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## DEMOGRAPHIC AND FOR THE NORTHWEST

This is the first of a series of articles that will focus on one region of Nebraska in order to manifest the demographic and economic characteristics of that region. Selected for this first in-depth analysis is the Northwest Region, frequently referred to as the Panhandle. Statistics on population, personal income, and retail sales will be presented to define a scenario of change during the past decade. Regional changes will be compared to those that have occurred statewide.

When traveling westward across Nebraska on Interstate 80, one cannot help but notice the transition that occurs in the surrounding landscape shortly after leaving Ogallala. The relatively flat farmlands suddenly give way to the high plains of the Nebraska Panhandle. As it is with the land, contrasts between the Northwest Region and other regions of the state are well defined in terms of demographic and economic characteristics. This article will seek to highlight the traits of this unique region of Nebraska comprising the counties of Banner, Box Butte, Cheyenne, Dawes, Deuel, Garden, Kimball, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, Sheridan, and Sioux (Figure 1).

### POPULATION

During the decade of the 1970s, fifty-one counties in Nebraska experienced declines in population. This trend also held for the Northwest Region, as seven of the eleven counties diminished in population during this ten-year period (Table 1). Counties in the region showing a population increase were Box Butte, Morrill, Scotts Bluff, and Sheridan. The most significant increase in population was experienced by Box Butte County, where the number of inhabitants increased 35.7 percent during the past decade. In fact, this was the largest percentage gain of any county in Nebraska. The populations of Morrill, Scotts Bluff, and Sheridan

## ECONOMIC CHANGES REGION OF NEBRASKA

counties increased modestly during the 1970s, although percentage increases were below the statewide increase of 5.7 percent.

Kimball County registered an 18.8 percent decline in population during the past decade, which is also the largest percentage decline in population of any county in the state. The remaining counties in the Northwest Region experienced more moderate declines in population, ranging from a 1.6 percent decrease for Dawes County to a 9.4 percent loss for Deuel County.

Of the cities in the Northwest Region, Alliance registered the greatest increase in population, growing from 6,862 in 1970 to 9,869 in 1980 (Table 1). Chadron's population remained essentially unchanged, while the cities of Kimball, Sidney, and Scottsbluff experienced losses in population. The population of Kimball fell from 3,680 in 1970 to 3,120 in 1980, a 15.2 percent decline.

Collectively, the population of counties in the Northwest Region increased 3.5 percent during the 1970s, as compared to the statewide increase of 5.7 percent. It is anticipated that the population of the Northwest Region will increase approximately 4 percent during the present decade. (continued on page 2)

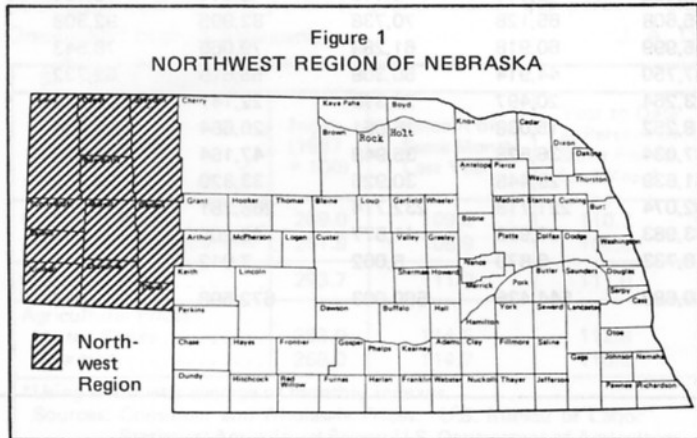


Table 1  
1970 AND 1980 POPULATION OF COUNTIES AND SELECTED CITIES IN THE NORTHWEST REGION OF NEBRASKA

Counties	Population	
	1970	1980
Banner	1,034	918
Box Butte	10,094	13,696
Cheyenne	10,778	10,057
Dawes	9,761	9,609
Deuel	2,717	2,462
Garden	2,929	2,808
Kimball	6,009	4,882
Morrill	5,813	6,085
Scotts Bluff	36,432	38,344
Sheridan	7,285	7,544
Sioux	2,034	1,845

Cities	Population	
	1970	1980
Alliance	6,862	9,869
Chadron	5,921	5,933
Kimball	3,680	3,120
Sidney	6,403	6,010
Scottsbluff	14,507	14,156

Source: 1970 U.S. Census of Population and 1980 U.S. Census of Population.

(continued from page 1) This gain could be significantly greater, however, if energy-related activities increase in the region.

### PERSONAL INCOME

A commonly used measure of the economic well-being of a region is personal income, composed of wages and salaries, proprietors income, other labor income, dividends, interest, rent, and transfer payments. The best available data on county-level personal income are annual in nature and cover the time period from 1972 through 1979.

Total personal income for the Northwest Region of Nebraska increased from \$384.2 million in 1972 to \$722.5 million in 1979, an 88 percent increase (Table 2). This regional increase is smaller than the statewide increase of 97 percent, primarily due to the farm income component of personal income which declined significantly for the Northwest Region in 1979 while increasing at the state level. The average annual increase in personal income for both the Northwest Region and the state was 10 percent for the period.

Box Butte and Scotts Bluff counties experienced increases in personal income of 113 percent and 104 percent, respectively. Most of the other counties in the region registered gains in personal income below the statewide increase. Because farm income is the major component of personal income for Banner and Sioux counties, their income series behaved rather erratically over the eight-year time period.

Nonfarm participation income is that part of total personal income consisting of wages and salaries, proprietors income, and other labor income (fringe benefits, and the like). In essence, it represents the earnings of all individuals that are producing the goods and services of a region. Corrected for inflation, real nonfarm earnings are expressed in 1972 dollars and yield an indication of the trend in output and production for a region. Real nonfarm income for the Northwest Region increased 26 percent from 1972 through 1979, the same as the statewide increase. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate the growth trends of real nonfarm earnings for the Northwest Region and the state, respectively. In both instances, the annual growth rate is 3 percent. It is interesting to note that the Northwest Region felt the impact of the disastrous

1974-75 recession to a greater extent than the state as a whole. Whereas the state economy experienced a slowdown in the growth of real nonfarm income, the Northwest Region of Nebraska registered a decline in this important component of personal income. Recovery from the effects of the recession was dramatic, however, with the Northwest Region posting an 8 percent increase in real nonfarm earnings the following year, as compared to a

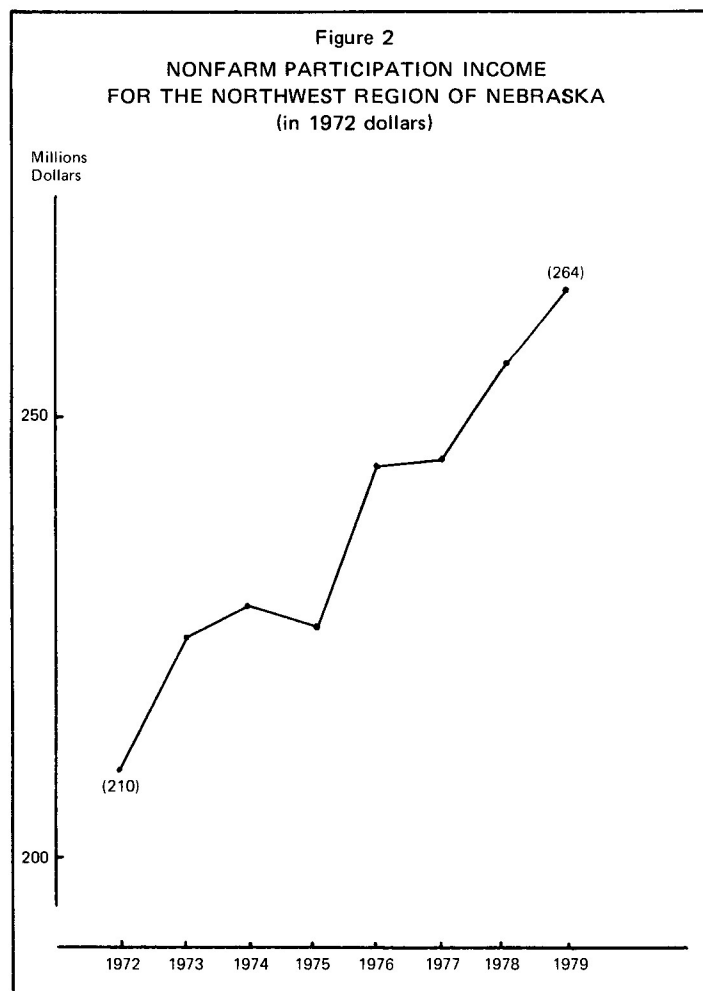


Table 2  
PERSONAL INCOME FOR COUNTIES OF THE NORTHWEST REGION OF NEBRASKA  
(in thousands of current dollars)

	1972	1973	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
Banner	5,991	7,977	5,248	6,453	5,441	4,416	8,111	5,154
Box Butte	43,310	56,231	53,197	65,608	65,128	70,738	82,995	92,308
Cheyenne	44,457	49,991	50,249	65,999	60,918	61,289	79,065	78,543
Dawes	33,984	39,172	45,115	37,750	44,914	50,308	55,615	62,732
Deuel	15,103	18,259	16,793	23,264	20,497	20,375	22,141	23,043
Garden	13,195	16,268	13,383	18,252	15,038	15,651	20,664	21,424
Kimball	26,402	32,256	33,436	37,034	36,528	35,948	47,164	44,325
Morrill	20,885	29,985	25,777	31,539	29,448	30,925	33,320	39,755
Scotts Bluff	142,826	167,088	195,248	232,074	221,718	232,714	268,281	290,752
Sheridan	31,035	38,299	32,371	33,983	37,936	41,577	48,200	54,964
Sioux	6,968	8,567	6,668	8,733	6,870	5,062	7,042	9,514
Regional Total	384,156	464,093	477,485	560,689	544,436	569,003	672,598	722,514

Source: Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce.

7 percent increase statewide. From 1976 to 1977, the growth of nonfarm income was flat for the Northwest Region, but increased more than 2 percent at the state level. This was due to a significant decline in farm income for this region, and emphasizes the impact that agriculture has on the nonagricultural sector.

Per capita personal income is total personal income divided by population, and is frequently used to measure the economic well-being of individuals in a region. The concept is strictly monetary, however, and doesn't take into account other benefits that people enjoy from living in a certain region. Being a ratio, per capita personal income is sensitive to changes in the numerator and denominator, and should be examined over the long run. Per capita personal income (1972 dollars) for the Northwest Region has increased from \$4,135 in 1972 to \$4,604 in 1979, representing an annual growth rate of 1.5 percent. Statewide, per capita personal income increased from \$4,364 in 1972 to \$5,108 in 1979, representing an annual growth rate of 2.3 percent. Figure 4 illustrates the behavior of real per capita personal income for the Northwest Region and for the entire state. With the exception of one year (1975), real per capita personal income for the Northwest Region has lagged behind that of the entire state. It should also be noted that the rather sizable fluctuations in both graphs of Figure 4 correspond to the good years and the lean years in terms of farm income. This again verifies the significant influence of agriculture on the Nebraska economy.

#### RETAIL SALES

The final barometer of economic well-being to be described is

net taxable retail sales. A high positive correlation exists between the relative wealth of a region and the level of retail sales. Stated otherwise, when a region has a higher level of personal income than surrounding regions, the volume of retailing will usually reflect this favorable condition. As in the previous sections, the following discourse will compare changes in the levels of retail sales for the Northwest Region with those of the entire state. Retail sales will be adjusted for inflation and expressed in 1972 dollars for the purpose of this comparison.

Net taxable retail sales for counties and selected cities of the Northwest Region and for the entire state are presented in Table 3 (p. 6). In real terms (1972 dollars), retail sales for the region have increased from \$193.0 million in 1970 to \$273.4 million in 1980, a 42 percent increase at an annual growth rate of 3.5 percent. Statewide, the overall 1970 to 1980 increase in retail sales was 56 percent, representing an annual growth rate of 4.5 percent. It is no secret that retail sales for the Northwest Region have lagged behind the rest of the state. As indicated in the previous section, real per capita personal income has historically been below the statewide level. However, certain trends appear to be changing, as indicated in recent quarterly retail sales reports published by the Bureau of Business Research. For instance, net taxable retail sales for the first

(continued on page 6)

Figure 3  
NONFARM PARTICIPATION INCOME  
FOR NEBRASKA  
(in 1972 dollars)

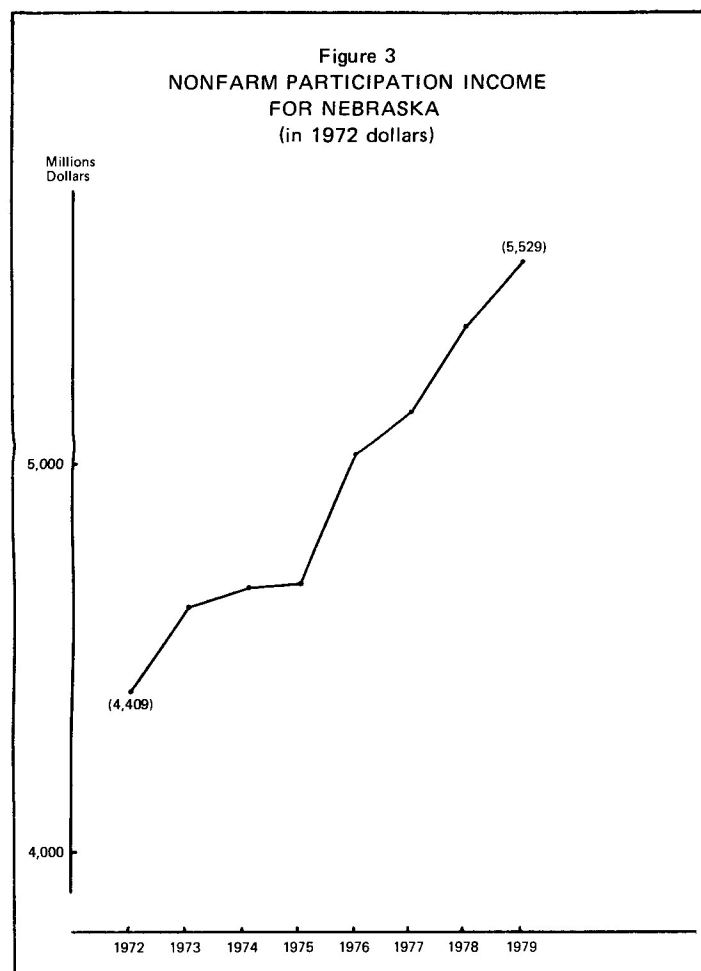
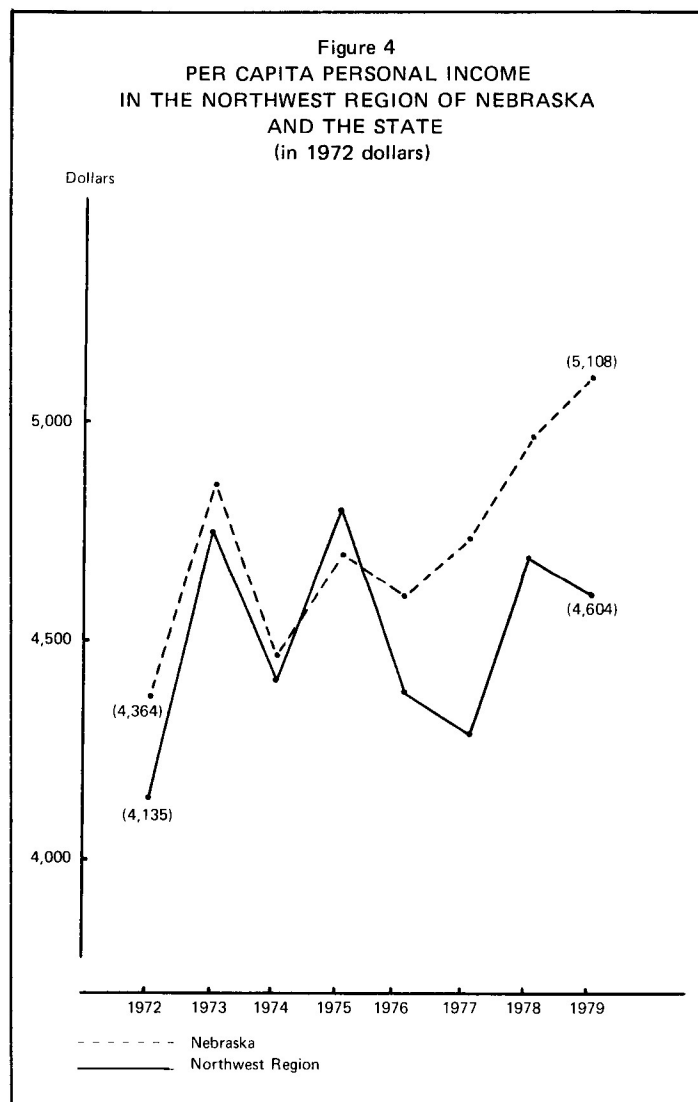


Figure 4  
PER CAPITA PERSONAL INCOME  
IN THE NORTHWEST REGION OF NEBRASKA  
AND THE STATE  
(in 1972 dollars)



## Review and Outlook

The level of economic activity in Nebraska increased slightly in May 1981 even though four of the five sectors recorded losses when compared to April. The physical volume index for the state rose 0.2 percent from its April level, but was 3.3 percent below its value of last year. Comparable national figures indicate an opposite pattern. The index for May was down 0.3 percent from April, but was 1.5 percent above the level of May 1980.

The April-to-May increase in Nebraska's economic activity was concentrated in the agricultural sector, where activity rose 29.0 percent. In sharp contrast, nonagricultural output fell 2.9 percent, with all four sectors declining. The month-to-month losses in the nonagricultural sectors were: government, -0.2 percent; manufac-

turing, -2.0 percent; distributive, -2.1 percent; and construction, -4.8 percent.

The sizable month-to-month increase in agricultural output (as measured by seasonally adjusted and price-adjusted cash farm marketings) should be viewed with caution. Not only is this sector extremely volatile, but the May increase also followed two successive monthly losses of 12.0 percent and 37.0 percent. Agricultural output for May, therefore, was nearly 30 percent below the level of a year ago. Seasonally adjusted prices received by Nebraska farmers declined 1.1 percent from April, but remained 14.6 percent higher than prices of May 1980.

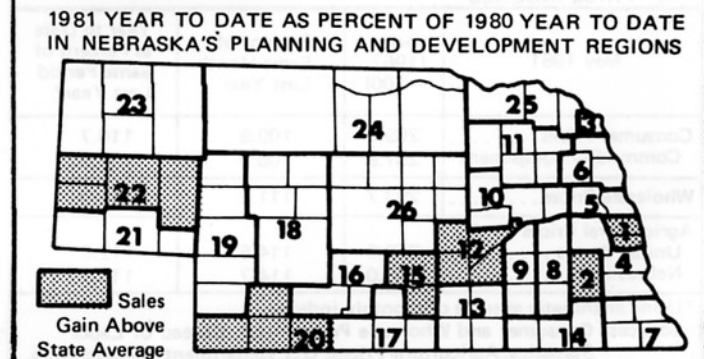
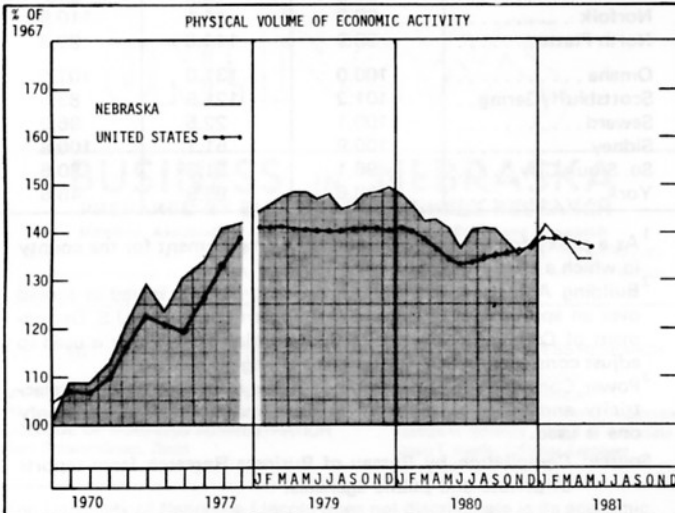
Construction activity dropped for the second consecutive month in May. Because of the gains (continued on page 5)

Notes for Tables 1 and 2: (1) The "distributive" indicator represents a composite of wholesale and retail trade; transportation, communication and utilities; finance, insurance, and real estate; and selected services. (2) The "physical volume" indicator and its components represent the dollar volume indicator and its components adjusted for price changes using appropriate price indexes—see Table 5, page 5.

ECONOMIC INDICATORS: NEBRASKA AND UNITED STATES				
1. CHANGE FROM PREVIOUS YEAR				
May 1981	Current Month as Percent of Same Month Previous Year		1981 Year to Date as Percent of 1982 Year to Date	
	Nebraska	U.S.	Nebraska	U.S.
Indicator	Nebraska	U.S.	Nebraska	U.S.
Dollar Volume	106.5	111.9	106.4	110.0
Agricultural	81.1	104.9	93.2	104.0
Nonagricultural	109.7	112.1	108.1	110.2
Construction	150.8	107.1	133.9	104.4
Manufacturing	111.3	112.3	106.1	108.8
Distributive	108.3	113.2	107.9	111.8
Government	104.2	108.9	105.3	108.7
Physical Volume	96.7	101.5	96.6	99.6
Agricultural	70.7	91.6	84.5	92.1
Nonagricultural	100.2	101.9	98.1	99.9
Construction	141.2	100.3	124.9	97.5
Manufacturing	101.2	101.4	96.3	98.2
Distributive	98.6	103.1	97.4	101.0
Government	97.8	98.8	98.4	99.6
2. CHANGE FROM 1967				
Indicator	Percent of 1967 Average			
	Nebraska	U.S.		
Dollar Volume	349.5	350.3		
Agricultural	227.7	324.4		
Nonagricultural	367.8	351.2		
Construction	299.9	316.0		
Manufacturing	386.2	316.7		
Distributive	373.8	378.5		
Government	360.8	331.2		
Physical Volume	134.5	137.0		
Agricultural	88.2	128.2		
Nonagricultural	141.5	137.3		
Construction	95.2	100.3		
Manufacturing	165.5	132.1		
Distributive	139.0	140.7		
Government	144.1	149.5		

3. NET TAXABLE RETAIL SALES OF NEBRASKA REGIONS AND CITIES (Adjusted for Price Changes)			
Region Number and City	City Sales*	Sales in Region*	
	May 1981 as percent of May 1980	May 1981 as percent of May 1980	Year to date '81 as percent of Year to date '80
<i>The State</i>	100.2	100.7	99.2
1 Omaha	109.1	108.9	103.7
Bellevue	104.1		
2 Lincoln	104.1	104.0	100.9
3 So. Sioux City	97.8	88.6	96.1
4 Nebraska City	96.7	97.7	96.6
5 Fremont	104.9	102.0	99.9
Blair	100.0		
6 West Point	92.2	96.7	92.5
7 Falls City	105.3	101.2	94.9
8 Seward	114.9	102.9	98.4
9 York	97.1	97.8	93.0
10 Columbus	107.0	105.7	97.4
11 Norfolk	102.0	105.7	99.0
Wayne	107.9		
12 Grand Island	108.6	98.8	101.8
13 Hastings	98.3	93.6	98.1
14 Beatrice	98.8	96.4	98.4
Fairbury	87.3		
15 Kearney	103.3	102.7	101.3
16 Lexington	89.5	87.5	92.4
17 Holdrege	97.1	93.6	97.1
18 North Platte	92.8	90.5	94.1
19 Ogallala	89.2	99.8	97.9
20 McCook	94.8	100.6	104.4
21 Sidney	93.2	94.2	98.2
Kimball	92.8		
22 Scottsbluff/Gering	110.2	107.9	101.4
23 Alliance	99.7	97.5	98.5
Chadron	96.3		
24 O'Neill	93.6	104.0	98.1
25 Hartington	100.9	97.3	92.4
26 Broken Bow	104.3	94.6	91.4

\*State totals include sales not allocated to cities or regions. The year-to-year ratios for city and region sales may be misleading because of changes in the portion of unallocated sales. Region totals include, and city totals exclude, motor vehicle sales. Sales are those on which sales taxes are collected by retailers located in the state. Compiled from data provided by Nebraska Department of Revenue.



(continued from page 4) in seven of the previous eight months, however, this month's activity was still 41.2 percent above the dismal levels of last May.

Manufacturing was the only other sector recording a May-to-May gain. The 1.2 percent increase represents only the second year-to-year gain for this sector since April 1980. Since the previous gain was last month, this may be an indication of renewed strength in the manufacturing sector.

The two remaining sectors, distributive and government, both recorded losses compared to May 1980. The losses were 1.4 percent in the distributive sector and 2.2 percent for government. These two sectors have been the weakest sectors in the Nebraska economy for several months. In fact, government has not recorded a year-to-year increase since May of 1980, and the distributive sector has not recorded a year-to-year increase since January 1980.

May employment data show a decrease of 0.4 percent (3,300 persons) compared to May 1980. At the same time, unemployment accounted for 3.6 percent of the labor force. Despite the decline for the state as a whole, Nebraska's cities showed some improvement. The twenty-six cities included in Table 4 increased an average of 0.1 percent. Sixteen of these cities experienced an increase in employment.

Net taxable retail sales recorded gains in May. The dollar volume of sales was up 9.6 percent above the sales of May 1980. After adjusting for the 8.9 percent May-to-May increase in prices, as measured by the commodity component of the Consumer Price Index, May sales gained 0.7 percent. Much of this gain was due to a 5.8 percent increase in motor vehicle sales, but non-motor vehicle sales also grew, at a rate of 0.2 percent. Nationally, price-adjusted retail sales were up 3.8 percent from last May.

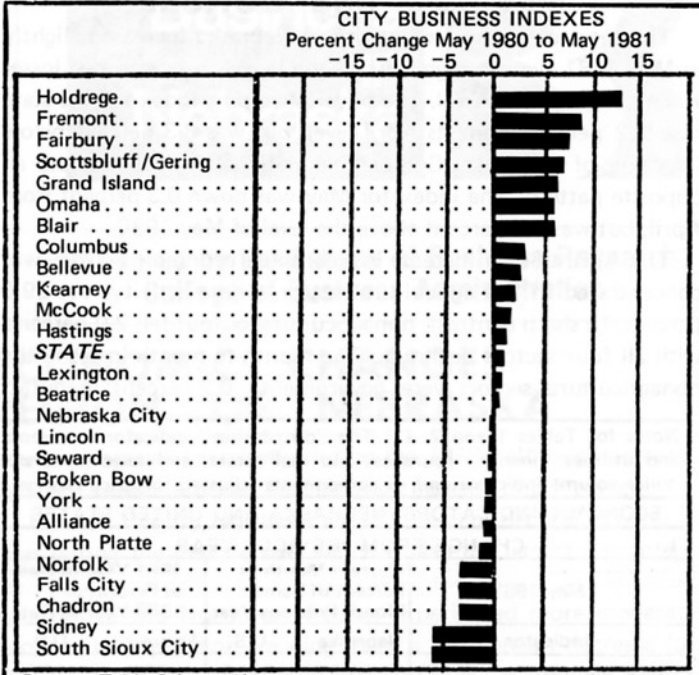
This strength in sales was reflected statewide, as eleven of the state's twenty-six planning regions recorded increases in total sales compared to May 1980. In addition, fourteen of the cities in Table 3 had nonmotor vehicle sales above those of last May. Two cities recorded increases greater than 10 percent: Seward's increase was 14.9 percent, and Scottsbluff/Gering recorded a 10.2 percent gain. Other cities with notable gains in real sales were Omaha, 9.1 percent; Grand Island, 8.6 percent; Wayne, 7.9 percent; Columbus, 7.0 percent; and Falls City, 5.3 percent.

Relative to May 1980, the city business indexes grew an average of 0.8 percent, as fourteen of the twenty-six cities registered gains. As a result of its sharp increase in building activity, Holdrege posted the largest gain in activity, with an increase of 12.6 percent. Other cities with May-to-May increases of more than 5 percent were Fremont, 8.5 percent; Fairbury, 6.5 percent; Scottsbluff/Gering, 6.0 percent; Grand Island, 5.5 percent; and Omaha and Blair, 5.3 percent.

J. A. D.

5. PRICE INDEXES			
May 1981	Index (1967 = 100)	Percent of Same Month Last Year	Year to Date as Percent of Same Period Last Year*
Consumer Prices . . . . .	269.0	109.8	110.7
Commodity component	251.9	108.9	109.6
Wholesale Prices . . . . .	293.7	111.2	111.0
Agricultural Prices			
United States . . . . .	253.0	114.5	112.8
Nebraska . . . . .	258.0	114.7	110.3

\*Using arithmetic average of monthly indexes.  
Sources: Consumer and Wholesale Prices: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics; Agricultural Prices: U.S. Department of Agriculture.



Source: Table 3 (page 4) and Table 4 below.

4. MAY CITY BUSINESS INDICATORS			
The State and Its Trading Centers	Percent of Same Month a Year Ago		
	Employment <sup>1</sup>	Building Activity <sup>2</sup>	Power Consumption <sup>3</sup>
The State . . . . .	100.1	114.5	99.3
Alliance . . . . .	97.1	97.5	99.2
Beatrice . . . . .	99.3	133.3	102.0
Bellevue . . . . .	100.0	117.9	91.4
Blair . . . . .	101.4	262.1	84.8
Broken Bow . . . . .	100.4	51.6	97.3
Chadron . . . . .	96.5	96.0	100.7
Columbus . . . . .	101.5	84.1	100.4
Fairbury . . . . .	100.8	1160.5	107.0
Falls City . . . . .	100.1	30.2	107.7
Fremont . . . . .	104.5	243.6	100.2*
Grand Island . . . . .	100.9	129.3	93.0
Hastings . . . . .	100.9	137.5	100.0
Holdrege . . . . .	101.2	1584.4	163.6
Kearney . . . . .	100.3	101.5	105.4
Lexington . . . . .	101.8	256.3	91.0
Lincoln . . . . .	98.6	71.2	105.3
McCook . . . . .	100.9	194.1	93.4
Nebraska City . . . . .	99.6	137.0	84.9
Norfolk . . . . .	99.3	44.1	110.6
North Platte . . . . .	98.9	144.6	90.3
Omaha . . . . .	100.0	131.0	101.6
Scottsbluff/Gering . . . . .	101.2	121.5	83.5
Seward . . . . .	100.1	22.5	96.2
Sidney . . . . .	100.9	51.1	100.8
So. Sioux City . . . . .	96.1	51.8	80.6
York . . . . .	100.6	95.9	46.6

<sup>1</sup> As a proxy for city employment, total employment for the county in which a city is located is used.  
<sup>2</sup> Building Activity is the value of building permits issued as spread over an appropriate time period of construction. The U.S. Department of Commerce Composite Construction Cost Index is used to adjust construction activity for price changes.  
<sup>3</sup> Power Consumption is a combined index of consumption of electricity and natural gas except in cases marked \* for which only one is used.

Source: Compilation by Bureau of Business Research from reports of private and public agencies.

(continued from page 3) quarter of 1981 compared to the first quarter of 1980 were above the average state gain in seven of the eleven counties of the Northwest Region. This same pattern emerged during the second and third quarters of 1980.

An interesting concept that can be applied to individual trade centers is real per capita retail sales. As with personal income, retail sales divided by population yields this value. Under certain assumptions, real per capita retail sales can be used as a crude measure of the drawing power of a trade center on consumers located away from that center. Real per capita retail sales for

selected trade centers of the Northwest Region are given in Table 4.

In 1980, retail sales (1972 dollars) were \$19.3 million for Kimball and \$19.9 million for Chadron. However, real per capita retail sales for Kimball and Chadron were \$6,199 and \$3,354, respectively. Assuming that the propensity to consume and the costs of goods and services at both trade centers are approximately equal, the greater per capita sales figure for Kimball suggests that perhaps this trade center is attracting a relatively higher percentage of consumers from outside its boundaries. On the other hand, per capita personal income for Kimball County (Kimball) has been historically higher than for Dawes County (Chadron), and this could be the predominant factor influencing the levels of per capita sales at these trade centers. Without a great deal of study, it would be inappropriate to state that one trade center has significantly greater attraction than any other.

In summary, the Northwest Region of Nebraska appears to have been somewhat less affluent than the remainder of the state during the past decade. As stated previously, it is difficult to measure the well-being of individuals in a region based solely on monetary measures. This should be kept foremost in mind when reviewing the data contained herein.

C. L. B.

Table 3  
1970 AND 1980 NET TAXABLE RETAIL SALES\*  
FOR COUNTIES AND SELECTED CITIES OF THE  
NORTHWEST REGION OF NEBRASKA AND THE STATE  
(in millions of dollars)

Counties	Current Dollars		1972 Dollars	
	1970	1980	1970	1980
Banner	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.1
Box Butte	20.0	67.2	21.6	37.6
Cheyenne	19.4	42.9	21.0	24.0
Dawes	16.0	41.8	17.3	23.4
Deuel	4.4	8.7	4.8	4.9
Garden	3.8	8.6	4.1	4.8
Kimball	13.4	35.4	14.5	19.8
Morrill	8.9	27.1	9.6	13.1
Scotts Bluff	77.0	215.1	83.2	120.2
Sheridan	14.8	40.1	16.0	22.4
Sioux	0.7	1.9	0.8	1.1
Regional Total	178.5	489.0	193.0	273.4
State	2,961.5	8,920.7	3,205.5	4,986.4

Cities	Current Dollars		1972 Dollars	
	1970	1980	1970	1980
Alliance	18.6	63.8	20.1	35.7
Chadron	13.3	35.6	14.4	19.9
Kimball	13.0	34.6	14.1	19.3
Sidney	17.5	38.9	18.9	21.7
Scottsbluff	58.6	157.8	63.4	88.2

\*Non-motor vehicle sales.

Source: Nebraska Department of Revenue.

Table 4  
1970 AND 1980 PER CAPITA RETAIL SALES\*  
FOR SELECTED CITIES IN THE  
NORTHWEST REGION OF NEBRASKA  
(in 1972 dollars)

City	1970	1980
Alliance	2,931	3,614
Chadron	2,428	3,354
Kimball	3,819	6,199
Sidney	2,955	3,618
Scottsbluff	4,366	6,231

\*Non-motor vehicle sales.

Source: Nebraska Department of Revenue, 1970 U.S. Census of Population, and 1980 U.S. Census of Population.

# UNL News

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