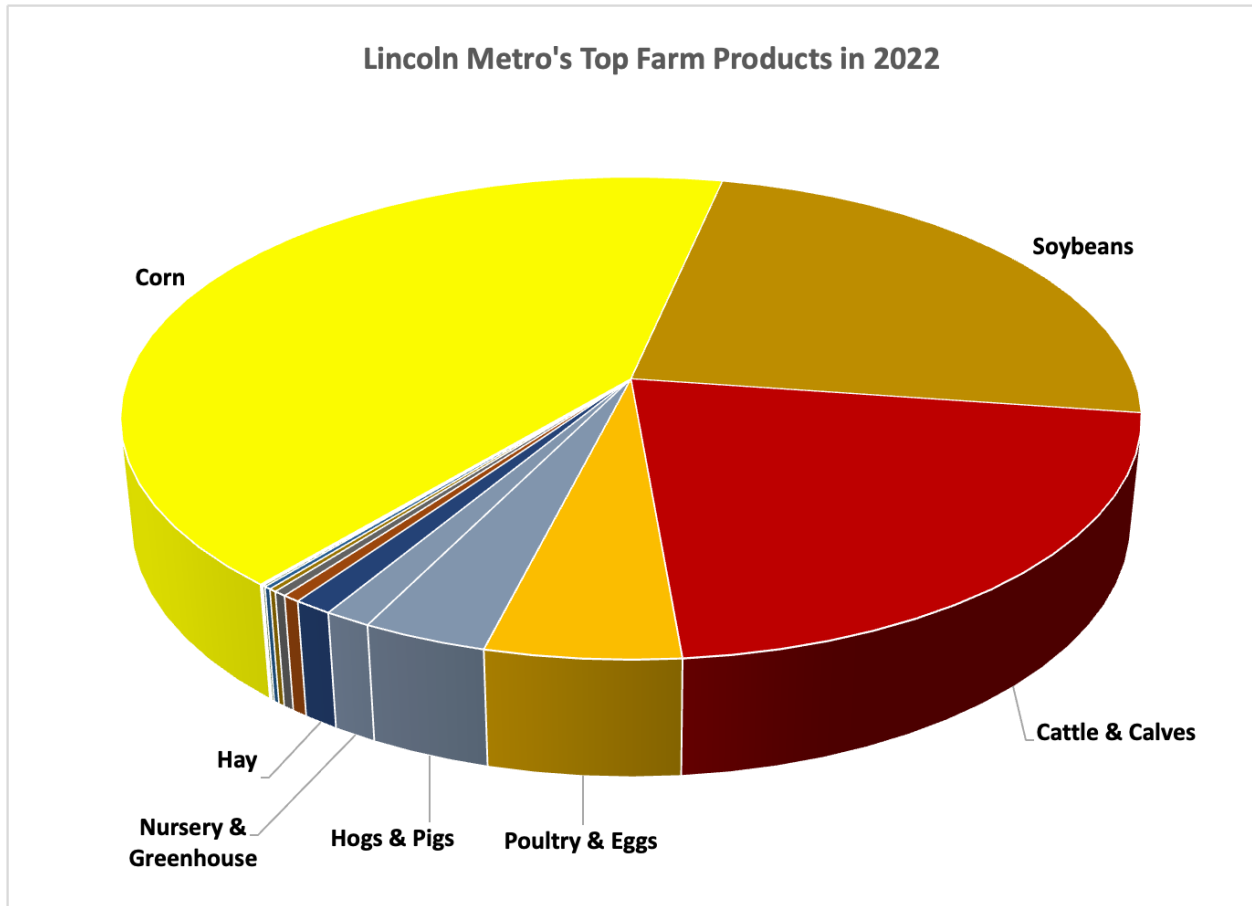
	Farms	\$ Millions
Corn	1,274	323.8
Soybeans	1,188	182.9
Cattle & Calves	67	163.7
Poultry & Eggs	11	40.7
Hogs & Pigs	821	26.1
Nursery & Greenhouse	15	9.8
Other Crops & Hay	72	8.1
Vegetables & Potatoes	73	3.7
Wheat	87	2.7
Sheep & Goats	561	1.6
Fruits, Nuts, & Berries	39	1.5
Horses & Ponies	164	0.7
Other Grains	70	0.4
Other Livestock	110	0.4
Sorghum	53	(D)

Note that at \$5.5 million, direct sales from farmers to household consumers, retail stores, institutions and food hubs as well as value-added products amount to more than the value of the 8th-ranking product, vegetables and potatoes (although there would be considerable overlap in these categories since vegetable and potatoes might well be sold directly). *See details below.* Organic product sales, at \$8.9 million, surpassed the value of Other Crops & Hay.

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Chart 7: Lincoln Metro's Top Farm Products in 2022

Data from Table 6 on previous page.



Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Foods Raised More Directly for Household Consumption

Direct Sales

Table 7: Direct Sales to Households & Institutions

	Farms 2022	Sales \$ 2022	Farms 2017	Sales \$ 2017
Direct to Households	127	2,287,000	186	1,326,000
Direct to Retail & Institutions	31	421,000	41	915,000
Value-Added Products	57	2,831,000	59	2,649,000

*Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022. The numbers in the table above and narrative below are **minimum** values.*

127 (4.4%) of Lincoln Metro farms sold at least \$2.3 million of farm products directly to household consumers in 2022. Sales increased considerably despite the fact that far fewer reported direct sales than for five years before.

31 (1.1%) farms sold at least \$421,000 of products directly to retailers, institutions, and food hubs, less than half the \$915,000 reported by 41 farms in 2017.

57 (2.0%) farms sold \$2.8 million of value-added products in 2022, about the same as 2017 sales, by a similar number of farms.

Vegetables, Potatoes, & Orchards

72 Lincoln Metro farms raised 308 acres of vegetables in 2022. 10 farms raised potatoes. The metro area had 77 farms hosting 286 acres of orchard.

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

Crop	Farms	Acres
Vegetables	72	308
Potatoes	10	1
Orchards	77	286

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Organic Food Sales

16 Lincoln Metro farms reported selling \$8.9 million of organic products.

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Operator Characteristics

Race & Ethnicity

Lincoln Metro 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	0.06%
Asian	8	0.16%
Black or African-American	4	0.08%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	-	0.00%
White	5,120	99.46%
More than One Race	13	0.25%
Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity	42	0.8%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Female Producers

Female producers are very important to Lincoln Metro’s farm community. 1,604 farms (55%) have female producers. These women manage, or co-manage, 44% of the region’s farm acreage.

Table 10: Female Producers

Farms	Female Producers	Acreage
1,604	1,788	385,841

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Young Producers

Lincoln Metro has 432 young producers. This is 5% 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
432	5%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Active Military or Veteran Producers

Lincoln Metro hosts 404 veteran or active military farmers.

Table 12: Active Military or Veteran Producers

Military/Veterans	Percent of Nebraska
404	7%

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Ownership

Most (92%) Lincoln Metro farms and 89% of farm acres are owned by families or family corporations.

Table 13: Farm Ownership

Type of Ownership	Farms	Acres
Family or Individual	2,498	666,539
Partnership	150	71,854
Corporation (Family)	175	116,637
Corporation (Other)	19	2,200
Estate, Trust, Prison, Association, or Native Reservation, etc.	72	25,995

Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Conservation Practices

As Table 14 shows, Lincoln Metro farms did not rely upon Bureau of Reclamation Irrigation water. Special cropping techniques are in use, and the region has a strong proportion of on-farm packing facilities due to the proximity of metro markets.

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

	Farms	Pct of Nebraska
Used Bureau of Reclamation Irrigation	0	0%
Practiced Alley Cropping, Silvopasturing, or Riparian Buffers	37	10%
Harvested Biomass for Renewable Energy	16	7%
Practiced Rotational Grazing or Intensive Management	220	4%
Had On-farm Packing Facility	16	19%

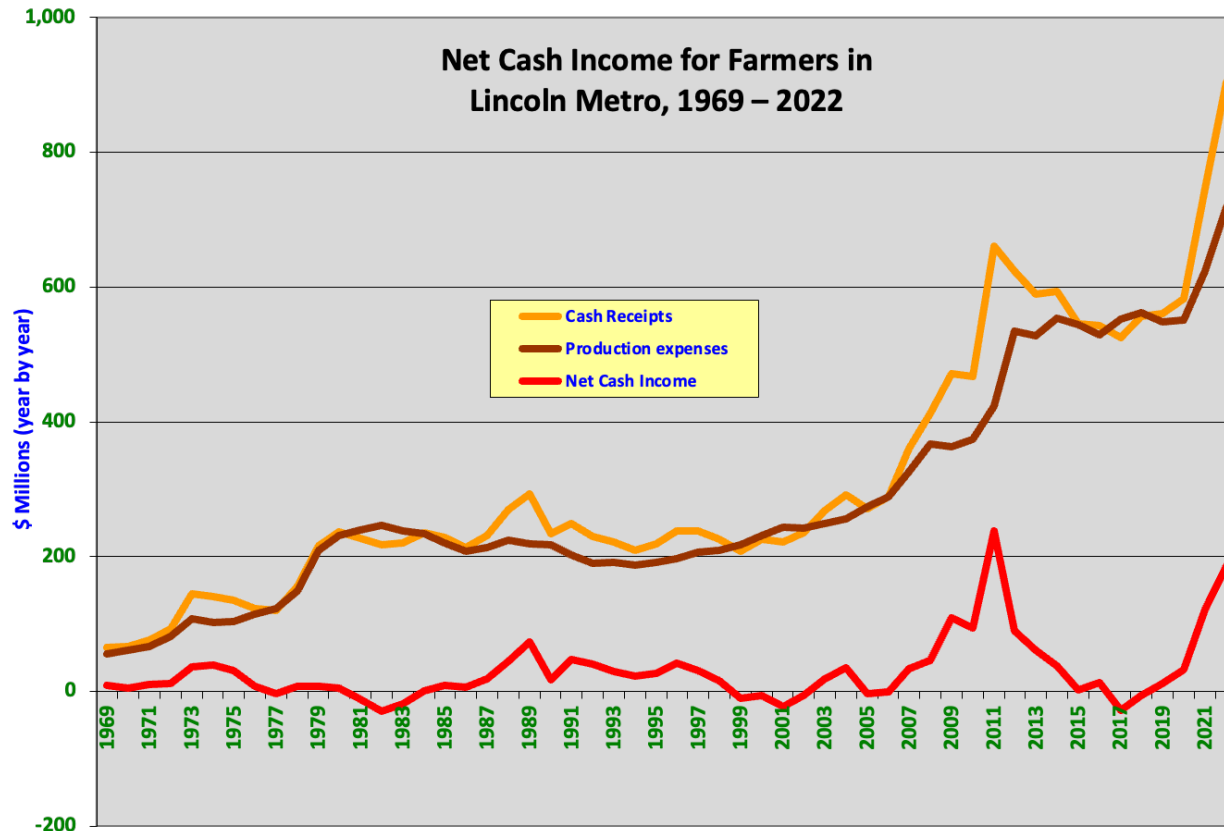
Source: USDA NASS Census of Agriculture, 2022.

Farm Income in Lincoln Metro, Nebraska

Net Cash Income

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



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

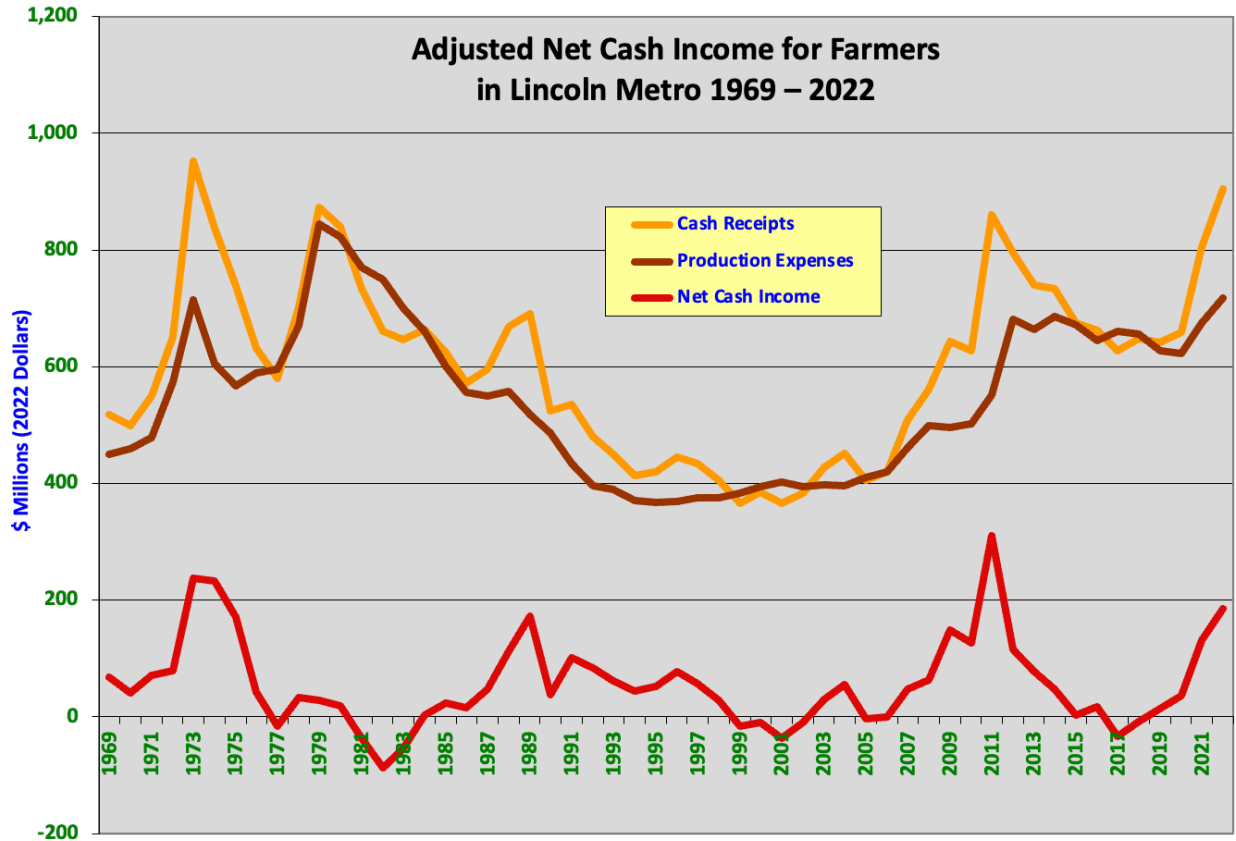
Chart 8 shows that Lincoln Metro farmers have solidly increased sales over the past 54 years, from \$65 million in 1969 to \$904 million in 2022. That is a 14-fold increase, and signifies tremendous growth in revenue. Sales expanded rapidly beginning in 2006. Note that BEA no longer reports farm income 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 2007, then, the net cash income earned by farmers held fairly steady at low levels. In 9 of those 39 years, net cash income fell below zero for the entire Lincoln 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 peaking in 2011, net cash income fell below zero for two years in 2017–2018. It rose again to a surplus of \$186 million in 2022. Thus, profitability for the farm sector is uncertain. It would be difficult to conclude that merely increasing sales means increased margins.

However, it is also important to take inflation into account when examining these trends. 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 Lincoln 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.

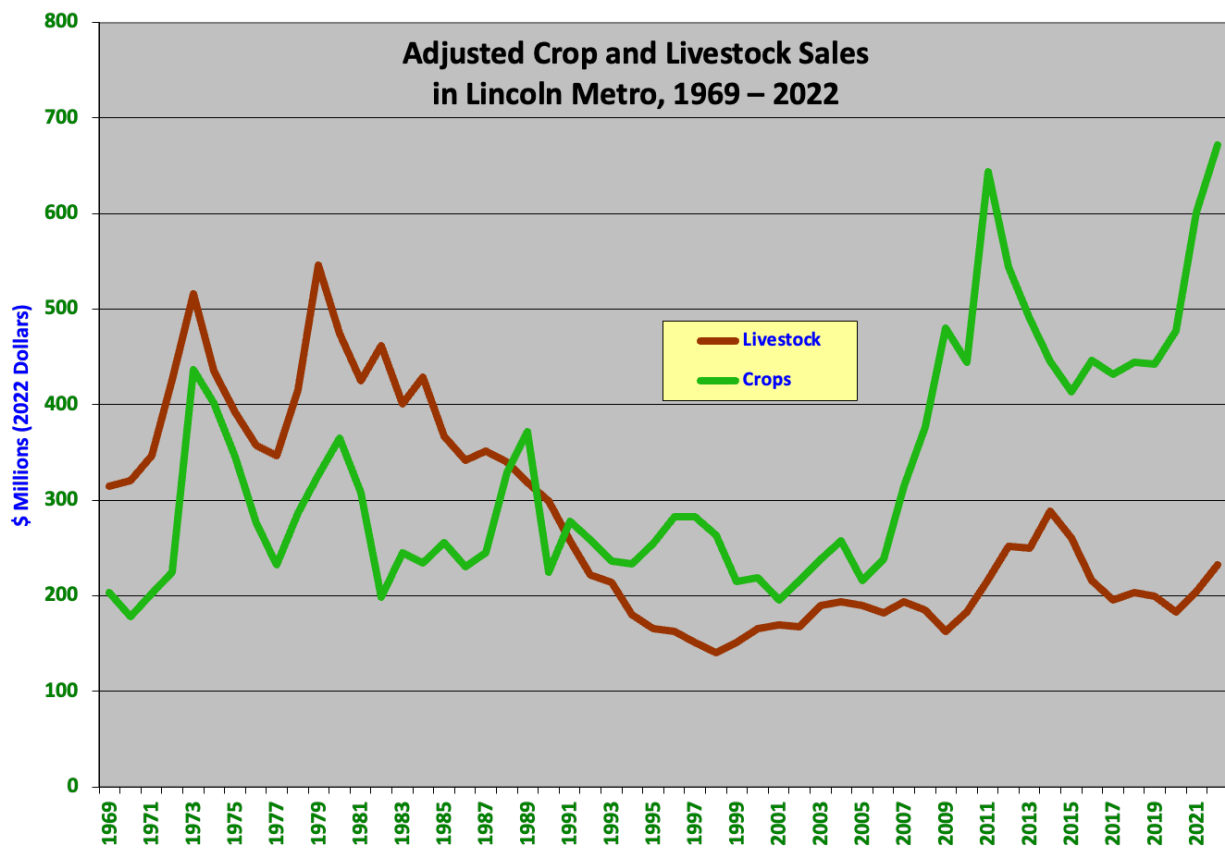
Once adjusted for inflation, the growth in sales is not nearly so dramatic. In fact, it could be argued that sales have been essentially level (although very uncertain) over the past 54 years, even though the value of cash receipts earned by the region’s farmers rose 75% from \$518 million in 1969 to \$904 million in 2022 dollars. Net cash income held fairly steady across this 54-year period, but fell below zero for 11 years. Peak income of \$310 million was realized in 2011, higher than the 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 the norm.

To assess the strength of the farm sector, it is useful to calculate returns since 1989, after the upheavals of the Farm Credit Crisis of the 1980s had settled down. Over those 34 years, Lincoln Metro farmers averaged a net cash income of \$59 million, despite suffering overall losses in 2017–2018. On average, the region’s farmers sold \$562 million of products, spending \$503 million to raise these commodities. This resulted in an aggregate surplus of \$2 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. Essentially, the farmers in Lincoln Metro have generally shifted from livestock production to crops. Livestock sales peaked in 1979, then declined until 1998. Sales of crops rose sharply beginning in 2007 but eroded until 2015, only to recover in 2020. When both crop and livestock sales bottomed out between 2015–2018., the farm sector was challenged. *This chart is also expressed in inflation-adjusted dollars.*

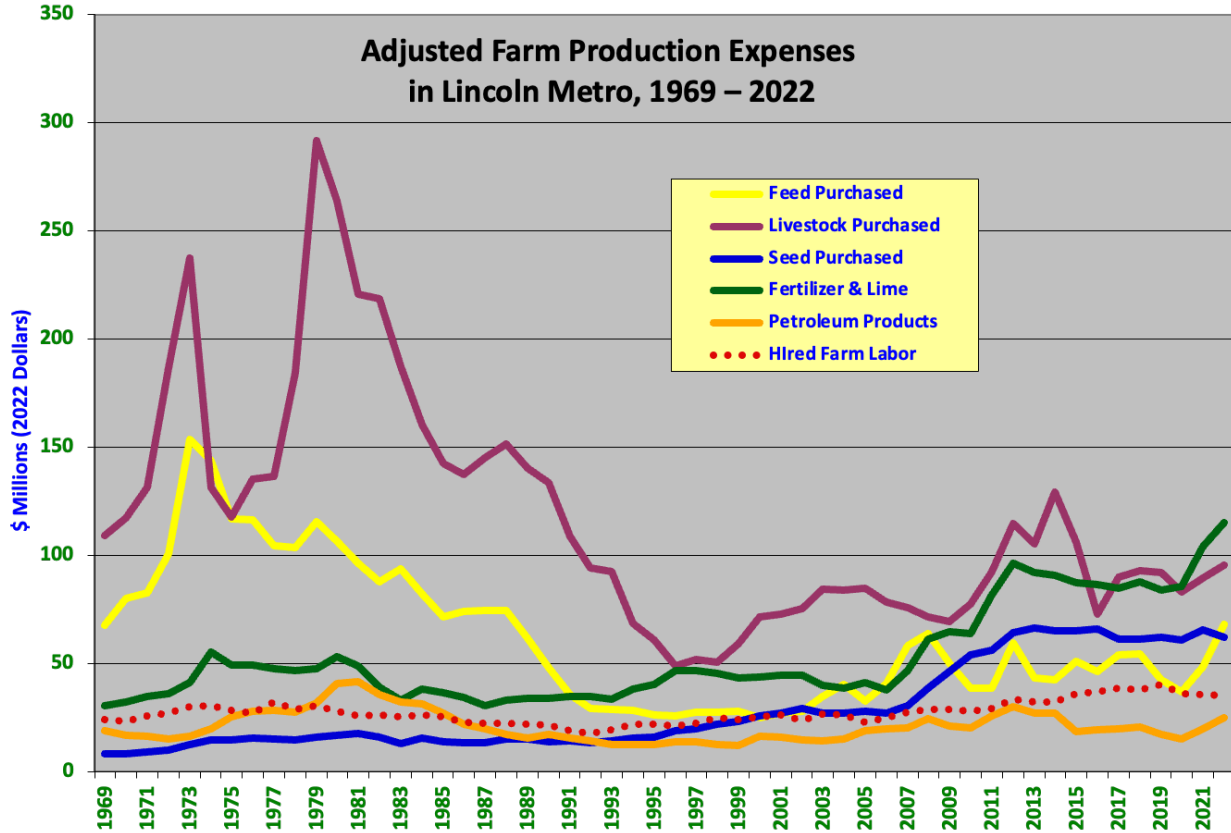
Chart 10: Adjusted Crop and Livestock Sales in Lincoln Metro, 1969–2022



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. The decline of livestock production caused purchases of animals and feed to decline, although feed costs rose during the global housing crisis as speculators bid up the price of grains. Meanwhile, increased crop sales have required higher costs for seed and fertilizers. Farmers have effectively held labor costs quite steady until 2010, while reducing fuel and oil use. *Once again, these have been adjusted for inflation.*

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



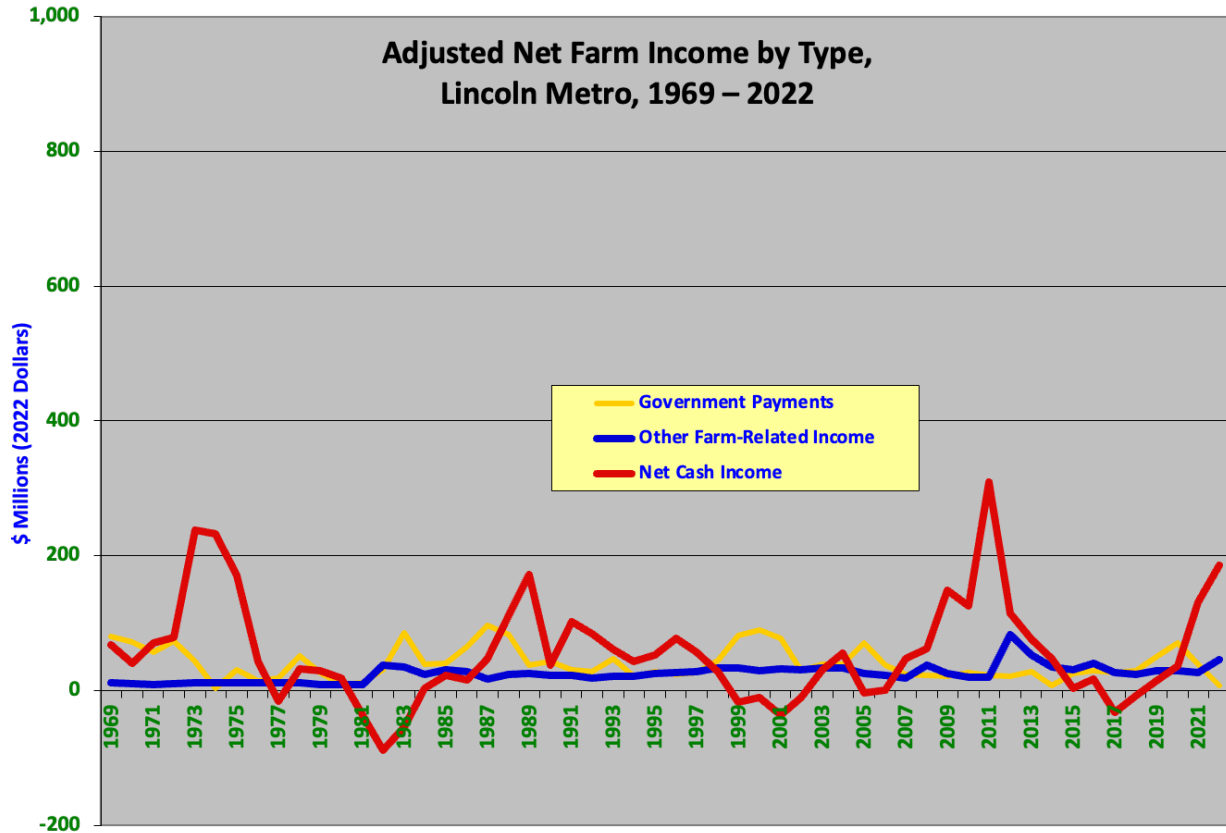
Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2022. Adjusted for inflation using the Minneapolis Federal Reserve Consumer Price Index. Note that these data are no longer reported by BEA; 2023 data are not available.

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 \$200 million out of Lincoln Metro.

Finally, it is useful to consider all forms of net income enjoyed by Lincoln Metro farmers. These are shown on Chart 12. This chart shows that net cash income — reflecting the act of farming — has been the source of both the highest highs and the lowest lows. Government subsidies have filled important gaps, averaging \$37 million during the years 1989 to 2022, about two-thirds of the \$59 million earned in net cash income. The chart also shows that government payments surpassed net cash income in 15 — nearly half — of the past 34 years.

The steadiest 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 \$30 million per year, about half of net cash income. Farm-related income rose sharply in 2012, after farmers enjoyed higher cash receipts. That suggests that when landowners saw that farmgate prices were high they charged their tenants higher rents. 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, Lincoln 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.

Lincoln Metro Summary

2,914 Lincoln Metro farmers sell an average of \$562 million of food commodities per year (1989–2022 average), spending \$503 million to raise them, for an average gain of \$59 million each year. This is an average net cash income of \$20,000 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 \$2 billion by selling crops and livestock over the years 1989–2022. Yet farm production costs exceeded cash receipts for 7 years of that 34-year period. Moreover, 49% of the region's farms reported net losses in 2022.

Federal farm support payments are a complementary source of net income, averaging \$37 million per year for the region for the same years. This is 62% the value of net cash income. Farmers and ranchers earn another \$30 million per year of farm-related income — primarily custom field work, and land rental income (34-year average for 1989–2022). This equals half 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 \$200 million or more) away from the region. This is difficult to measure precisely.

Massive infrastructure has been constructed to ensure that the region's livestock are fed, but similar infrastructure is lacking for conveying healthy food from local farms to Lincoln Metro residents.

Lincoln Metro Consumers

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

350,179 Lincoln Metro consumers spend \$1.3 billion buying food each year, including \$808 million for home use. At least 90% of this food is produced outside the region, so consumers spend more than \$1.1 billion per year buying food sourced outside the metro region. This is far more than the net cash income that farmers earn. Only \$2.3 million of food products (0.4% of farm cash receipts and 0.2% of the region's consumer market) are sold by farmers directly to household consumers.

Farm and Food Economy Summary

Farmers earn \$59 million each year producing food commodities, while spending more than \$200 billion buying inputs sourced outside of the region. Even when individual farmers make money, these input purchases result in substantial losses to the region as a whole.

Meanwhile, consumers spend \$1.1 billion buying food sourced outside the region. If each Lincoln Metro resident purchased (or had purchased for them) \$5 of food each week directly from some farm in the region, this would generate \$91 million of new farm income for the region. This would increase farm cash receipts by 16%, and 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.

Lincoln Metro

Table 15: 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.

Southeast Nebraska

Table 16: 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 that region is nearly half of the Metro Lincoln market, as Tables 15 & 16 show.

Omaha Metro

Table 17: 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.

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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