LABOR FORCE AND UNEMPLOYMENT: Preliminary numbers from the Nebraska Department of Labor show the state’s labor force averaged 1,010,241 persons in September 2017, of whom 982,241 were employed. That was 2,080 more workers employed than in August 2017.

The annual average Nebraska unemployment rate has been among the lowest in the nation for years (Figure 1). In September 2017, the preliminary Nebraska seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 2.8 percent. The seasonally adjusted national rate was 4.2 percent. In September 2017, the Omaha MSA, which includes counties in Iowa, had a not seasonally adjusted unemployment rate of 2.6 percent; the Lincoln MSA also had a not seasonally adjusted rate of 2.3 percent; and the Grand Island MSA had an unemployment rate of 2.5 percent.

The annual average Nebraska unemployment rate was 4.4 percent in 2011, 4.0 percent in 2012; 3.8 percent in 2013; 3.3 percent in 2014; 3.1 percent in 2015; and 3.2 percent in 2016 compared to 8.9 percent, 8.1 percent, 7.4 percent, 6.2 percent, 5.3 percent and 4.9 percent overall in the U.S. (Figure 1).

- JOB GROWTH: The Nebraska growth in non-farm payroll employment (jobs) has generally been positive in recent years. The Nebraska Department of Labor’s preliminary numbers estimate that there were 1,033,320 nonfarm jobs in the state in September 2017, or 3,751 more jobs than in August. The number of not seasonally adjusted nonfarm jobs totaled 509,004 in the Omaha MSA; 192,628 in the Lincoln MSA in September 2017; and 43,217 jobs in the Grand Island MSA. Job numbers increased in all three cities from August 2017.
MANUFACTURING JOB GROWTH: During the 2007-2009 recession years, manufacturing job growth in both the nation and in Nebraska suffered — state manufacturing job numbers fell 8.1 percent between those years. Since then, there has been some rebound (a 5.0 percent growth in Nebraska’s manufacturing job numbers between 2011 and 2015), but there was another fall-off in job growth in 2015 (Figure 2). In September 2017, the Nebraska Department of Labor preliminary estimates show that Nebraska averaged 97,651 manufacturing jobs. That represented 430 fewer manufacturing jobs than in August 2017, but represented 968 more jobs than in September 2016.

The number of Nebraska manufacturing jobs increased 1.8 percent in 2011, increased 1.7 percent in 2012, increased 1.6 percent in 2013, increased a modest 1.0 percent in 2014, decreased 0.1 percent in 2015, and remained unchanged in 2016. Overall in the U.S., the number of manufacturing jobs increased 1.7 percent in 2011, increased 1.7 percent again in 2012, increased 0.8 percent in 2013, increased 1.4 percent in 2014, increased 1.2 percent in 2015, and increased 0.1 percent in 2016. Since 2014, then, Nebraska has fallen behind national manufacturing employment growth trends.

![U.S. and Nebraska Manufacturing Job Growth, 2011 to 2016](image)

RESIDENTIAL BUILDING UNITS: The U.S. Bureau of the Census’ Construction Statistics Division reported that Nebraska permit-issuing places authorized the construction of 738 new residential units in September 2017. That represented a decrease of 10.1 percent in the number of units compared to the number authorized in August 2017. The value of new residential permits decreased from $142,960,000 in August 2017 to $139,481,000 in September 2017, a 2.4 percent decrease. It did represent a 35.3 percent increase over the September 2016 value.

The annual number of new Nebraska residential building permits; decreased 3.7 percent in 2011, increased 17.5 percent in 2012, increased 23.3 percent in 2013, increased a very modest 1.9 percent in 2014; increased 5.3 percent in 2015; and increased 0.1 percent in 2016 (see
Figure 3 and *Nebraska Databook*). Nationally, the number of residential units increased 3.2 percent in 2011; 32.9 percent in 2012; 19.4 percent in 2013; 6.2 percent in 2014; 12.4 percent in 2015; and 0.6 percent in 2016.

**NET TAXABLE RETAIL SALES:** Nebraska net taxable retail sales usually increased on a monthly and an annual basis until the 2008 recession. Recently, they have returned to more typical long-term seasonal growth patterns. In July 2017, state net taxable retail sales totaled $2.51 billion, or 3.3 percent less than in June 2017; and, in July 2017, net taxable sales represented a 3.1 percent increase from the July 2016 sales level (see Figure 4).

Total annual taxable retail sales in Nebraska increased 5.4 percent in 2011; increased 4.2 percent in 2012; increased 5.3 percent in 2013; increased 3.0 percent in 2014; increased 0.9 percent in 2015; and increased 4.2 percent in 2016. In 2004, the state sales tax rate was set permanently at 5.5 percent and sales taxes on some services were eliminated.
MERCHANDISE EXPORTS AND IMPORTS: Nebraska has been a major exporter of agricultural crops and livestock products for many years (see Nebraska Databook table). The state has also increased exports of other goods and services (see Figure 5). In September 2017, Nebraska goods exports were down 8.8 percent compared to August 2017. Specifically, they totaled $621.8 million in August compared to $566.9 million in September. They were up 13.9 percent compared to Nebraska exports in September 2016.

In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau began releasing estimates of the value of state imports based on the final destination of import shipments reported at the time of entry into the U.S. (see Figure 6). Those numbers suggest that monthly Nebraska imports generally average 40-50 percent of the value of state exports. Nebraska imports were down an estimated 8.5 percent in September 2017 compared to August 2017. Imports were up an estimated 14.6 percent year-over-year.
INCOME: Historically, Nebraska’s per capita income (PCI) has been below the U.S. average (Figure 7). In 2002, Nebraska per capita income was 4.0 percent more than the national average; but, in 2016, the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis estimates show the state’s PCI at $49,636, which was just 0.1 percent more than the U.S. figure. That value was actually down from the previous five-years, when the Nebraska PCI averaged 102.5 percent of the national average.

As the State Data Center wrote “Nebraska’s per capita income declined in relation to the US between 1970 and 1989 and fluctuated between 95 and 100 percent of the national average from 1994 to 2010. Beginning in 2011, Nebraska’s per capita income moved above the national
average for the first time since 1975 and only the 5th time since the series began in 1929” (State/Local Population Trends, Nebraska State Data Center, August 17, 2016).

Nebraska per capita personal income jumped 12.3 percent to $44,864 in 2011, increased by 2.7 percent to $46,060 in 2012, fell by 0.4 percent to $45,858 in 2013, then rose by 5.4 percent to $48,321 in 2014; in 2015, rose 0.5 percent to $48,544; and, in 2016, rose 2.2 percent.

![Average Annual Per Capita Income, Nebraska & U.S.](image)

**Figure 7**

**COST OF LIVING:** In a community cost of living index compiled for 265 U.S. urban areas by C2ER, the three Nebraska communities usually in the survey have generally been below the national average for the six expenditure categories tracked. Looking at their composite indexes for the first quarter of 2017, the three Nebraska communities' composite value was below the U.S. average of 100.0 at 93.8 (see Figure 8). With an individual composite index of 93.6, Omaha scored the lowest among the three Nebraska communities in the survey, but Hastings and Lincoln were well below the national average with an index of 94.1 percent each. So, these Nebraska cities maintained their below average cost of living ranking for all of 2017.
POPULATION: From 1974 to 1990, Nebraska experienced a net out-migration of people. But the U.S. Census Bureau reported that Nebraska's 2000 population was 1,711,263, or 132,846 persons higher than in 1990. Natural increases (births exceeding deaths) contributed to the state’s 8.4 percent population growth, but a significant factor was international migration. The Census Bureau reported the state’s 2010 population was 1,826,341 persons, or 6.7 percent higher than 2000 (see Nebraska Databook table). And, the Census Bureau’s estimate of the state’s 2016 population reached 1,907,116 persons, or 4.4 percent higher than in 2010. The national growth rate during the same years was 4.6 percent.

County-level 2000 Census numbers showed population growth in 40 of Nebraska’s 93 counties between 1990 and 2000, compared to only ten counties between 1980 and 1990. Between 2000 and 2010, 24 counties experienced population growth; and between 2010 and 2015, an estimated 31 counties had population growth. Sarpy County, at 29.6 percent, and Lancaster County, at 14.0 percent, were the top growth counties in 2010.

Nebraska’s Short-Term Economic Outlook: “The Leading Economic Indicator – Nebraska (LEI-N) 1 rose by 1.86% during September of 2017. The increase in the LEI-N, which is designed to predict economic activity six months into the future, suggests solid economic growth in Nebraska during the first quarter of 2018. The rise in the indicator was due to an increase in building permits for single-family homes and growth in manufacturing hours-worked. There also was a decline in the value of the dollar in September, which is positive for Nebraska exporters. Finally, there were positive business expectations. Businesses responding to the September Survey of Nebraska Business reported plans to increase sales and employment over the next six months. There was, however, a modest increase in initial claims for unemployment insurance during September on a seasonally adjusted basis.” (http://cba.unl.edu/outreach/bureau-of-business-research/documents/LEI_10_2017.pdf)

For additional Nebraska economic and demographic info, see: http://opportunity.nebraska.gov/business/data-a-research