

Nebraska Agriculture a Leader in the Region and the Country

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In the Upper Midwest and Great Plains region of the United States, agriculture is a fundamental driver of the economy and a primary steward of the landscape. The seven-state region of Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota represents a dominant part of the nation's agricultural sector, producing more than 30% of the nation's economic output from agriculture in 2021 (USDA Economic Research Service). The region occupies more than 40% of the nation's cropland and nearly 20% of the nation's pastureland as of the 2017 Ag Census (USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service).

Even among this vibrant agricultural region, Nebraska is a leader in terms of the impact, significance, and output of the ag sector. The following tables provide some statistical perspectives of Nebraska agriculture in relation to the seven-state region and to the United States as a whole.

Table 1. Agriculture Value Added, 2021

	Nebraska	Region Total	United States
Value of Agricultural Sector Production			
\$1,000	\$28,753,747	\$152,891,454	\$487,225,544
% of U.S. Total	5.90%	31.38%	
U.S. Rank	4		
Net Value Added			
\$1,000	\$11,497,146	\$63,417,512	\$209,306,242
% of U.S. Total	5.49%	30.30%	
U.S. Rank	4		
Net Farm Income			
\$1,000	\$8,037,344	\$43,279,831	\$140,980,917
% of U.S. Total	5.70%	30.75%	
U.S. Rank	5		

Source: USDA Economic Research Service (ERS)

Nebraska contributes more than 5% to the nation's agricultural sector, whether calculated in value of ag production, net value added (economic contribution to the nation's gross domestic product or GDP), or net farm income (after factors of production like land, labor, and capital are compensated). Related data from the U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Economic Analysis shows further evidence of the importance of Nebraska agriculture. The production ag sector contributes more than 6.5% of the state's gross state product (the state equivalent to GDP at the national level), the second-highest share in the country behind only North Dakota, where ag is a larger share of a smaller state economy.

Table 2. Agricultural Demographics, 2017

	Nebraska	Region Total	United States
Number of Operations	46,332	411,479	2,041,220
% of U.S. Total	2.27%	20.15%	
U.S. Rank	18		
Number of Producers	77,097	680,188	3,399,834
% of U.S. Total	2.27%	20.01%	
U.S. Rank	17		
Total Land Area			
Acres	49,163,591	324,872,471	2,260,681,965
% of U.S. Total	2.17%	14.37%	
U.S. Rank	15		
Total Ag Land			
Acres	44,626,564	254,843,882	910,132,297
% of U.S. Total	4.90%	28.00%	
U.S. Rank	4		
Ag Land % of Total State Land Area	90.77%	78.44%	40.26%
U.S. Rank	1		
Cropland Acres	22,242,599	163,065,459	396,433,817
% of U.S. Total	5.61%	41.13%	
U.S. Rank	6		
Pastureland Acres	22,031,430	83,726,224	440,606,426
% of U.S. Total	5.00%	19.00%	
U.S. Rank	8		
Woodland Acres	352,535	8,052,199	73,092,054
% of U.S. Total	0.48%	11.02%	
U.S. Rank	37		

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service

According to U.S. Census of Agriculture data from 2017, there were 46,332 farm operations in the state of Nebraska with 77,097 producers. These operations worked over 2% of the nation’s total landscape, or nearly 5% of the nation’s total agricultural land, ranking them 4th nationally.

Table 3. Crop Production, 2021

	Nebraska	Region Total	United States
Corn, Grain - Production, Measured in BU	1,854,640,000	8,193,560,000	15,073,820,000
% of U.S. Total	12.30%	54.36%	
U.S. Rank	3		
Soybeans - Production, Measured in BU	350,910,000	2,205,070,000	4,465,382,000
% of U.S. Total	7.86%	49.38%	
U.S. Rank	4		
Wheat - Production, Measured in BU	41,160,000	732,685,000	1,646,254,000
% of U.S. Total	2.50%	44.51%	
U.S. Rank	14		

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service

Not surprisingly, the Cornhusker State is a leader in corn production, ranking 3rd nationwide. Nebraska is also in the top 5 for soybean production and is in the top 15 for wheat production. While smaller crops nationally, Nebraska is also a leading state for grain sorghum, sugar beets, and dry beans, among other crops.

Table 4. Livestock and Meat Production and Inventory, 2021

	Nebraska	Region Total	United States
Cattle, Incl Calves - Production, Measured in Lb.	5,818,846,000	17,913,580,000	45,935,139,000
% of U.S. Total	12.67%	39.00%	
U.S. Rank	2		
Cattle, Incl Calves Inventory	6,850,000	29,510,000	93,789,500
% of U.S. Total	7.30%	31.46%	
U.S. Rank	2		
Cattle, Cows, Beef Inventory	1,880,000	9,331,000	30,843,600
% of U.S. Total	6.10%	30.25%	
U.S. Rank	4		
Cattle, On Feed Inventory	2,700,000	7,539,000	14,667,400
% of U.S. Total	18.41%	51.40%	
U.S. Rank	3		
Hogs - Production, Measured in Lb.	1,549,277,000	23,346,165,000	39,972,892,000
% of U.S. Total	3.88%	58.40%	
U.S. Rank	7		
Hogs - Inventory	3,650,000	44,048,000	74,446,100
% of U.S. Total	4.90%	59.17%	
U.S. Rank	6		
Red Meat, Slaughter, Commercial - Production, Measured in Lb.	7,968,400,000	29,459,500,000	55,813,500,000
% of U.S. Total	14.28%	52.78%	
U.S. Rank	2		

Source: USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service

The livestock and red meat production numbers show Nebraska near the top as well. Nebraska ranks 2nd in cattle production and is a leading state in all inventory numbers. Nebraska also ranks in the top 10 nationally in hog production. Total red meat production from the livestock sector amounts to nearly 8 billion pounds, more than 14% of national production, ranking 2nd nationally.

While this data confirms the economic significance of farm and ranch production in the state, the economic impact of the sector stretches far beyond the farm gate, both backwards for inputs such as farm supplies and ag equipment manufacturing as well as forwards for ag processing, merchandising, and food manufacturing. Previous research by Thompson, Lubben, and Stokes (2020) showed the broader Nebraska agricultural production complex accounts for more than 33% of the total value of state output

and more than 20% of the total economic value added in the state when direct and indirect economic impacts are considered.

References

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