

# nebraska

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# 2011 ANNUAL REPORT

DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



FISCAL YEAR  
**JULY 1, 2010 - JUNE 30, 2011**

## General Message from DED Director Catherine D. Lang



Governor Heineman, Members of the Nebraska Legislature, Fellow Nebraskans:

It is my honor and privilege as newly appointed director of the Nebraska Department of Economic Development to report on the state of our Department's hard work during FY 2010-2011.

By all accounts, DED continues to strive for and successfully meet benchmarks related to helping Nebraska communities grow and thrive. We are somewhat unique in this regard due to the wide-ranging programs and services we offer to accomplish this. DED is not only about business development and expansion and job creation. We are much, much more.

Attracting businesses or encouraging them to expand here encompasses many needs and considerations—from providing an ample supply of affordable housing for future employees, to ensuring that companies have access to necessary infrastructure, including abundant, clean water, sewage treatment services, solid grade streets and sidewalks, electricity and more. Building on the overall quality of life that attract people and companies to our communities in the first place is our top priority.

We are committed to helping businesses of all sizes, whether corporations or microenterprises, and to this end, we provide numerous incentive programs including Nebraska Advantage, the new TI2 package that was passed this past legislative session, Job Training and others.

Additionally, we are in the unique position to promote our state's third largest industry, travel and tourism through a number of means, including agritourism, ecotourism and incentives for building and expanding quality tourism attractions.

I am pleased to be taking the helm of this department at a juncture when the economy is starting to demonstrate clear signs of recovery and movement in a positive direction. Our department's work will continue to contribute to the uptick and forward growth and development of the state as a whole.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Catherine D. Lang". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Catherine D. Lang**  
*Director*

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# ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

## Unemployment Rate

Nebraska fared considerably better than the overall U.S. in recent years in most economic measure including labor force employment. As reported by the Nebraska Department of Labor, the state's unemployment rate was 4.9 percent in June 2010, compared to 9.5 percent for the nation. Similarly, a year later in June 2011, **Nebraska's unemployment rate was 4.5 percent, while the nation's was 9.2 percent.**

## Industry Employment

The total non-farm job count in Nebraska advanced 1.8 percent from June 2010 to June 2011. In the overall U.S., it grew just 0.2 percent. **Total private employment rose 2.7 percent in the state.** Manufacturing jobs increased 3.7 percent, and service-producing employment advanced 1.7 percent. Among major industry sectors, only government employment decreased in Nebraska, falling 2.3 percent. In agriculture—the state's largest sector for both self-employment and home-based business—total farm income grew to record-high levels, benefiting from rising commodity prices and a good crop and livestock season in contrast to severe drought conditions in states south of Nebraska.

## Wages

The growth of employment in Nebraska in FY 2010–2011 was accompanied by an increase in wages. Average hourly earnings in manufacturing increased from \$16.18 in June 2010 to \$16.55 in June 2011. In professional and business services, they rose from \$17.69 an hour to \$18.33.

## Income and Cost of Living

The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that Nebraska's per capita personal income was \$39,674 in 2010, just below the national average of \$39,945 and ranking 20th among all states. **Well below the national average was the state's cost of living,** as reported by the American Chamber of Commerce Researchers Association. The Association's Cost of Living Index showed that the cities of Hastings, Lincoln, and Omaha together had general living costs that averaged 92.5 percent of the national average in the second quarter of 2011.

## Housing

Housing prices are, on average, lower in Nebraska than in the nation overall, leading to owner-occupied housing making up a higher percent of total units in the state than the U.S. average. The U.S. Bureau of the Census reports that in the second quarter of 2011 the home ownership rate in Nebraska was 70.1 percent, up from 69.2 percent in the second quarter of 2010. Nationally, homeownership fell to 65.9 percent in the second quarter of 2011 from 66.9 percent a year earlier.

## Online Data

More detailed demographic and economic data for Nebraska are in the *Research & Databook* section of the Department's web site at <http://www.neded.org/business/data-a-research>.



Nebraska Department of Economic Development  
 Fiscal Year 2010-2011 (07/01/10 thru 06/30/11) total budget sources and major uses

		<b>SOURCES OF FUNDS</b>
<b>\$7,902,000</b>	<b>General Funds</b>	
<b>\$36,661,000</b>	<b>Cash Funds</b>	
<b>\$104,987,000</b>	<b>Federal Funds</b>	
<hr/>		
		<b>USES OF FUNDS</b>
<b>\$5,385,000</b>	<b>Staff</b>	
<b>\$10,448,000</b>	<b>Operations</b>	
<b>\$89,154,000</b>	<b>Aid/Grants <i>(Listed Below*)</i></b>	
<hr/>		
<b>\$28,338,000</b>	<b>Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)</b>	<b>* MAJOR AID/GRANT PROGRAMS AND SERVICE CONTRACTS</b>
<b>\$1,000,000</b>	<b>CDBG Disaster Funds</b>	
<b>\$16,886,000</b>	<b>Neighborhood Stabilization Program (NSP)</b>	
<b>\$17,700,000</b>	<b>Affordable Housing Trust Fund</b>	
<b>\$7,000,000</b>	<b>HOME</b>	
<b>\$12,659,000</b>	<b>Job Training</b>	
<b>\$2,238,000</b>	<b>Value-Added Agriculture &amp; BECA Grants</b>	
<b>\$573,000</b>	<b>Microenterprise Program Contract</b>	
<b>\$749,000</b>	<b>Manufacturing Extension Partnership</b>	
<b>\$254,000</b>	<b>Nebraska Operational Assistance Act</b>	
<b>\$133,000</b>	<b>Tourism Grants</b>	
<b>\$1,104,000</b>	<b>Civic, Cultural &amp; Convention Center Funds</b>	
<b>\$449,000</b>	<b>Other</b>	
<b>\$89,154,000</b>		



# BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

## Nebraska Advantage

In FY 2010–2011, business development staff closed a number of successful projects. Among the most notable were *TD Ameritrade, AgReliant Genetics, Laredo Wind Ridge LLC, Xpanxion LLC, Natura Pet Products, Inc., High Point Manufacturing LLC, Worldlawn Power Equipment, Inc., BD Medical West, Graepel North America, Inc., Novel Chemical Solutions, World's Foremost Bank, TMCO, Archer–Daniels–Midland Company, Tyson Fresh Meats, Inc., Lozier Corporation, Tenneco, Neapco Components, Laurel Biocomposite, CoxCom, Inc. & Affiliates, Midwest Web, Inc. and Cargill*. Business development efforts continued to closely involve public and private partnerships in accomplishing solid projects.

Company-direct contacts for recruitment activity accounts for an estimated 47% of lead generation. An additional estimated 19% comes from consultants that the recruitment team works closely with and meets with during events, including *Industrial Asset Management Council, CoreNet, and Area Development Forums*.

**During FY 2010–2011, the Department focused on rapidly growing targets, including biosolutions, transportation/logistics, and software and technology.**



## Nebraska Advantage

The Nebraska Advantage Act has significantly enhanced the state's business climate. Department efforts focused on a statewide vision in the global economy. During FY 2012–2011, the Act attracted 43 applications for a potential \$281 million investment and 1,591 jobs.

## Customized Job Training

In FY 2010–2011, the Customized Job Training Program signed 26 contracts, resulting in a \$2,581,997 investment, the creation of 878 jobs, and the further education of Nebraska workers. As of June 30, 2011, there are 51 businesses under contract, representing \$6,655,247 and 3,045 jobs. The average dollar amount per job is \$2,185.63. An additional \$11,972,000 is committed to 31 businesses, which propose to create 4,065 jobs. For FY 2010–2011, at the time of application, 25 of the projects under contract (49 percent) had a base employment of 25 or fewer employees. Of the 51 projects under contract for FY 2011, 57 percent are for businesses in Greater Nebraska, outside of the Lincoln and Omaha Metropolitan Statistical Areas.

## Nebraska's Industry Growth Targets

Nebraska continues to develop industry clusters, as identified in the Battelle report, based on existing synergies for knowledge-based, diversified economy focused on a competitive global environment.

The following industries were identified as Nebraska's industry growth clusters:

- **BioSolutions**
- **Transportation Logistics**
- **Software and Technology**
- **Advanced Manufacturing**
- **Food**
- **Finance and Insurance**
- **R&D and Engineering**
- **Tourism**
- **Health Services**
- **Business Management and Administrative Services**

## One-Stop Business and Entrepreneur Center

The One-Stop office responded to 2,475 requests for information and assistance in FY 2010-2011 by phone, email and office visits. Of 1,409 telephone contacts 170 came from different Nebraska communities, 44 from other states and two from Canadian provinces.

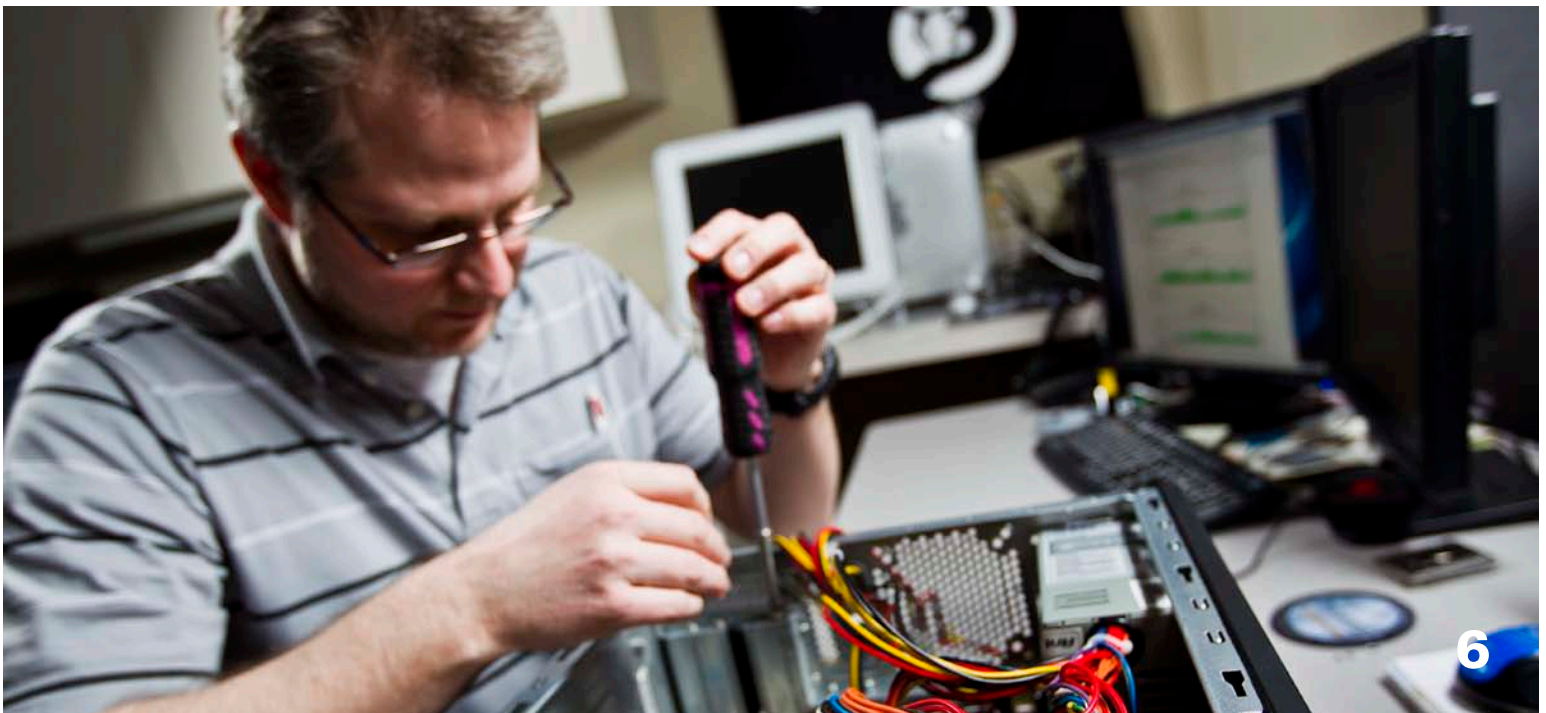
## Nebraska Business Retention & Expansion

Existing businesses form the basis of Nebraska's economy and are key to sustaining local economies. Business owners and managers are socially responsible contributors to the economy in communities across Nebraska. Their employees purchase local goods and services, as well as serve in leadership roles for civic, recreational, social and cultural events. With this in mind state and local economic developers maintain regular contact with business owners and managers in Nebraska through Business Retention & Expansion interviews. During FY2010-2011 there were more than 300 interviews conducted, of which 259 were with primary industries. Of the primary industries interviewed, 169 businesses plan to introduce new products and services in the next two years and 134 primary businesses had intentions of physically expanding their facility. **The estimated new investment in land, equipment, and other physical expansions is over \$252 million during the next three years.** The Nebraska businesses interviewed also shared details regarding employment needs. 110 primary businesses projected increased employment needs over the next two years and based on the FY2010-2011 responses, there are over 800 positions in primary industries that remain unfilled.

The data collected from the interviews is tracked through the *Synchronist Business Information System*®. The system also analyzes growth potential, value and risk of businesses within the local, regional, state and national economy. In 2010 the department purchased additional sub-licenses for the Synchronist System using a grant from the *National Telecommunications and Information Administration* in partnership with the *Nebraska Public Service Commission*, *Nebraska Information Technology Commission* and the *University of Nebraska-Lincoln*. Around 30 local and regional economic development groups, including utility partners *Black Hills Energy* and *Nebraska Public Power*, are using the system to analyze trends in industry sectors and the impact of the current business climate on their plans for future growth.

## InternNE

After passage of LB 386, DED prepared to implement the InternNE program, which included drafting program guidelines, preparing necessary documents, and partnering with the *AIM Insitute* and *careerlink.com* to create a website, [www.interne.com](http://www.interne.com). The program began taking applications June 1, 2011. By the June 30 FY end, 32 applications had been reviewed and approved, creating 86 internships. Of those internships, 20 are or will be geared toward engineering and architecture; 19 towards computer science and mathematics; 13 towards sales and marketing; nine towards accounting and financial services; and seven toward science and laboratory work. Of the business applicants, 14 are involved in manufacturing, eight in information technology and communications, four in wholesale and/or distribution, three in research and development, and two in financial services. During the first months, businesses have hired 39 interns in Lincoln, Omaha, Crete, Kearney, Grand Island, Hastings, Norfolk, and Aurora at an average \$11.39 per hour wage.



# BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

## Nebraska Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP)

Nebraska MEP provided services to 234 manufacturers during FY 2011. Of that total 48 clients were surveyed and reported that **Nebraska MEP's services led to 385 created or retained jobs**, generated increased and retained sales of more than \$17 million, helped reduce costs by more than \$5.3 million, and generated more than \$47 million in impacts for every \$1 of federal funds received. Clients rated the quality services at 8.75 on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being highest.

## International Trade and Investment

Nebraska Exports:

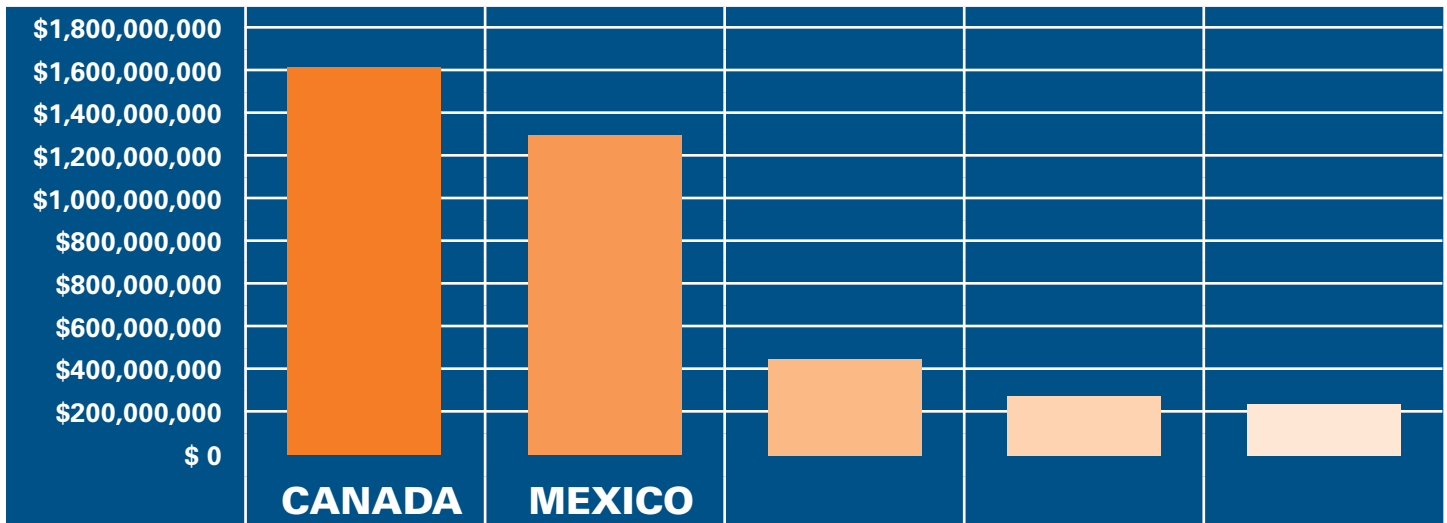
2006	\$3,633,247,980	
2007	\$4,266,141,656	increase of 17% from 2006
2008	\$5,412,021,410	increase of 27% from 2007
2009	\$4,872,924,899	decrease of 10% from 2008
2010	\$5,819,949,181	increase of 19% from 2009

*Nebraska exports increased 60% during the past five years!*

*Nebraska exported to more than 180 countries in 2010!*

Fifty countries accounted for 98% of Nebraska's exports in 2010. But, 50% of Nebraska's exporters went to only two countries.

- **27.6% - Canada (\$1,606,795,391 - an increase of 12% from 2009)**
- **22.5% - Mexico (\$1,313,771,883 - an increase of 19% from 2009)**



Source: Office of Trade and Industry Information (OTII), Manufacturing and Services, International Trade Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce.

Top five importers of Nebraska products were Canada, Mexico, Japan, China and South Korea

DED's focus on training resulted in sponsoring and co-sponsoring 13 international business education workshops and seminars covering a variety of international trade topics during this time period. In addition, the "Traveling International Office" program completed 8 community visits across the state reaching from South Sioux City to Sidney providing one-on-one meeting time with international staff and training on the benefits and challenges of exporting, readiness to export considerations, export planning, and resources available to Nebraska exporters.



In addition to extensive exports, Nebraska has seen an increase in foreign direct investment from abroad. Between the first Reverse Trade Mission in 2008 and June, 2011, twenty companies from eight countries have invested \$276 million in Nebraska creating almost 800 jobs. One company, *EM Gear, LLC*, a South Korean gear box manufacturer, located its U.S. headquarters in Omaha in the late spring of 2011.

The *Nebraska Center–Japan (NCJ)*, Nebraska’s trade office located in Tokyo, was very busy during the year. NCJ staff assisted twelve Nebraska companies to enter or expand their market in Japan. In addition to the assistance NCJ gave to Nebraska companies, the NCJ also provided support for over twenty Japanese companies looking to do business in Nebraska through either direct trade or foreign direct investment. Lastly, the NCJ represented Nebraska at five trade shows in Japan last year.

*JZW International*, a consulting company contracted by DED to represent and market Nebraska in China, helped numerous Nebraska companies interested in doing business in China. A key focus of JZW is to promote Nebraska as a place for Chinese companies to expand their operations by way of foreign direct investment. In June of 2011, *Global Choice International, LLC*, a Chinese LED and energy products company, announced the opening of their North American sales office in Omaha.



## Business Development Regional Staff

Business Development field staff members are strategically located across the state, living and working in the regions in which they serve. The field staff work closely with existing businesses, start up businesses, business attraction projects, local economic development staff, and community leaders to grow the economy in rural Nebraska. Technical assistance, financial packaging, marketing, site development and organizational assistance and services are provided as needed in each region. Considerable time is spent on the state’s Business Retention and Expansion (BRE) program. Business surveys in 2011 were focused on companies that have used the state programs such as Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), Customized Job Training funds or Nebraska Advantage tax incentives.

Expansion of existing businesses is a primary responsibility of the field staff. In addition to the CDBG Economic Development program, additional funds were available under the ARRA program for economic development. **Field staff assisted 337 businesses and was collectively involved in 105 business development projects in FY2010-2011.**

Among the successful projects this year are:

*Greenbrier Rail Services, Brehmer Manufacturing, M&Q LLC, Lone Wolf Wurst Meats, NOVEL Chemical Solutions, KYS Foods, Inc., Intervet-Schering Plough, Nelnet, Evonik Degussa, Prairieland Dairy, Behlen, Novozymes, TIMPTE, Seargent Pet Products, Kid Command Green Bein Productions, Worldlawn, General Dynamics, Premier Senior Marketing, House of Brick Technologies, Breeza Fans, Nissen Winde, and ePower.*

## Nebraska Economic Development Certified Communities

Currently in its seventh year, the program has 34 communities statewide that have been identified as ‘recruitment ready’ for economic development opportunities. Sponsored by the Nebraska Diplomats and other development partners, and administered by DED, it is one of only a few programs in the nation to recognize communities for economic development preparedness.

## Nebraska Leadership Community Designation

The new Nebraska Leadership Community Designation program is designed to help communities plan for community and economic development. Communities earning the designation have completed a rigorous community planning process that prepares them for growth. Currently one community has earned the designation with several in the working through the application process.

## LB 840

The Local Option Municipal Economic Development Act (LB 840) authorizes incorporated cities and villages to collect and appropriate local tax dollars (sales and/or property tax), if approved by the local voters, for economic development purposes. To date, 59 communities have voted to create LB 840 programs.

## BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

### Operational Assistance Act/Invest Nebraska Corporation

The Nebraska Department of Economic Development provided funds from the Operational Assistance Act to *Invest Nebraska Corporation* to further entrepreneurial development in Nebraska. *Invest Nebraska Corporation* is a non-profit, 501(c)(3), venture development organization that advises and invests in companies and early stage business ideas across the state. As *Invest Nebraska* is led by successful entrepreneurs, a motto of the organization is to serve the entrepreneurial community while at the same time embodying the entrepreneurial spirit of Nebraskans. *Invest Nebraska* receives strong demand for financing and services from the business community. From 7/1/2010 to 6/30/2011, *Invest Nebraska* was approached by 145 entrepreneurs seeking financial or technical assistance and reviewed 55 business plans. *Invest Nebraska* has invested over \$277,000 in startup capital and has provided \$108,600 in operational assistance to Nebraska-based companies. Since 2008, in addition to the capital investments made by *Invest Nebraska*, their portfolio companies have also received \$3,290,000 in additional equity capital from outside investors, \$363,000 in loans and \$646,000 in grant capital. Invest Nebraska's capital was leveraged 11:1. *Invest Nebraska* has completed six Operational Assistance awards. The Operational Assistance Program was designed for startups meeting the following criteria (i) headquartered and principal operations located in or, or willing to locate to, Nebraska, and (ii) the potential to raise additional venture or angel capital. The ideal company for the program is a startup in need of capital to build out an alpha or beta model of their product or to make a substantial improvement on the current product. The Operational Assistance comes in the form of a low interest loan with entrepreneur-friendly terms.

In 2009 *Invest Nebraska* began holding regional venture competitions to stimulate growth in young companies and spur startup companies. Modeled after the McCook-based Hormel Family Foundation's annual business plan competition, *Invest Nebraska* has held 10 regional competitions and 3 statewide competitions. In addition to providing startup/growth capital to these companies, *Invest Nebraska* works to educate the companies on best practices in the fields of corporate governance, investor relations, business planning, and numerous other areas.

### Nebraska Microenterprise Program

The Department contracts with the Nebraska Enterprise Fund to administer the Microenterprise Development Act Funds. Individuals from all 93 counties have received services throughout the years. Microenterprise development organizations helped more than 5,000 participants during with training and technical assistance, including business planning and management, financial analysis, marketing strategies and /or micro loans for start up or expansions. **The number of micro loans was up 29 percent from more than a year ago with \$1,283,325 loaned.** A total \$1,718,634 in loans was leveraged from other capital sources, such as banks, public agencies and revolving loan pools.

### Nebraska Film Office

The Nebraska Film Office supports efforts to film on location throughout the state. Staff respond to requests for film and video production information including: securing locations, permits (if necessary), crew resources and production services. The Film Office maintains a searchable database of crew and service providers. Many providers are independent contractors who work to help build infrastructure that is vital in attracting and growing this industry across the state.



# COMMUNITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

The Department's Community and Rural Development Division administers grant programs for housing, community infrastructure, planning and business development. The division's technical and financial services target communities and region-wide delivery.

## Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)

In FY 2010, the Department distributed CDBG funds in the categories of:

- **Comprehensive Revitalization**
- **Downtown Revitalization**
- **Economic Development**
- **Planning**
- **Public Works**
- **Tourism**
- **Water/Wastewater**



### Comprehensive Revitalization

During FY 2010, the cities of North Platte, Grand Island, Fremont, Kearney, Columbus, and Norfolk received \$1.45 million for needs assessment and comprehensive revitalization.

### Downtown Revitalization

During FY 2010, \$206,700 Phase I CDBG funds were distributed to Beatrice, Scottsbluff, Falls City, Auburn, Laurel, Hartington, and Ogallala for Downtown Revitalization. An additional \$1,050,000 Phase II CDBG funds for downtown revitalization activities were awarded to Scottsbluff, Falls City, and Auburn.

### Economic Development

To promote business growth and expansion, a number of economic development loans were awarded in FY 2010. Awards totaling \$7.95 million were made for business expansions taking place in nine Nebraska cities.

### Planning

Planning grants totaling \$252,400 were distributed. These grants are used for a number of activities comprehensive zoning plans and housing market studies to recreation plans and water and wastewater system studies.



# COMMUNITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

## Public Works

A total \$1,852,130 public works grants were distributed to six communities.

## Tourism

A total \$795,350 in CDBG funds were awarded in the Tourism category for projects in Nebraska City, Winnebago, Ord, and McCook.

## Water/Wastewater

A total \$1.9 million in water/wastewater grants were distributed. CDBG funding was awarded to six Nebraska communities to help local governments repair or update existing water and wastewater systems.

## Housing

The Department works closely with communities, nonprofit organizations, housing authorities, and private developers in identifying housing needs throughout the state and assisting in investing funds in quality projects and programs that help create additional affordable housing opportunities, particularly for persons at or below 80 to 100 percent of the Area Median Income. \$12.54 million in Nebraska Affordable Housing Program (NAHP) funds were invested in projects that included new housing construction, rental housing development, housing rehabilitation, and technical assistance. The NAHP program included funding through the Nebraska Affordable Housing Trust Fund (NAHTF), Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), and HOME funds. Funding included a \$5.15 million investment of the NAHTF, which was responsible for the development and improvement of approximately 342 units, a \$1.65 million investment in CDBG funds to rehabilitate 53 homes and a \$5.74 million was used to develop and improve 214 units.

## Nebraska Affordable Housing Trust Fund

The Nebraska Affordable Housing Trust Fund (NAHTF) was created by the 1996 Nebraska Affordable Housing Act to enhance economic development in the State and provide safe, affordable housing to Nebraska's citizens. Funding is received from the revenue generated through the State's Documentary Stamp Tax. Since the program awarded its first funds in July 1998, it has awarded \$89,655,985, matched by \$301,104,237; created 4,791 housing units; and created 6,341 jobs.

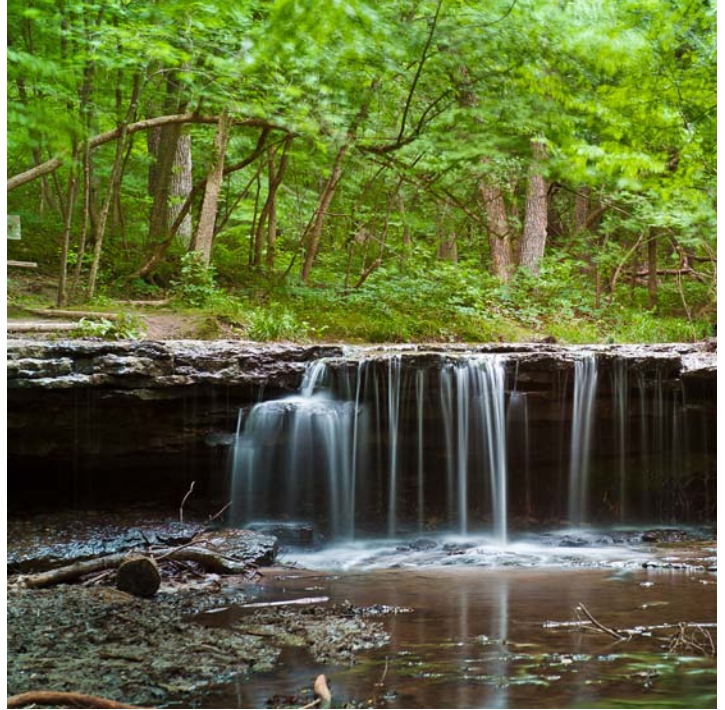
## Community Development Assistance Act

The Community Development Assistance Act provides tax credits to local governments and nonprofit organizations that use the credits as incentives to attract private investment in support of specific community economic development projects. 15 projects were awarded \$350,000 tax credit authorization. Six projects and \$150,000 in credits were renewals of previously awarded projects. The total cost of the 15 projects was \$10,760,749. Of the \$350,000 awarded credits, \$215,401 was claimed, leveraging about \$538,503 in private contributions matching the projects.



The Department's Travel and Tourism Division offers programs and services to help communities and regions develop tourism potential and further strengthen the state's third-largest earner of revenue from outside the state, after agriculture and manufacturing. In 2010, travelers spent almost \$4 billion in the state on trips with overnight stays in paid accommodations and on day trips to places 100 miles or more from home. Annual spending on these trips has increased by more than \$2.3 billion since 1990. **Nebraska jobs directly attributed to travel and tourism spending totaled 45,600 in 2010.** In addition, each dollar spent by tourists in Nebraska is re-spent in the state to produce an additional \$1.70 in business and income, creating an overall impact of \$2.70.

Nebraskans and visitors to the state made 19.4 million trips in the state in 2010 to destinations 100 miles or more from home. Leading states for visitor origin were, in order, Kansas, Iowa, Colorado, Missouri, South Dakota, Illinois, and Minnesota. The average nonresident traveling party visiting Nebraska by highway during the summer consisted of 2.4 people who stayed 2.2 nights in the state and spent \$452. More than one-third of the nonresident traveling parties go to attractions and events, and for each attraction or event visited, they average a half-day longer in Nebraska, spending an additional \$104.



### Tourism Advertising

Funded mostly with revenues from the State's one percent lodging tax, the Travel and Tourism Division devotes a large portion of its resources to advertising, printing and distributing state travel literature, and answering requests for travel information. In FY 2010-2011, paid ads generated 153,175 inquiries for travel information. Of that number, 122,277 were received in the first six months of 2011, when most of the tourism ads also ran. Non-neighboring states including California, Texas, Illinois, and Florida remain in the lineup of top 10 states consistently requesting travel information, indicating that the Division's advertising 'footprint' is growing.



## TRAVEL AND TOURISM DIVISION

### Tourism Marketing Grants

Tourism groups throughout Nebraska received 30 Tourism Marketing Grants totaling almost \$125,000 in FY 2010-2011. Grants were awarded for promotion of events and regions, and general marketing.

### Nebraska Byways Program

The Nebraska Byways Program, which began in 1999, showcases outstanding archaeological, cultural, historic, natural, recreational, and scenic qualities along Nebraska's two-lane highways. The state has nine designated scenic and historic byways. A Division staff member serves as a byways coordinator, helping byway organizations receive grants and other assistance for promoting these roadways.

### Tourism Assessment Program

The Tourism Assessment Program helps Nebraska's communities build on strengths, correct weaknesses, and reach tourism potentials. Communities organize local teams that evaluate past and present tourism efforts and issues. After the assessment coordinator reviews the evaluation, a community site visit is scheduled, when local assessment members and Division staff meet to tour and discuss the community's existing tourism assets and potential for future tourism development. In FY 2010-2011, Tourism Assessment visits were made to Bassett, Fremont, Holdrege, and Sherman County.

### Tourism Attraction Assessment Program

The Tourism Attraction Assessment Program is a new program created in 2010 that follows the same general format as the Tourism Assessment Program. This program is designed to evaluate a single tourism attraction, whether a community tourism assessment was done or not. So far, two attraction assessments have been done: Strategic Air & Space Museum in Ashland and the Meriwether Dredge Museum in Brownville.

### Tourism Development and Marketing Resources Guide

The Tourism Development and Marketing Resources Guide provides useful information on local, State, and Federal funding resources, community and statewide foundations, tourist-oriented organizations and associations, and other information pertinent to developing the tourism industry. It is continually updated.

### Agritourism and Ecotourism

With increasing interest in agritourism and ecotourism in Nebraska, the Travel and Tourism Division has specialists on its staff to assist in these areas of development. In March 2011, the Division hosted an agri/ecotourism workshop in Kearney attended by more than 150 people. Overall, agri/ecotourism continues to show strong interest statewide, with an increase in businesses specializing in wine (wineries and vineyards), birding opportunities, river activities, country retreats, and local food production. There are more places where people can "Buy Fresh/Buy Local" foods, including cheese, bison jerky, jellies, homemade pies, and organic beef and poultry.



## Economic Development Commission

The Department is served by a nine-member voting Economic Development Commission and the Department director, who serves as a non-voting member. The members are Tim Burke, Lindy Hoyer, Mike Herre, Craig K. Madson, Janet Palmtag, Bob Unzicker, Tim White, Milton Rogers and DED Director Catherine Lang.



## Nebraska Diplomats

The nonprofit Nebraska Diplomats Inc. has a membership of more than 360 business executives and community leaders and is the largest economic development organization in Nebraska. The Nebraska Diplomats support the Department's efforts to assist the growth and expansion of existing businesses, attract new business to the state and improve Nebraska's business climate and competitiveness.

Among their many activities in FY 2010-11:


- **Sponsored the State Chamber's Legislative Lunch in February**
- **Helped with TechNebraska – Site Consultants came to Nebraska to look at Power Park Sites.**
- **Sponsored the Reverse Trade Mission – Diplomat Board helped with hosting duties, meetings, etc.**
- **Incorporated Passport Weekend into the last days of the Reverse Trade Mission.**

## Nebraska Rural Development Commission

The Nebraska Rural Development Commission completed a final round of grant awards under the Building Entrepreneurial Communities Act and Value-Added Agriculture grant programs. Ongoing administration of awards will continue through 2013. The projected population loss of nearly 4,000 residents throughout ten counties in the Sandhills led the Commission to meet with every impacted village board and county commission/board of supervisors in the area to share available resources and accumulate data (later shared at a Sandhills Summit). Follow-up meetings will offer further community specific assistance and help connect the communities and businesses with appropriate resources.

The RDC led the four-state "MINK" project along the Missouri River. MINK, which stands for Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, and Kansas, is working to promote the area as a desired destination for travel, cultural heritage, business development, and recreation. Commission activities also include collaborations for a stronger Governor's Conference on Rural Development, assistance for communities with capacity building issues, and continuation of the Sandhills and MINK projects. The RDC did not receive any federal funds in 2011 however \$600 in private donations helped offset Sandhills Summit expenses.





**THE NEBRASKA DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MISSION:**

To provide quality leadership and services that enable Nebraska communities, businesses, and people to succeed in a global economy. We are here, equipped and ready, to assist you and your community in developing and capitalizing on economic development opportunities.

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