



SOUTHWEST MINNESOTA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REGIONS 6W, 8, and 9

Covers counties:

Big Stone, Blue Earth, Brown, Chippewa,
Cottonwood, Faribault, Jackson,
Lac qui Parle, Le Sueur, Lincoln, Lyon,
Martin, Murray, Nicollet, Nobles,
Pipestone, Redwood, Rock, Sibley, Swift,
Waseca, Watonwan, and Yellow Medicine

2024 REGIONAL PROFILE

Updated November 2024

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DEMOGRAPHICS

POPULATION CHANGE

The Southwest Minnesota planning region includes a total of 23 counties, covering three Economic Development Regions (EDRs) and two Workforce Development Boards (WDBs). In sum, Southwest Minnesota was home to 396,942 people in 2023, about 7% of the state’s total population. The region saw a 0.3% increase in population over the past 13 years, with losses in Region 6W and Region 8 slightly outpaced by the larger increase in Region 9. In comparison, the state of Minnesota saw an 8.2% gain (Table 1).

According to Census population estimates, only 4 of the 23 counties in the region gained population from 2010 to 2023, with the other 19 seeing declines. The largest counties in the region are Blue Earth and Nicollet County, which make up the Mankato/North Mankato Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). With 70,006 people, Blue Earth is the 13th largest county (out of 87) and one of the fastest growing in the state, and Nicollet has 34,242 people after gaining over 1,500 people. Other large counties in the region include Le Sueur with 29,255 people, Brown with 25,628 people, Lyon with 24,427 people, and Nobles with 21,727 people; while Big Stone, Lincoln, Lac qui Parle and Murray are the smallest counties in the region and among the smallest in the state.

Table 1. Population Change 2010-2023

	2010 Census	2023 Census	2010-2023 Change	
			Number	Percent
Southwest Minnesota	395,643	396,942	+1,299	+0.3%
Region 6W	45,190	43,093	-2,097	-4.6%
Big Stone Co.	5,269	5,105	-164	-3.1%
Chippewa Co.	12,441	12,172	-269	-2.2%
Lac qui Parle Co.	7,259	6,630	-629	-8.7%
Swift Co.	9,783	9,719	-64	-0.7%
Yellow Medicine Co.	10,438	9,467	-971	-9.3%
Region 8	119,151	116,046	-3,105	-2.6%
Cottonwood Co.	11,687	11,319	-368	-3.1%
Jackson Co.	10,266	9,919	-347	-3.4%
Lincoln Co.	5,896	5,521	-375	-6.4%
Lyon Co.	25,857	24,427	-430	-1.7%
Murray Co.	8,725	8,049	-676	-7.7%
Nobles Co.	21,378	21,727	+349	+1.6%
Pipestone Co.	9,596	9,245	-351	-3.7%
Redwood Co.	16,059	15,288	-771	-4.8%
Rock Co.	9,687	9,551	-136	-1.4%
Region 9	231,302	237,803	+6,501	+2.8%
Blue Earth Co.	64,013	70,006	+5,993	+9.4%
Brown Co.	25,893	25,628	-265	-1.0%
Faribault Co.	14,553	13,873	-680	-4.7%
Le Sueur Co.	27,703	29,255	+1,552	+5.6%
Martin Co.	20,840	19,657	-1,183	-5.7%
Nicollet Co.	32,727	34,242	+1,515	+4.6%
Sibley Co.	15,226	15,084	-142	-0.9%
Waseca Co.	19,136	18,981	-155	-0.8%
Watonwan Co.	11,211	11,077	-134	-1.2%
State of Minnesota	5,303,925	5,737,915	+433,990	+8.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

COMPONENTS OF POPULATION CHANGE

Though deaths have been increasing, Southwest Minnesota still saw a natural increase – more births than deaths – of 95 over the last three years. Additionally, the region

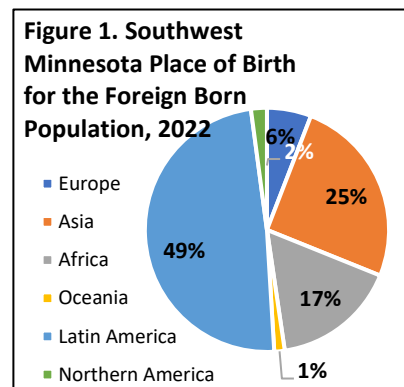
Table 2. Components of Population Change, 2020-2023

Area	Total Population Change	Natural Increase	Vital Events		Net Migration		
			Births	Deaths	Total	Inter-national	Domestic
Southwest	-1,714	+95	+14,372	-14,277	-1,882	+2,146	-4,028
Minnesota	+31,111	+40,368	+207,857	-167,489	-11,352	+34,624	-45,976

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program

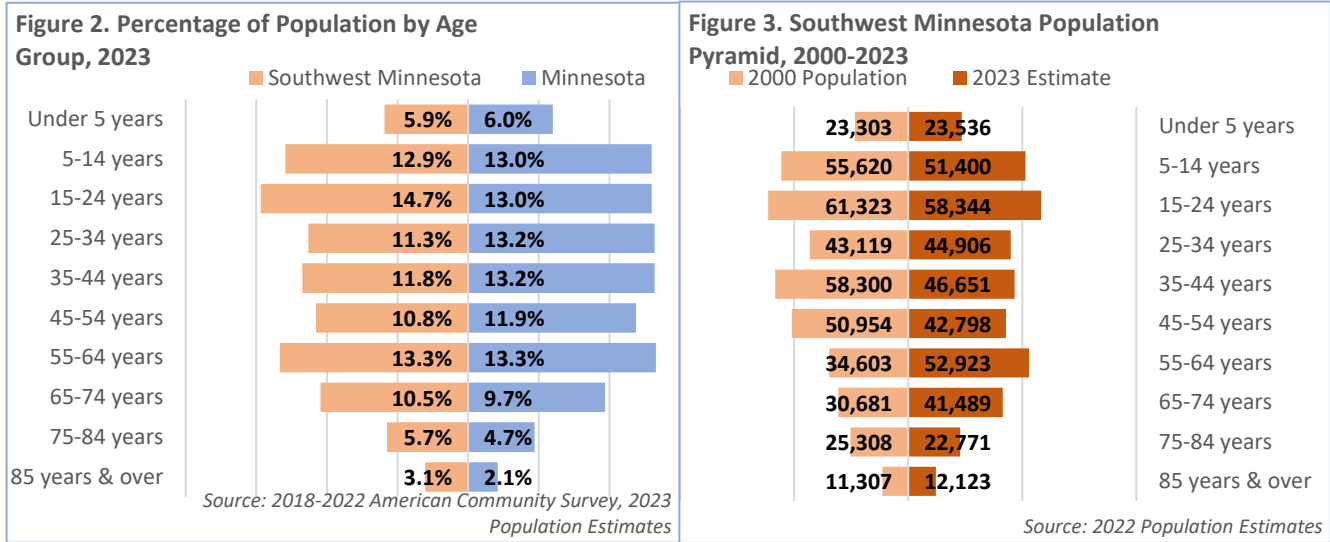
lost population because of out-migration, with about 1,900 more people moving out of the region than moving in. Though there was domestic out-migration of 4,028 people, the region did enjoy positive in-migration of 2,146 additional residents from international sources (Table 2).

Southwest Minnesota is now home to just under 20,000 foreign born residents, or about 5.0% of the total population. The number of immigrants in the region increased by 38.5% since 2010, outpacing the statewide growth rate of 31.3%. About half of these immigrants (9,768 people) were from Latin America, while the second largest number were from Asia, and then Africa (Figure 1).



POPULATION BY AGE GROUP

Southwest Minnesota has an older population than the rest of the state, with 32.6% of residents aged 55 years and over, compared to 29.8% statewide. Consequently, Southwest Minnesota had a lower percentage of people in the 25- to 54-year-old age group, typically considered the “prime working years.” However, having several postsecondary institutions in the region led to a higher percentage of people aged 15 to 24 (Figure 2).

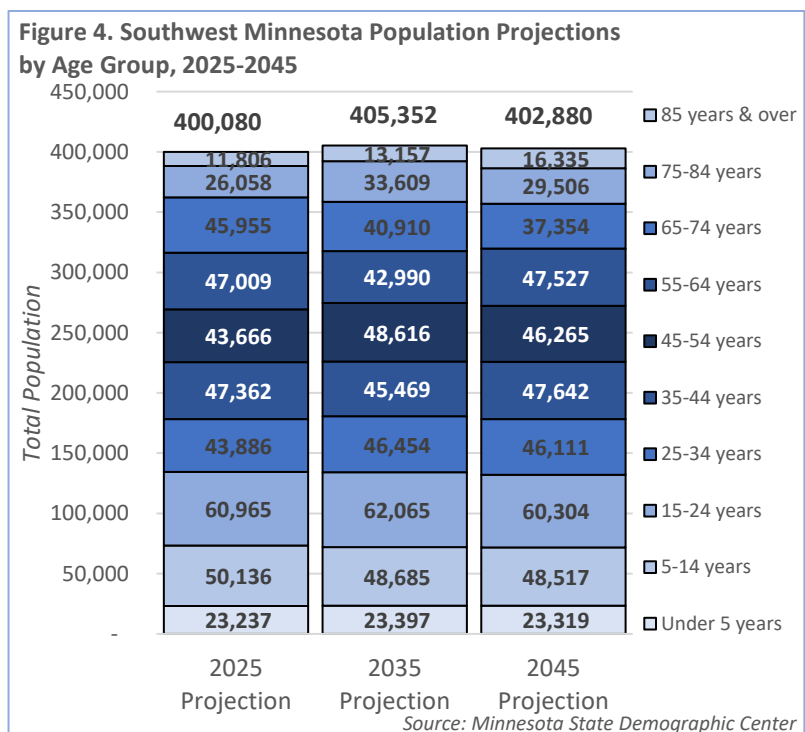


A large portion of the region’s population is a part of the Baby Boom generation, people born between 1946 and 1964, which is creating a significant shift in the population over time. While the number of younger and middle-aged residents was declining, the number of residents aged 55 years and over was rapidly increasing. This included a huge jump in the number of people from 55 to 74 years of age, but a more measured change in people aged 75 years and over (Figure 3).

POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY AGE GROUP

Southwest Minnesota is projected to experience both population growth and decline in the next 20 years. According to population projections from the [State Demographic Center](#), the region is expected to add about 3,250 residents from 2025 to 2035, then lose about 2,500 residents from 2035 to 2045 (Figure 4). In comparison, the state of Minnesota is projected to grow 5.5% through 2045.

Southwest Minnesota is expected to add about 8,000 people aged 75 years and over. Gains are also projected for 25 to 64 year olds, as generations shift through the pyramid. In contrast, the region is projected to see declines in 5 to 24 year olds, and in the 65-74 year old age group as the Baby Boom generation ages into the oldest groups.



POPULATION BY RACE

Southwest Minnesota’s population is less diverse than the state’s but is becoming more diverse over time. In 2022, 88.5% of the region’s residents reported white alone as their race, compared to 79.7% of residents statewide. The region had much smaller percentages of Black or African American residents, Asian or Other Pacific Islanders, people of Two or More Races, and American Indian & Alaskan Natives. However, at 7.6%, Southwest Minnesota had a higher share of people reporting Hispanic or Latino origin than the state, and a slightly higher percentage of people of Some Other Race. The region’s white population was declining over the decade, whereas the population of all other race groups was increasing rapidly (Table 3).

Nobles County had the most diverse populace in the region, including 30.0% of residents reporting Hispanic origin, which was the highest rate in the state. Watonwan, Lyon, Cottonwood, and Blue Earth were also relatively diverse. In contrast, at least 94% of residents in Rock, Big Stone, Lac qui Parle, Brown, and Lincoln were white alone, making them among the least racially diverse counties in the state.

Table 3. Race and Hispanic Origin, 2022	Southwest Minnesota			Minnesota	
	Number	Percent	Change from 2011-2022	Percent	Change from 2011-2022
Total	398,098	100.0%	+0.9%	100.0%	+7.9%
White	352,270	88.5%	-5.0%	79.7%	-0.4%
Black or African American	8,254	2.1%	+62.6%	6.7%	+44.3%
American Indian & Alaska Native	2,551	0.6%	+9.2%	0.9%	-10.2%
Asian & Other Pac. Islander	7,412	1.9%	+33.9%	5.1%	+37.1%
Some Other Race	11,353	2.9%	+106.5%	2.3%	+84.7%
Two or More Races	16,258	4.1%	+207.0%	5.3%	+159.6%
Hispanic or Latino	30,101	7.6%	+48.6%	5.7%	+34.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey

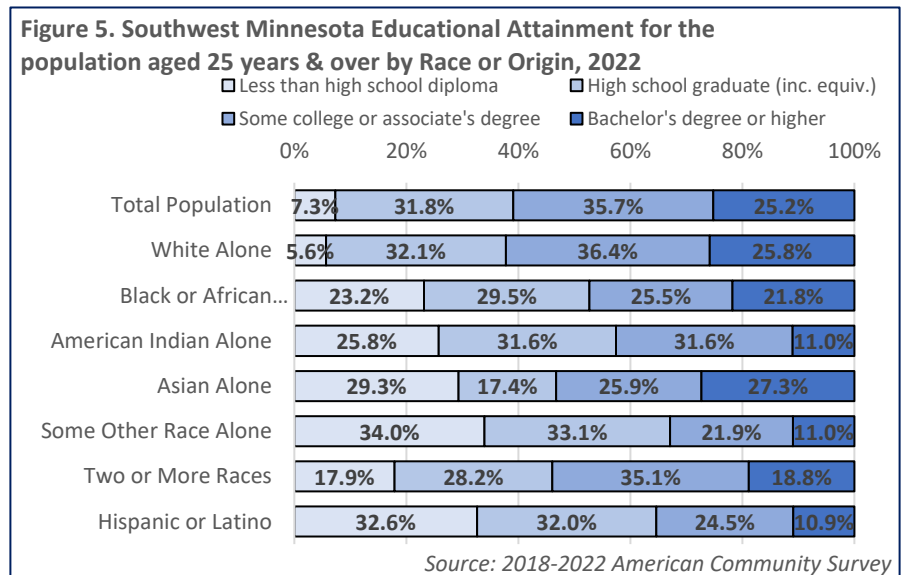
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

With 36.0% of adults aged 18 years and over having a college degree, Southwest Minnesota has lower educational attainment than the state, where 46.5% of adults have an associate, bachelor’s, or advanced degree. In contrast, Southwest has a slightly higher percentage of people with some college but no degree, and a higher percentage of people with a high school diploma or less (Table 4).

Table 4. Educational Attainment for the Adult Population, 2022	Southwest Minnesota		Minnesota
	Number	Percent	Percent
Total Population, 18 years & over	307,256	100.0%	100.0%
Less than high school	24,215	7.9%	7.0%
High school graduate (incl. equiv.)	97,413	31.7%	24.5%
Some college, no degree	75,032	24.4%	22.0%
Associate's degree	39,381	12.8%	11.1%
Bachelor's degree	51,541	16.8%	23.7%
Advanced degree	19,674	6.4%	11.8%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018-2022 American Community Survey

Educational attainment varies significantly by race in Southwest Minnesota. About one-third of Hispanic or Latino residents and people of Some Other Race had less than a high school diploma, compared to just 5.6% of white residents. Likewise, about one-third of American Indians and people of Two or More Races have attended some college or earned an associate degree, while over 25% of white and Asian adults had a bachelor’s degree or higher (Figure 5).



LABOR FORCE

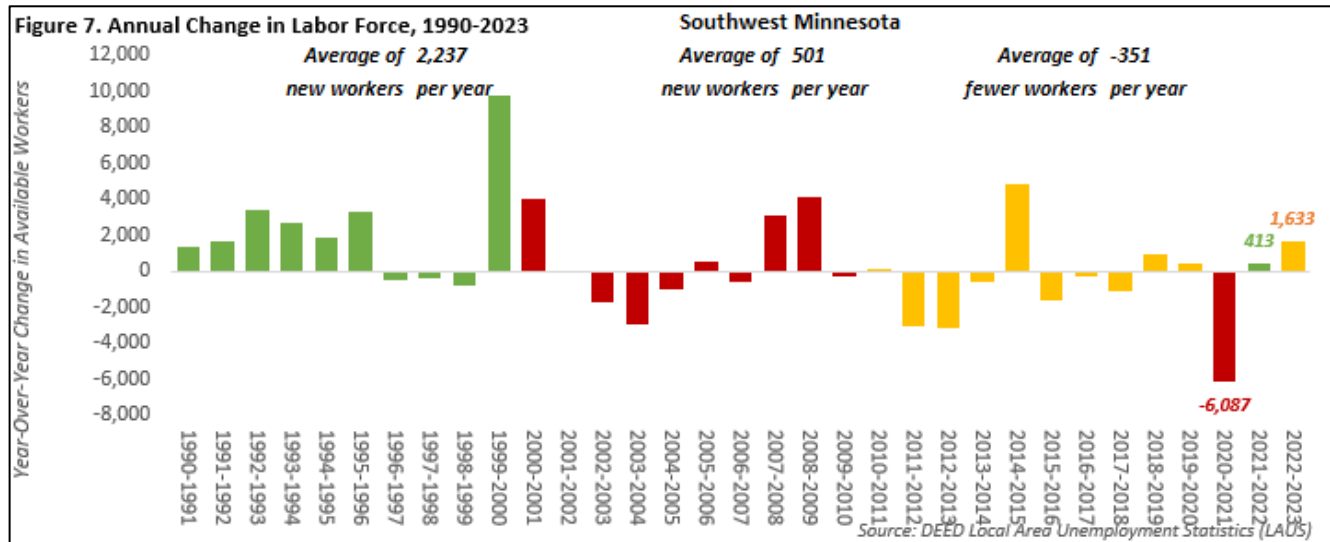
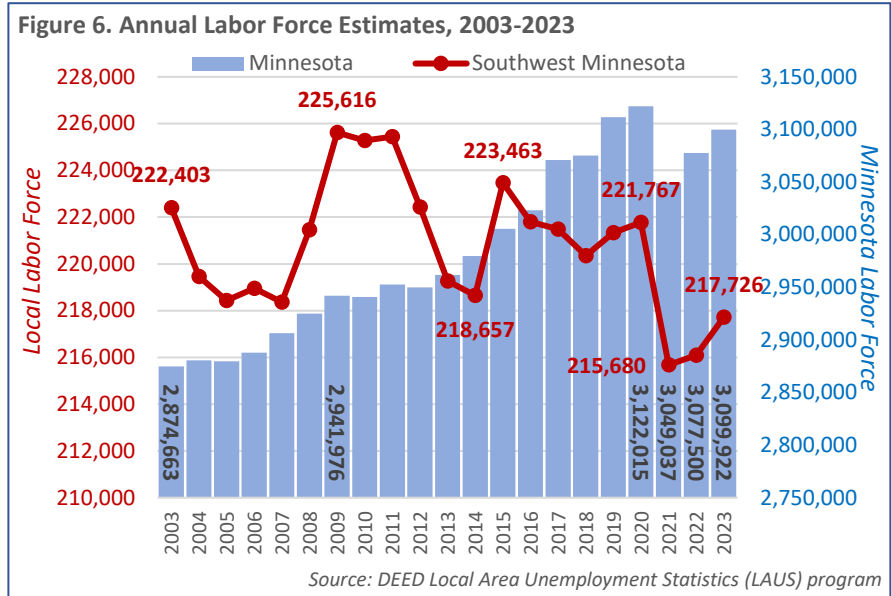
LABOR FORCE CHANGE

According to data from DEED’s [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#) program, Southwest Minnesota had an annual average labor force count of just under 217,750 workers in 2023. The regional labor force has fluctuated up and down since 2003, but has been trending downward over time as the population ages (Figure 6).

After growing to nearly 222,000 workers in 2020, Southwest lost about 5,650 workers from 2019 to 2021 due to the pandemic

recession. This was the most severe labor force decline of the 6 planning regions in the state, and Southwest has not seen a full bounceback so far through 2023. There were just over 6,250 unemployed workers in 2023, which is the second fewest over the past 20 years, showing a tight labor market. These labor force constraints will have a substantial impact on the regional economy.

Averaging a net gain of 2,237 additional labor force participants per year between 1990 and 2000, employers in Southwest Minnesota were able to tap into a large and growing pool of talented workers. With recent declines, the region actually averaged a loss of 351 fewer workers per year between 2010 to 2020, before the precipitous declines of 2021 (Figure 7). Increasingly tight labor markets and a growing scarcity of workers is now recognized as one of the most significant barriers to future economic growth in Southwest Minnesota. In the face of these constraints, it has become evident that a more diverse workforce in terms of age, gender, race, ethnicity, disability status, and immigration has been and will continue to be a vital source of the workers that employers need to succeed. As the white, native-born workforce continues to age, younger workers of different races or from different countries will comprise the fastest growing segment of the labor force.



LABOR FORCE PROJECTIONS

If Southwest Minnesota’s population changes at the projected rates shown in Figure 4 above, the region would be expected to see a small increase in the labor force over the next decade as well. Applying current labor force participation rates to future population projections by age group creates labor force projections for the region, which show a steady 1.1% gain in workforce numbers (Table 5).

In addition to the overall increase, the labor force will also see a significant shift over time, with relatively large gains in the number of workers from 20 to 54 years of age against huge declines in the number of workers aged 55 to 74 years. The region is also expected to lose teenaged workers in the next decade. However, the region is expected to see gains in the number of workers over 75 years of age, as the Baby Boom generation stays active. Due to the projected changes, the 25 to 54 year old age group will make up about 57.9% of the total workforce in 2035, up from 56.2% in 2025. Either way, these long-term changes will likely lead to a tight labor market in the future, with employers needing to respond to the changing labor force availability in the region.

	2025 Labor Force Projection	2035 Labor Force Projection	2025-2035 Change	
			Numeric	Percent
16 to 19 years	13,020	12,609	-411	-3.2%
20 to 24 years	26,912	28,610	+1,697	+6.3%
25 to 44 years	80,637	81,233	+597	+0.7%
45 to 54 years	38,028	42,339	+4,311	+11.3%
55 to 64 years	35,464	32,432	-3,032	-8.5%
65 to 74 years	14,195	12,637	-1,558	-11.0%
75 years & over	2,930	3,619	+689	+23.5%
Total Labor Force	211,186	213,479	+2,293	+1.1%

Source: calculated from MN State Demographic Center projections, and 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

With 66.9% of the working age population aged 16 years and over in the labor force, Southwest Minnesota had slightly lower labor force participation rates than the state’s 68.7% rate. However, the region actually had higher labor force participation rates than the state in most age groups, but the overall rate was lower because of the region’s smaller labor force in the prime working years and larger labor force in the oldest age groups (Table 6).

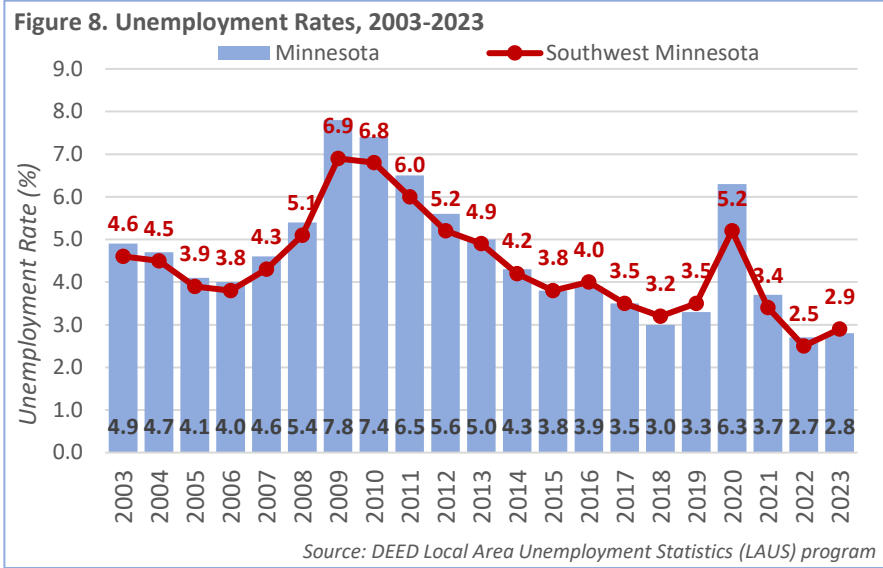
Likewise, the region had slightly higher participation rates than the state for most racial groups; and also had large unemployment rate disparities for BIPOC workers. The region also had 11,414 workers with disabilities in the labor force, participating at rates similar to the state, but lower than the rate for all workers. Unemployment rates were highest for youth, BIPOC workers, people with less education, and workers with disabilities.

Age Group	Southwest Minnesota			Minnesota	
	Labor Force	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate
Total Labor Force	212,394	66.9%	3.3%	68.7%	4.0%
16 to 19 years	13,069	56.1%	8.4%	53.0%	9.8%
20 to 24 years	25,199	84.2%	4.6%	83.1%	6.7%
25 to 44 years	81,146	88.4%	2.9%	88.8%	3.5%
45 to 54 years	37,381	87.1%	2.4%	87.8%	2.9%
55 to 64 years	40,042	75.4%	2.9%	72.8%	3.1%
65 to 74 years	12,853	30.9%	2.9%	27.6%	3.3%
75 years & over	2,708	7.7%	2.2%	6.6%	3.2%
Employment Characteristics by Gender					
Male	113,329	71.0%	4.1%	72.4%	4.3%
Female	99,074	62.7%	2.4%	65.0%	3.6%
Employment Characteristics by Race & Hispanic Origin					
White alone	190,274	66.4%	3.0%	67.8%	3.4%
Black or African American	3,878	66.1%	7.9%	71.5%	8.7%
American Indian & Alaska Native	1,086	58.5%	1.7%	57.6%	11.9%
Asian or Other Pacific Islanders	3,900	66.3%	6.0%	73.9%	3.6%
Some Other Race	5,930	76.6%	4.9%	76.1%	6.1%
Two or More Races	7,332	76.8%	7.0%	74.3%	6.6%
Hispanic or Latino	14,901	77.4%	7.2%	77.0%	6.3%
Employment Characteristics by Disability, 20 to 64 years					
With Any Disability	11,414	53.8%	9.7%	54.4%	10.2%
Employment Characteristics by Educational Attainment					
Population 25 to 64 years	158,579	84.4%	2.8%	84.4%	3.3%
Less than H.S. Diploma	8,798	69.9%	3.3%	67.2%	4.6%
H.S. Diploma or Equivalent	40,059	78.8%	1.7%	76.8%	2.5%
Some College or Assoc. Degree	63,050	86.7%	2.8%	85.1%	3.6%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	46,662	90.3%	1.7%	90.3%	2.0%

Source: 2018-2022 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

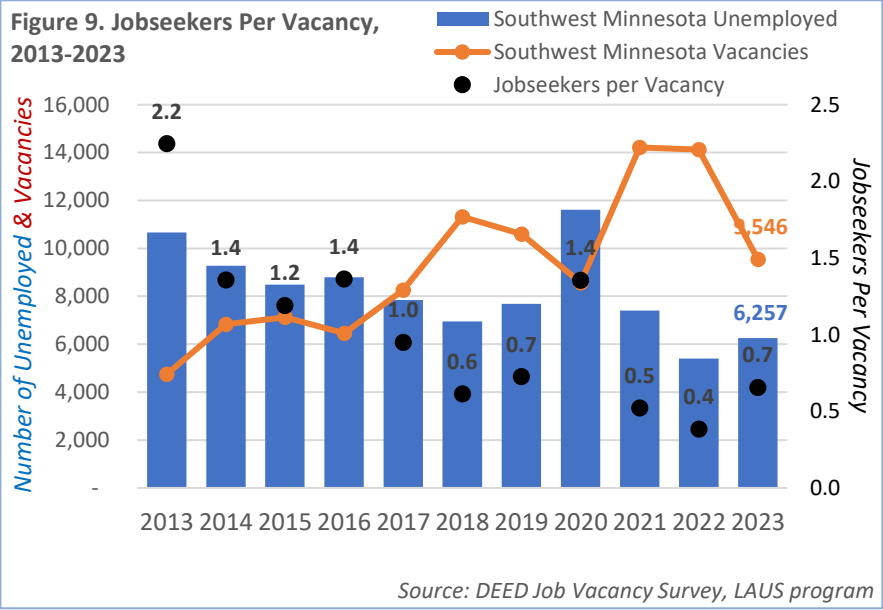
UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

Southwest Minnesota’s unemployment rate hit 2.9% in 2023, which is still lower than those seen pre-pandemic. Unemployment rates jumped across the state and in Southwest Minnesota in 2020 due to the pandemic recession, with the highest rates reported in the summer before dropping back down by the end of the year. According to [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#), even though rates rose, they did not get as high as during the Great Recession. In general, Southwest Minnesota’s unemployment rate has closely tracked the state rate (Figure 8).



JOBSEEKERS PER VACANCY

As the number of available unemployed workers has declined and the economy continues to recover, the region’s labor market has tightened. Prior to the pandemic, the region had seen three straight years with less than one jobseeker per vacancy, indicating an extremely tight labor market. The ratio spiked to 1.4 jobseekers per vacancy in 2020, then declined to an all-time low of 0.4 in 2022. By that measure, Southwest Minnesota had one of the tightest labor markets in the state (Figure 9).



COMMUTE SHED AND LABOR SHED

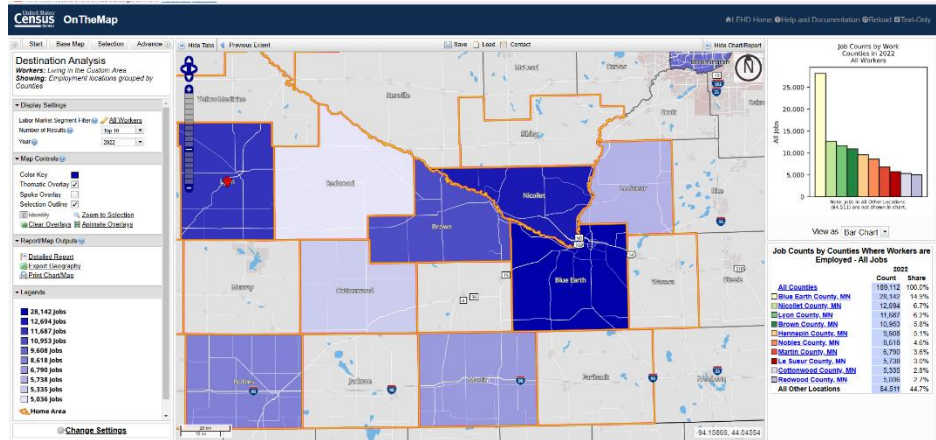
According to commuting data from the [U.S. Census Bureau](#), the vast majority – about 80% – of workers who live in the region also work within the region. However, Southwest is a net exporter of labor, having more workers than available jobs. In sum, 136,548 workers both lived and worked in Southwest in 2022, while another 35,030 workers drove into the region for work, compared to 52,564 workers who lived in the region but drove to surrounding counties for work – that number has been increasing over time (Table 7 and Figure 10).

	2022	
	Count	Share
Employed in the Selection Area	171,578	100.0%
Employed in the Selection Area but Living Outside	35,030	20.4%
Employed and Living in the Selection Area	136,548	79.6%
Living in the Selection Area	189,112	100.0%
Living in the Selection Area but Employed Outside	52,564	27.8%
Living and Employed in the Selection Area	136,548	72.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap

Home to Mankato, Blue Earth County is the largest regional employment center, and was the biggest draw for workers, followed by Nicollet, Lyon, Brown, Nobles, Martin, and Le Sueur County. Employers in the region both lose and draw workers from the Twin Cities metro area, as well as Minnehaha County in South Dakota, which includes the fast growing city of Sioux Falls. In sum, most workers both live and work in the region, but more workers commute out of the region than commute in (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Southwest Minnesota Labor and Commute Shed, 2022

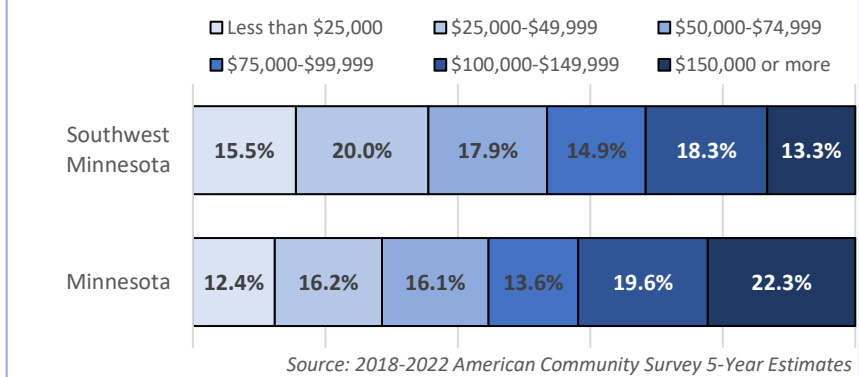


INCOMES, WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS

HOUSEHOLD INCOMES

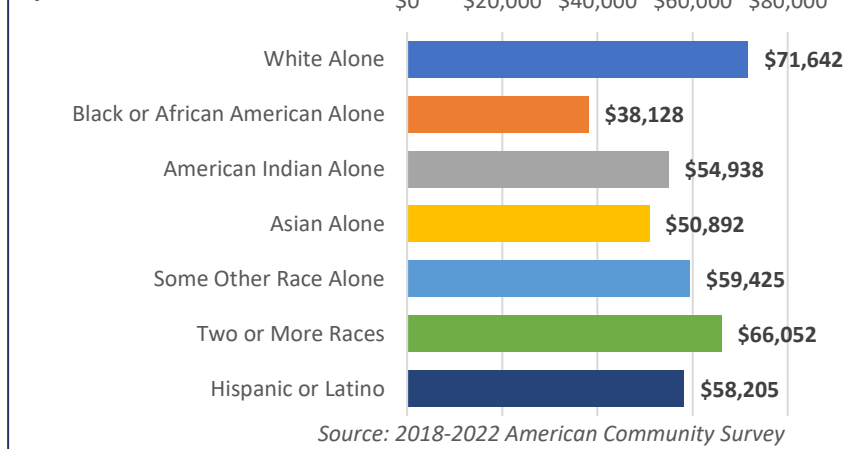
Household incomes were significantly lower in Southwest Minnesota than the rest of the state. The median household income in Southwest was \$69,891 in 2022, compared to \$84,313 in Minnesota. About 35.5% of the households in the region had incomes below \$50,000 in 2022, compared to just 28.6% of households statewide. Another 32.8% earned between \$50,000 and \$100,000, and 31.6% earned over \$100,000 per year, compared to 29.7% and 41.9% statewide, respectively (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Household Incomes, 2022



Median household incomes varied by race or origin in the region. Black or African American households reported the lowest incomes in Southwest Minnesota, with a median income that was more than \$33,500 lower than for white households. Households of two or more races had a median income of \$66,052, followed by Some Other Race at \$59,425, Hispanic or Latino at \$58,205, American Indian at \$54,938, and Asian at \$50,892. Every race group in the region had lower incomes than white households (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Southwest Minnesota Median Household Income by Race, 2022



COST OF LIVING

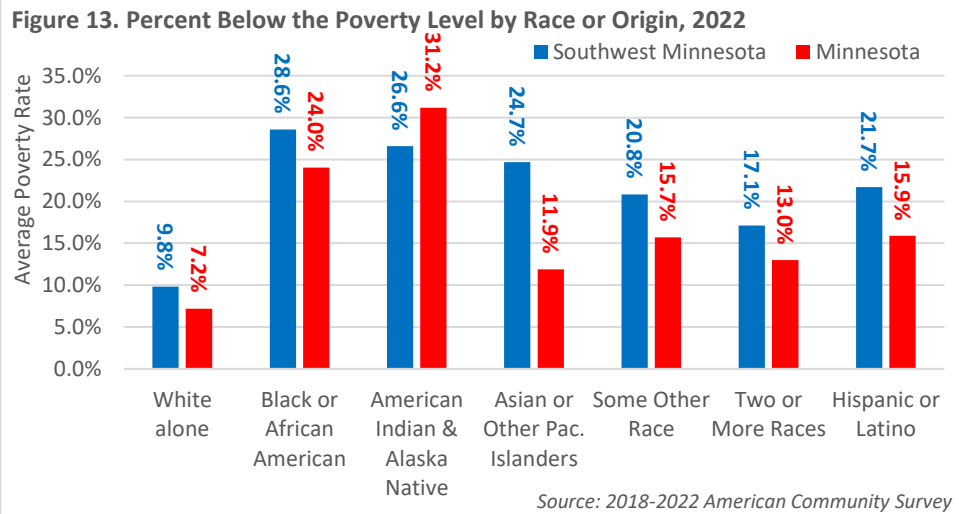
According to DEED’s [Cost of Living tool](#), the basic needs budget for an average Minnesota family (which consists of 2 adults and 1 child, with 1 full-time and 1 part-time worker) was \$67,320 in 2023. The cost of living for a similar family in Southwest Minnesota was \$56,004 – which was the lowest of the 6 planning regions in the state. The highest monthly costs were for transportation, food, and housing; though the region’s taxes, housing, and child care costs were significantly lower than the rest of the state. In order to meet the basic cost of living for the region, the workers in the family scenario described would need to earn \$17.95 per hour over the course of 60 hours per work week.

DEED’s Cost of Living tool provides different estimates for household compositions including single people, partnered couples, and up to 4 children. For a single person living alone and working full-time, the estimated yearly cost in Southwest would be \$29,112, which would require an hourly wage of \$14.00 to meet the basic needs standard of living (Table 8). That was also the lowest cost of living in the state.

Table 8. Southwest Minnesota Cost of Living, 2023										
Family Composition	Number of Workers	Yearly Cost of Living	Hourly Wage Required	Monthly Costs						
				Child Care	Food	Health Care	Housing	Transportation	Other	Taxes
Southwest Minnesota										
Single, 0 children	1 FT	\$29,112	\$14.00	\$0	\$413	\$161	\$730	\$549	\$274	\$299
Single, 1 child	1 FT	\$46,092	\$22.16	\$650	\$608	\$415	\$936	\$553	\$370	\$309
2 parents, 1 child	1 FT, 1 PT	\$56,004	\$17.95	\$325	\$942	\$576	\$936	\$923	\$449	\$516
2 parents, 2 children	2 FT	\$75,084	\$18.05	\$917	\$1,226	\$585	\$1,271	\$957	\$597	\$704
State of Minnesota										
Single, 0 children	1 FT	\$34,704	\$16.68	\$0	\$419	\$160	\$1,021	\$572	\$345	\$375
2 parents, 1 child	1 FT, 1 PT	\$67,320	\$21.58	\$544	\$955	\$574	\$1,285	\$977	\$536	\$739

Source: DEED Cost of Living tool

Overall, Southwest Minnesota’s poverty rate was 11.2%, which was higher than the statewide rate of 9.3%. Like incomes, poverty levels varied widely by race and origin. It was estimated that just under 30% of the region’s Black or African American population was below the poverty level in 2022, compared to just 9.8% of the white population. Likewise, poverty levels hovered around 27% for American Indians and almost 25% Asians, which was more than double the rate for Asians in the state as a whole. Other than white and people of Two or More Races, every other race counted more than a fifth of its members below the poverty threshold. And in every case except for American Indians, the region’s poverty rate was higher than the state’s poverty rate, a reflection of the lower household incomes as noted above (Figure 13).



WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS

According to DEED’s [Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics](#) program, the median hourly wage for all occupations in Southwest Minnesota was \$22.98 in the first quarter of 2024, which was the second lowest wage level of the six planning regions in the state. Southwest’s median wage was about \$2.25 below the state’s median hourly wage, equaling 91% of the statewide wage rate, and \$4.80 below the median hourly wage in the Twin Cities metro area. At \$22.61, EDR 6W had the lowest median wage in the region, just below EDR 8 at \$22.81, and well below EDR 9 at \$23.24 (Table 9).

Table 9. Occupational Employment Statistics by Region, 1 st Qtr. 2024	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment
Central Minnesota	\$23.55	274,190
Twin Cities Metro Area	\$27.78	1,743,500
Northeast Minnesota	\$23.41	138,010
Northwest Minnesota	\$22.77	219,910
Southeast Minnesota	\$24.26	240,340
Southwest Minnesota	\$22.98	169,300
EDR 6W - Upper MN Valley	\$22.61	16,230
EDR 8 - Southwest	\$22.81	52,080
EDR 9 - South Central	\$23.24	100,990
State of Minnesota	\$25.22	2,881,100

Source: [DEED Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics](#)

Based on location quotient, Southwest Minnesota stands out for having higher concentrations of Farming, Production, Installation, Maintenance, & Repair, Education, Training & Library, and Transportation & Material Moving workers than the state. The largest occupations in the region include Production, Office & Administrative Support, Transportation & Material Moving, and Sales & Related positions. Not surprisingly, the lowest-paying jobs are concentrated in Food Prep & Serving, Personal Care & Service, Sales & Related, Healthcare Support, and Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance, which tend to have lower educational and training requirements. For the most part, the gap in pay between Southwest Minnesota and the state is also much lower in these jobs (Table 10).

Table 10. Southwest Minnesota Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics, 1 st Qtr. 2024							
	Southwest Minnesota				State of Minnesota		
	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment	Share of Total Employment	Location Quotient	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Statewide Employment	Share of Total Employment
Total, All Occupations	\$22.98	169,300	100.0%	1.0	\$25.22	2,881,100	100.0%
Management	\$46.97	9,230	5.5%	0.8	\$57.75	201,710	7.0%
Business & Financial Operations	\$33.80	6,800	4.0%	0.6	\$39.26	202,700	7.0%
Computer & Mathematical	\$39.00	1,750	1.0%	0.3	\$50.83	98,240	3.4%
Architecture & Engineering	\$38.29	2,550	1.5%	0.7	\$42.97	58,320	2.0%
Life, Physical & Social Science	\$33.10	1,310	0.8%	0.8	\$39.93	29,220	1.0%
Community & Social Service	\$27.03	3,910	2.3%	1.1	\$27.92	57,930	2.0%
Legal	\$37.81	520	0.3%	0.5	\$51.15	19,040	0.7%
Education, Training & Library	\$26.90	11,890	7.0%	1.2	\$28.22	163,340	5.7%
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	\$23.25	1,560	0.9%	0.7	\$29.01	36,160	1.3%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	\$39.40	9,630	5.7%	0.9	\$43.01	184,410	6.4%
Healthcare Support	\$18.15	10,230	6.0%	1.0	\$18.07	169,580	5.9%
Protective Service	\$28.75	2,330	1.4%	0.9	\$28.87	45,860	1.6%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	\$14.59	14,330	8.5%	1.1	\$15.07	232,190	8.1%
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	\$18.12	5,120	3.0%	1.1	\$18.83	79,660	2.8%
Personal Care & Service	\$16.74	3,150	1.9%	0.9	\$17.60	59,420	2.1%
Sales & Related	\$17.35	14,430	8.5%	1.0	\$18.82	242,440	8.4%
Office & Administrative Support	\$22.56	19,330	11.4%	0.9	\$23.86	352,250	12.2%
Farming, Fishing & Forestry	\$21.86	530	0.3%	2.6	\$22.13	3,520	0.1%
Construction & Extraction	\$28.73	7,080	4.2%	1.1	\$32.44	110,960	3.9%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	\$27.56	7,870	4.6%	1.3	\$29.54	104,530	3.6%
Production	\$22.27	19,500	11.5%	1.6	\$23.05	203,810	7.1%
Transportation & Material Moving	\$22.25	16,250	9.6%	1.2	\$22.86	225,820	7.8%

Source: [DEED Occupational Employment Statistics, Qtr. 1 2024](#)

In contrast, the highest paying jobs are found in Management, Healthcare Practitioners, Computer & Mathematical, Architecture & Engineering, Legal, Business & Financial Operations, and Life, Physical, & Social Science occupations, which all need higher levels of education and experience, including many that require postsecondary training. The pay gaps between the region and state are much bigger in these occupations.

JOB VACANCY SURVEY

Employers in Southwest Minnesota reported 9,546 job vacancies in 2023, which was down by about 4,600 vacancies compared to the past year, though that was the second highest number ever reported (going back to 2001). Instead, the 9,546 vacancies in 2023 was in line with pre-pandemic levels, down slightly from the average in 2018 and 2019, but up compared to 2016 and 2017. The median hourly wage offer jumped up to \$19.74 across all occupations, but ranged from a low of around \$14.60 per hour for Personal Care & Service occupations, to \$37.50 per hour or more for Computer & Mathematical occupations. The median wage offer increased by \$3.19 compared to 2022, reflecting high demand for workers.

The largest number of vacancies were in Food Preparation & Serving Related and Sales & Related occupations, with each having just under 1,200 vacancies. There were also a lot of openings in Transportation & Material Moving, Healthcare Practitioners, Installation, Maintenance & Repair, Office & Administrative Support, Production, and Healthcare Support occupations (Table 11).

Overall, about one-quarter of openings were part-time and only 11% were temporary or seasonal. Just under one-third required postsecondary education, and nearly the same amount required a year or more of experience. In sum, educational requirements in the region had been stable or declining over the past 5 years, while work experience requirements were rising. Educational requirements vary widely by occupation though, with 91% of Computer & Mathematical occupations requiring a degree compared to 0% of both Food Prep & Serving Related and Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance occupations, which can be learned on the job.

Table 11. Southwest Minnesota Job Vacancy Survey Results, 2023

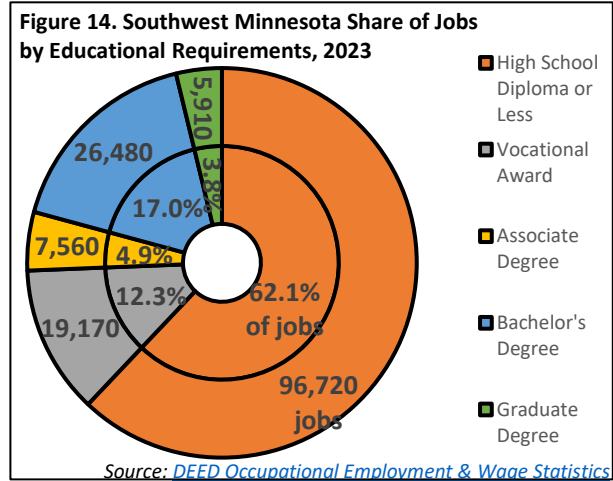
	Number of Total Vacancies	Median Hourly Wage Offer	Percent Part-Time	Percent Temporary or Seasonal	Requiring Postsecondary Education	Requiring 1 or More Years of Work Exp.	Requiring Certificate or License
Total, All Occupations	9,546	\$19.74	26%	11%	31%	33%	46%
Management	202	\$32.04	0%	0%	66%	87%	43%
Business & Financial Operations	520	\$25.88	26%	9%	64%	49%	47%
Computer & Mathematical	100	\$37.50	2%	0%	91%	41%	12%
Architecture & Engineering	96	\$28.56	0%	0%	74%	86%	61%
Life, Physical & Social Sciences	69	\$24.18	1%	0%	26%	61%	52%
Community & Social Service	258	\$23.46	18%	0%	88%	48%	75%
Education, Training & Library	453	\$18.35	40%	24%	58%	30%	70%
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	129	\$16.82	81%	55%	51%	24%	34%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	738	\$31.97	30%	2%	95%	47%	98%
Healthcare Support	508	\$16.76	46%	0%	45%	9%	77%
Protective Service	177	\$22.52	50%	14%	35%	37%	77%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	1,180	\$15.32	31%	5%	0%	17%	7%
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	432	\$16.90	26%	43%	0%	13%	13%
Personal Care & Service	188	\$14.60	70%	45%	21%	5%	37%
Sales & Related	1,164	\$15.93	22%	5%	5%	20%	10%
Office & Administrative Support	563	\$19.27	25%	2%	9%	44%	21%
Construction & Extraction	431	\$25.04	0%	14%	17%	46%	54%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	653	\$22.92	6%	4%	33%	60%	63%
Production	540	\$18.93	18%	7%	12%	37%	12%
Transportation & Material Moving	773	\$21.15	36%	35%	3%	24%	91%

Source: [DEED Job Vacancy Survey, 2023](#)

EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Similar to Job Vacancy Survey results, data from DEED’s Occupational Employment Statistics program shows that only about 38% of jobs in the region require postsecondary education for entry. The other 62% can be started with a high school diploma or less and some amount of on-the-job training (Figure 14).

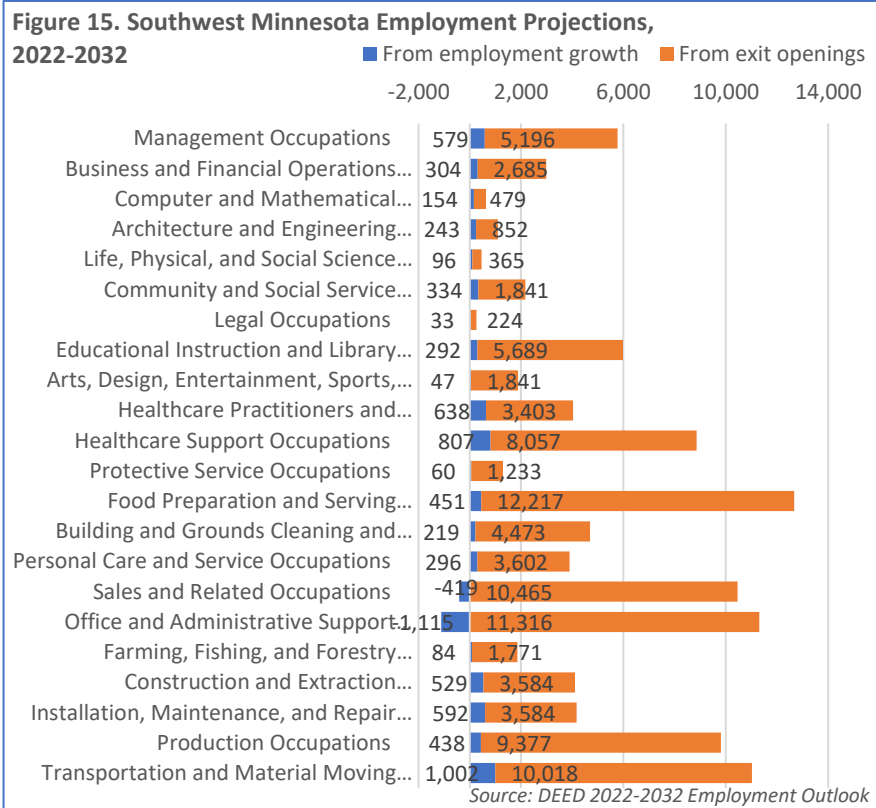
Certain careers – such as dentists, lawyers, and teachers – require a college education, while other jobs – including cost estimators, sales representatives, and correctional officers – do not. College is an excellent way to move up career ladders and open windows of opportunity to fields that would otherwise be closed, such as nursing or engineering. Many of these occupations offer high wages and are in high demand in the marketplace. While education is typically a worthwhile investment, college can be expensive – with average annual expenses ranging between \$20,500 and more than \$53,000 per year in Minnesota¹. For those who go to college, choice of major matters – different programs lead to different jobs that earn different amounts of money.



EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS

Overall, the 23-county Southwest Minnesota planning area is projected to grow 2.8% from 2022 to 2032, a gain of 5,664 new jobs. That is the slowest of the 6 planning regions in the state. In addition, the region is also expected to need 102,272 replacement openings to fill jobs left vacant by retirements or other people who have dropped out of the labor force or changed careers.

Transportation & Material Moving, Healthcare Support, Healthcare Practitioners, Installation, Maintenance & Repair, Management, and Construction & Extraction occupations are expected to see the most new growth, while Architecture & Engineering, Healthcare Support, and Computer & Mathematical



occupations are projected to be the fastest growing. But every occupational group will show some future demand either through new jobs or replacement openings, with the most openings shown for Food Preparation & Serving, Office & Administrative, Sales & Related, and Transportation (Figure 15).

¹ <http://www.ohe.state.mn.us/mPg.cfm?pageID=94>

OCCUPATIONS IN DEMAND

According to DEED's [Occupations in Demand](#) tool, there are well over 200 occupations showing relatively high demand in the region, with training and education requirements ranging from short-term on-the-job training to postsecondary education to advanced degrees. These occupations are spread across different sectors but are also concentrated in the region's major industries. For example, Home Health & Personal Care Aides, Teachers, Mechanics and Repair workers, Truck Drivers, and Retail Trade workers are among the top occupations in demand based on the consistent need for workers in these fields. Many of the jobs are concentrated in Healthcare, Transportation, Education, and other related industries (Table 12).

High School or Less	Vocational Training	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Retail Salespersons \$34,798/yr	Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers \$54,491/yr	Registered Nurses \$85,138/yr	Accountants & Auditors \$69,245/yr
Home Health & Personal Care Aides \$36,495/yr	Nursing Assistants \$39,764/yr	Police & Sheriff's Patrol Officers \$74,684/yr	General & Operations Managers \$82,482/yr
Fast Food & Counter Workers \$30,228/yr	Licensed Practical & Licensed Vocational Nurses \$58,499/yr	Dental Hygienists \$84,870/yr	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education \$65,364/yr
Cashiers \$30,595/yr	Heating, Air Conditioning, & Refrig. Mechanics & Installers \$64,265/yr	Industrial Engineering Technologists & Technicians \$60,049/yr	Secondary School Teachers, exc. Special Ed. & Career/Technical \$66,349/yr
Teaching Assistants, Except Postsecondary \$38,031/yr	Bus & Truck Mechanics & Diesel Engine Specialists \$59,444/yr	Radiologic Technologists & Technicians \$78,236/yr	Substitute Teachers, Short-Term \$52,112/yr
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers \$45,427/yr	Bookkeeping, Accounting, & Auditing Clerks \$47,963/yr	Agricultural Technicians \$50,274/yr	Financial Managers \$119,560/yr
Janitors & Cleaners \$37,379/yr	Plumbers, Pipefitters, & Steamfitters \$61,794/yr	Human Resources Assistants, Except Payroll & Timekeeping \$49,828/yr	Industrial Engineers \$90,455/yr
Construction Laborers \$49,744/yr	Substance abuse, behavioral, & mental health counselors \$49,947/yr	Civil Engineering Technologists & Technicians \$71,227/yr	Computer Systems Analysts \$96,291/yr
Bus Drivers, School \$49,228/yr	Automotive Service Technicians & Mechanics \$50,024/yr	Physical Therapist Assistants \$62,988/yr	Middle School Teachers, exc. Special Ed & Career/Technical \$66,534/yr
Laborers & Freight, Stock, & Material Movers, Hand \$43,003/yr	Industrial Machinery Mechanics \$60,689/yr	Veterinary Technologists & Technicians \$40,453/yr	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education \$37,747/yr

Source: DEED Occupations in Demand

ECONOMY

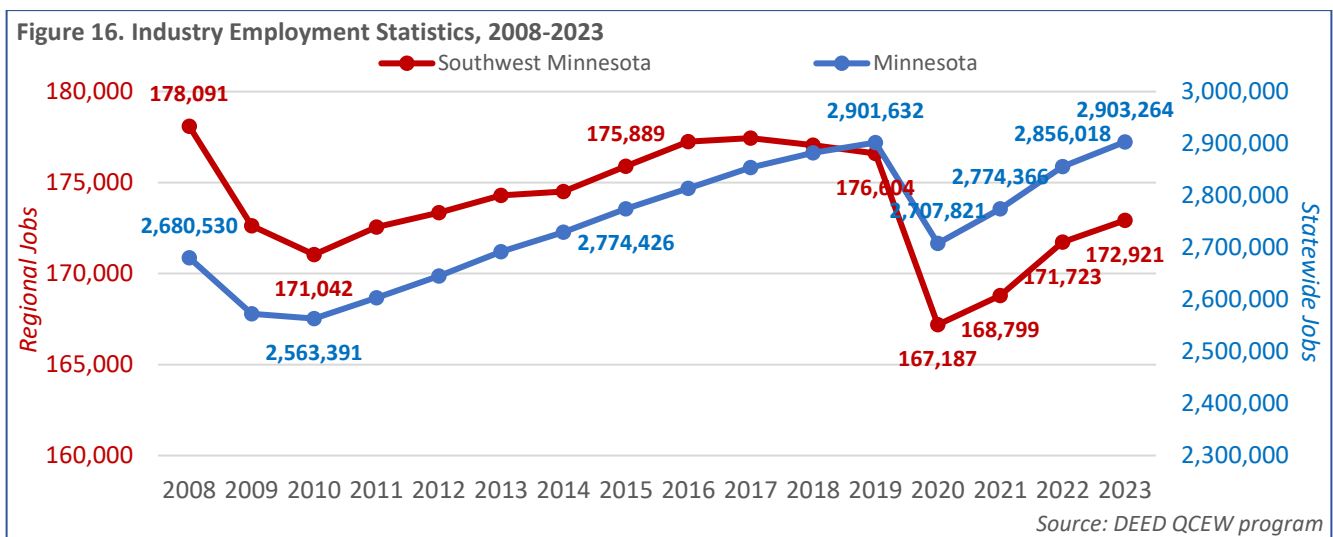
INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT

According to DEED's [Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages \(QCEW\) program](#), Southwest was home to 12,929 business establishments providing an average of 172,921 covered jobs through 2023, with a total payroll of just under \$9.1 billion. That was about 6% of total employment in the state. Average annual wages were \$52,571 in the region, which was nearly \$19,000 lower than the state's average annual wage (Table 13). With 103,794 jobs at 7,154 business establishments, EDR 9 accounts for about 60% of total employment in the Southwest Minnesota planning region. In contrast, EDR 6W had the smallest number of firms and jobs, with 16,571 jobs at 1,626 firms, and suffered the fastest job loss from 2019 to 2023. EDR 8 had 4,149 firms providing 52,555 jobs in 2023, but experienced the smallest job decline from 2019 to 2023 (Table 13).

Geography	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll	Average Annual Wage	2022-2023		2019-2023	
					Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Southwest Minnesota	12,929	172,921	\$9,090,562,731	\$52,571	+1,198	+0.7%	-3,683	-2.1%
Region 6W	1,626	16,571	\$844,511,233	\$50,963	+157	+1.0%	-677	-3.9%
Region 8	4,149	52,555	\$2,680,092,578	\$50,996	-491	-0.9%	-678	-1.3%
Region 9	7,154	103,794	\$5,565,958,920	\$53,625	+1,531	+1.5%	-2,328	-2.2%
Minnesota	207,647	2,903,264	\$207,665,582,979	\$71,528	+47,246	+1.7%	+1,632	+0.1%

Source: DEED Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages (QCEW)

The pandemic recession caused significant job loss in the region, dropping to lower employment levels than suffered during the Great Recession in 2009 and 2010. However, like in the past recession, Southwest Minnesota was less impacted than the state as a whole, and showed a smaller year-over-year decline from 2019 to 2020 than the state. The region lost about -5.3% of employment, compared to a -6.7% decline statewide. Since 2020, the region’s recovery has also been slower than the state’s, adding back only 5,750 of the nearly 9,400 jobs lost (Figure 16).



With 31,276 jobs at 623 firms, Manufacturing is the largest employing industry, accounting for 18.1% of total jobs in the region. Southwest is the only region of the state where Manufacturing is still the largest industry. At \$63,487 in 2023, average annual wages were nearly \$11,000 higher in Manufacturing than the total of all industries. The region has strong concentrations of employment in Food Manufacturing, Machinery Manufacturing, Printing, Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing, and Electrical Equipment Manufacturing.

After several years of growth, the region’s Health Care & Social Assistance industry was still down 1,664 jobs since 2019 (due to the Pandemic Recession), but still offered with 29,905 jobs at 1,730 firms after regaining 688 jobs over the past year. Due to the region’s older population, the largest sector was Nursing & Residential Care Facilities, followed by Hospitals, Ambulatory Health Care Services, and Social Assistance.

Retail Trade is the third largest industry, with 19,151 jobs at 1,438 establishments, while Educational Services was the fourth largest, providing 15,605 jobs at 239 establishments. Combined, these four largest industries accounted for 55.5% of the region’s employment. Other important industries in the region include Accommodation & Food Services, Public Administration, Construction, and Wholesale Trade. Seventeen of 20 industries in the region are still below pre-pandemic employment levels. However, 15 industries added jobs back over the past year, with the largest gains occurring in Health Care & Social Assistance, Accommodation & Food Services, Wholesale Trade, Public Administration, and Construction (Table 14).

NAICS Industry Title	2023 Annual Data			Avg. Annual Wage	2022-2023		2019-2023	
	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll (\$1,000s)		Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Total, All Industries	12,929	172,921	\$9,090,563	\$52,571	+1,198	+0.7%	-3,683	-2.1%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & Hunting	733	5,173	\$268,352	\$51,876	+26	+0.5%	-219	-4.1%
Mining	24	218	\$16,325	\$74,886	+8	+3.8%	-101	-31.7%
Construction	1,567	8,157	\$551,445	\$67,604	+219	+2.8%	-133	-1.6%
Manufacturing	623	31,276	\$1,985,617	\$63,487	-827	-2.6%	-71	-0.2%
Utilities	76	924	\$95,132	\$102,956	+24	+2.7%	-24	-2.5%
Wholesale Trade	644	7,738	\$623,260	\$80,545	+276	+3.7%	+12	+0.2%
Retail Trade	1,438	19,151	\$608,781	\$31,788	-158	-0.8%	-19	-0.1%
Transportation & Warehousing	785	6,931	\$347,405	\$50,123	+19	+0.3%	-348	-4.8%
Information	198	2,042	\$126,494	\$61,946	+11	+0.5%	-455	-18.2%
Finance & Insurance	698	5,885	\$456,310	\$77,538	-18	-0.3%	-7	-0.1%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	275	1,409	\$51,452	\$36,516	+37	+2.7%	-18	-1.3%
Professional & Technical Services	627	3,906	\$281,245	\$72,003	+166	+4.4%	+91	+2.4%
Management of Companies	53	1,403	\$151,922	\$108,284	-37	-2.6%	-24	-1.7%
Admin. Support & Waste Mgmt. Svcs.	411	3,880	\$186,023	\$47,944	-11	-0.3%	-159	-3.9%
Educational Services	239	15,605	\$783,806	\$50,228	+88	+0.6%	-493	-3.1%
Health Care & Social Assistance	1,730	29,905	\$1,572,365	\$52,579	+688	+2.4%	-1,664	-5.3%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	242	1,986	\$44,205	\$22,258	+24	+1.2%	-28	-1.4%
Accommodation & Food Services	874	12,058	\$218,403	\$18,113	+336	+2.9%	-193	-1.6%
Other Services	1,114	5,022	\$174,436	\$34,734	+49	+1.0%	-11	-0.2%
Public Administration	579	10,247	\$547,585	\$53,439	+275	+2.8%	+179	+1.8%

Source: DEED Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages (QCEW) program

WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS

According to DEED's Quarterly Employment Demographics (QED) program, the workforce in the region was aging over the past 10 years. About one-quarter (24.5%) of workers in the region were 55 years or older, compared to 22.1% statewide and just 21.1% in the region one decade earlier. The percentage of teenaged workers was also rising, along with wages and the number of hours worked as high demand attracted the youngest workers into the workforce (Table 15).

As noted above, wages were climbing across the board for all workers due to rising demand and a tight labor market. While wages were still lowest for the youngest and oldest workers who tend to fill lower-skilled, less-than-full time jobs in industries like Retail Trade and Accommodation & Food Services, people aged 20 to 24 years old enjoyed the fastest percentage increase in wages from 2012 to 2022. Wages were highest for 45 to 64 year old workers, and men earned higher wages than women, though the gap was narrowing.

Southwest Minnesota	Percentage of Workers		Percent of Workers, Minnesota		Median Hourly Wage		Median Hours Worked (Per Qtr.)	
	2022	2012	2022	2012	2022	2012	2022	2012
Total, all ages	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	\$20.34	\$13.48	409	403
19 years & under	8.5%	8.1%	6.6%	6.3%	\$13.42	\$7.98	116	113
20 to 24 years	10.6%	12.4%	9.2%	11.3%	\$17.31	\$10.16	275	258
25 to 44 years	40.0%	37.5%	43.6%	42.3%	\$23.19	\$15.09	471	461
45 to 54 years	16.6%	20.9%	18.4%	21.9%	\$25.50	\$16.54	487	480
55 to 64 years	17.2%	16.1%	16.7%	14.7%	\$23.52	\$16.25	483	474
65 years & over	7.3%	5.0%	5.4%	3.5%	\$17.93	\$12.04	229	197
Male	48.4%	47.6%	49.1%	49.1%	\$23.15	\$15.41	475	474
Female	51.6%	52.4%	50.9%	50.9%	\$19.40	\$12.31	368	348

Source: DEED Quarterly Employment Demographics

EMPLOYMENT DIVERSITY

According to data from the Quarterly Workforce Indicators program, just under 84% of jobs in the region were held by workers who were white and not Hispanic or Latino, compared to about 16% of jobs that were held by workers of other races or Hispanic or Latino origin. That was a significant increase over the past 23 years – non-Hispanic whites accounted for 94% of jobs back in 2000. In 2023, 150,999 jobs were held by non-Hispanic whites, compared to 28,893 jobs held by BIPOC workers, which was an 182.9% increase from 2000 (see Figure 17).

Southwest Minnesota has a high concentration of Hispanic or Latino workers, holding 15,584 jobs in 2023, up from 5,798 jobs in 2000, a 168.8% increase. The next largest number of jobs held by a BIPOC group was Black or African Americans, holding 6,242 jobs in 2023, a 382.8% increase since 2000. The region also had 4,119 jobs held by Asian or Pacific Islanders, up 103.5% since 2000; and 2,058 jobs for people of Some Other Race, up 230.3%. American Indians held 890 jobs in the region, up 87.8% since 2000 (Figure 18).

The Manufacturing, Agriculture, Accommodation & Food Services, Administrative Support & Waste Management Services, and Health Care & Social Assistance sectors have the highest share of non-White employment at 30%, 24.3%, 20.5%, 20.3%, and 19% respectively. The largest numbers of non-White workers are employed by Manufacturing (9,620 jobs), Health Care & Social Assistance (6,378 jobs), Retail Trade (2,857 jobs), and Accommodation & Food Services (both 2,479 jobs) (Figure 19).

Figure 17. Employment Share by Race & Ethnicity in Southwest, 2000-2023

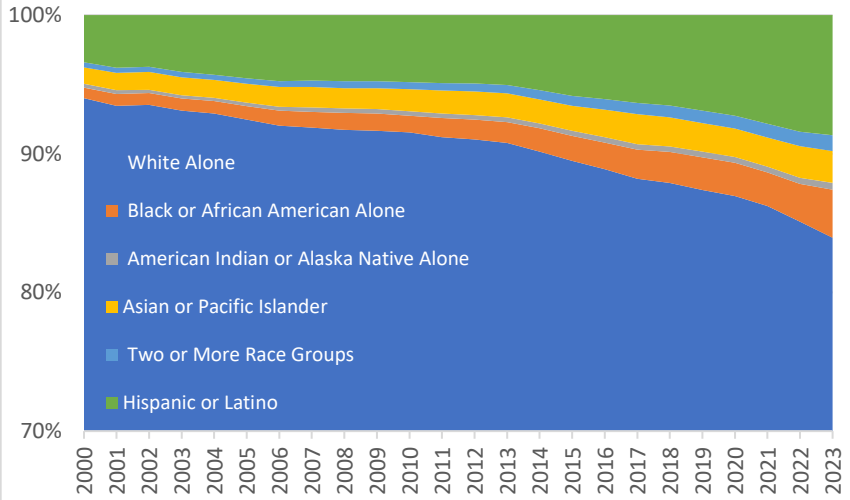


Figure 18. Jobs Held by People of Color in Southwest Minnesota, 2000-2023

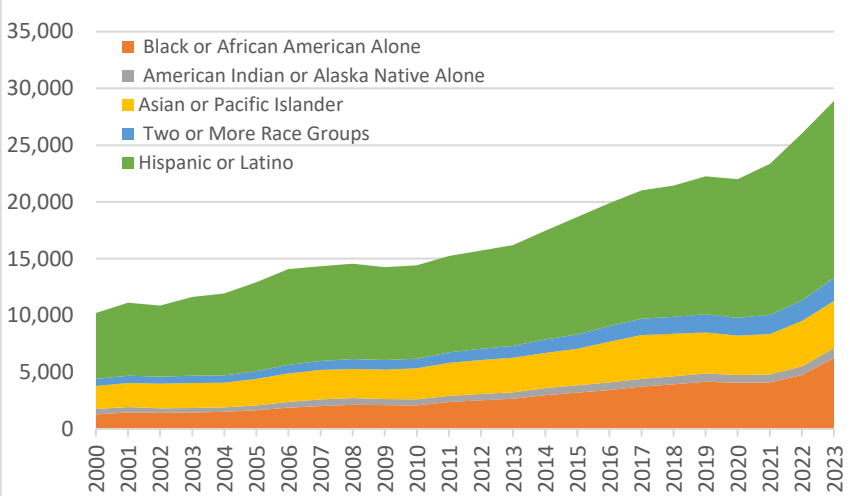
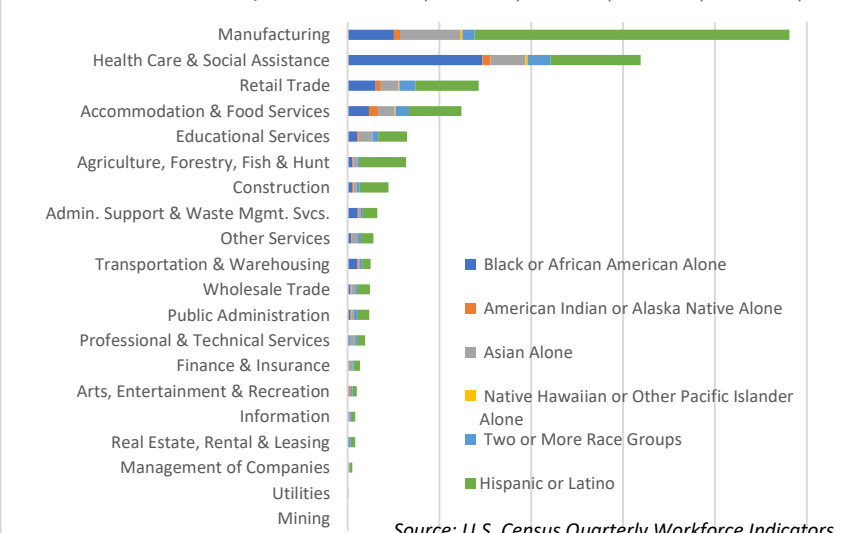


Figure 19. People of Color Employment by Industry in Southwest Minnesota, 2023



Source: U.S. Census Quarterly Workforce Indicators

INDUSTRY PROJECTIONS

As noted above, Southwest is projected to grow 2.8% from 2022 to 2032, a gain of 5,664 new jobs. Management of Companies, Arts, Entertainment & Recreation, Transportation & Warehousing and Construction are expected to grow the fastest as the pandemic employment recovery continues.

Health Care & Social Assistance is projected to add the most new jobs over the next decade, followed closely by Manufacturing. Those two industries are projected to account for over half (54%) of the region's job growth. Accommodation & Food Services, Construction, and Transportation & Warehousing will also see strong gains. Mining, Information, and Retail Trade are the only industries projected to lose jobs (Table 16).

Industry	Estimated Employment 2022	Projected Employment 2032	Percent Change 2022-2032	Numeric Change 2022-2032
Total, All Industries	202,214	207,878	+2.8%	+5,664
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & hunt	5,309	5,566	+4.8%	+257
Mining	214	211	-1.4%	-3
Utilities	690	690	0.0%	0
Construction	7,679	8,252	+7.5%	+573
Manufacturing	32,192	33,537	+4.2%	+1,345
Wholesale Trade	8,001	8,116	+1.4%	+115
Retail Trade	19,409	19,084	-1.7%	-325
Transportation & Warehousing	6,297	6,810	+8.1%	+513
Information	2,093	2,046	-2.2%	-47
Finance & Insurance	6,830	6,930	+1.5%	+100
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	1,397	1,445	+3.4%	+48
Professional & Technical Services	4,066	4,371	+7.5%	+305
Management of Companies	1,478	1,614	+9.2%	+136
Admin. Support & Waste Mgmt.	4,127	4,331	+4.9%	+204
Educational Services	16,065	16,116	+0.3%	+51
Health Care & Social Assistance	28,786	30,498	+5.9%	+1,712
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	1,889	2,059	+9.0%	+170
Accommodation & Food Services	11,736	12,318	+5.0%	+582
Other Services	7,097	7,281	+2.6%	+184
Public Administration	14,117	14,370	+1.8%	+253

Source: DEED 2022-2032 Employment Outlook

NONEMPLOYER ESTABLISHMENTS

Southwest Minnesota was home to 27,054 self-employed businesses or "nonemployers" in 2021, which are defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as "businesses without paid employees that are subject to federal income tax, originating from tax return information of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)." Southwest Minnesota saw a small decline in nonemployers over the past decade. In sum, the region lost 188 nonemployers from 2012 to 2021, a -0.7% decrease. In sum, these nonemployers generated sales receipts of \$1.4 billion (Table 17).

	2021		2012-2021	
	Number of Firms	Receipts (\$1,000s)	Change in Firms	Percent Change
Southwest Minnesota	27,054	\$1,395,519	-188	-0.7%
Region 6W	3,168	\$152,233	-251	-7.3%
Region 8	8,259	\$435,762	-120	-1.4%
Region 9	15,627	\$807,524	+183	+1.2%
Minnesota	429,672	\$22,727,564	+41,117	+10.6%

Source: U.S. Census, Nonemployer Statistics program

CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

Like other parts of Greater Minnesota, agriculture is also a key industry in Southwest Minnesota, including 17,589 farms producing just over \$12 billion in the market value of products sold in 2022 according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Several of the highest ranked agriculture counties in the state are in Southwest Minnesota, including Martin (#2), Blue Earth (#3), Redwood (#5), Nobles (#7), and Rock (#10). Like the state, the number of farms in the region declined over the past 5 years, but Southwest Minnesota still accounts for 26.8% of the farms in the state (Table 18).

	Number of Farms	Market Value of Products Sold	State Rank
Southwest Minnesota	17,589	\$12,018,450,000	1
Region 6W	3,245	\$1,911,756,000	7
Region 8	7,206	\$5,134,210,000	1
Region 9	7,138	\$4,972,484,000	2
Minnesota	65,531	\$28,482,097,000	

Source: 2022 Census of Agriculture

Upon request, this information can be made available in alternate formats by contacting Luke Greiner at 320-223-6992 or at luke.greiner@state.mn.us or Amanda Blaschko at 320-441-6571 or at amanda.oconnell@state.mn.us