

# ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REGION 7W: Central

Covers counties:  
Benton, Sherburne, Stearns, and Wright

## 2023 REGIONAL PROFILE

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## DEMOGRAPHICS

### POPULATION CHANGE

Economic Development Region 7W – Central includes a total of 4 counties, located in the larger 13-county Central Minnesota planning region. Region 7W was home to 450,695 people in 2022, comprising 7.9% of the state’s total population. The region saw a 12% population increase since 2010, making it the fastest growing of the 13 economic development regions (EDRs) in the state, and is now the third largest in total population after gaining more than 48,400 new residents. In comparison, the state of Minnesota saw a 7.8% gain from 2010 to 2022 (Table 1).

	2010 Population	2022 Estimates	2010-2022 Change	
			Number	Percent
<b>Region 7W</b>	<b>402,292</b>	<b>450,695</b>	<b>+48,403</b>	<b>+12.0%</b>
Benton Co.	38,451	41,463	+3,012	+7.8%
Sherburne Co.	88,499	100,824	+12,325	+13.9%
Stearns Co.	150,642	160,405	+9,763	+6.5%
Wright Co.	124,700	148,003	+23,303	+18.7%
<b>Minnesota</b>	<b>5,303,925</b>	<b>5,717,184</b>	<b>+413,259</b>	<b>+7.8%</b>

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates](#)

All four counties in the region saw population gains since 2010, led by Wright County, which was the third fastest growing county in the state and is now the 10<sup>th</sup> largest (of 87 counties in the state) with 148,003 people. Sherburne County was the fifth fastest growing and is now the 12<sup>th</sup> largest in the state, with 100,824 people. Stearns County was the slowest growing in the region but the 8<sup>th</sup> largest in the state with 160,405 people, and the 21<sup>st</sup> fastest growing in the state after gaining 9,763 new residents. Benton County is the smallest in the region with 41,463 people, but is the 24<sup>th</sup> largest in the state and was the 18<sup>th</sup> fastest growing from 2010 to 2022. These recent gains are part of a long-term trend in the region, which has been adding population since 1950, albeit slower more recently and concentrated in the eastern counties.

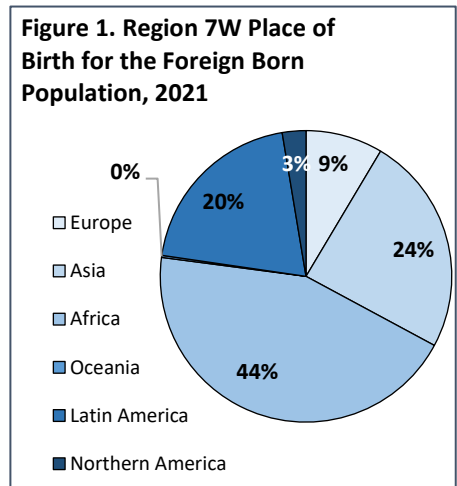
### COMPONENTS OF POPULATION CHANGE

With a younger and fast-growing population, Region 7W experienced a natural increase – more births than deaths – of 4,340 people so far in the past two years. In addition, the region gained residents from in-migration, with 8,062 more people moving into the region than moving out. The vast majority of in-migration since 2020 has been from domestic residents (+6,504) rather than international sources (+1,558 (Table 2).

	Total Change	Natural Increase	Vital Events		Net Migration		
			Births	Deaths	Total	Inter- national	Domestic
Region 7W	+12,495	+4,340	12,257	7,917	+8,062	+1,558	+6,504
Minnesota	+10,680	+26,917	144,350	117,433	-17,365	+20,012	-37,377

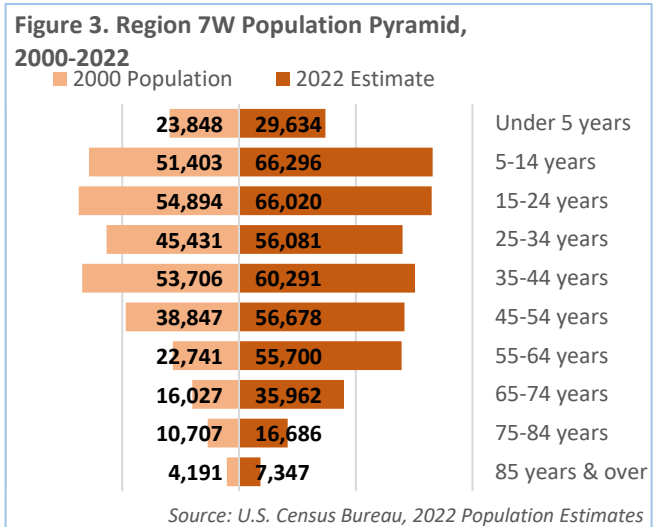
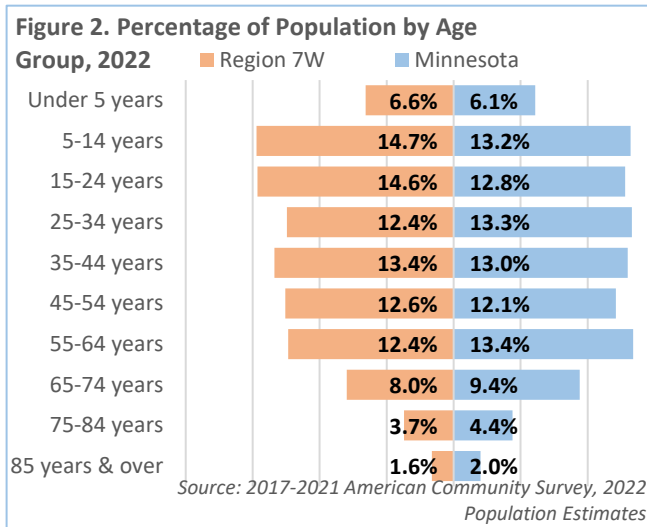
Source: [U.S. Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program](#)

Region 7W was home to 19,472 foreign born residents, or about 4.5% of the total population, compared to 8.5% of the state’s population. The number of immigrants in the region increased by 64.9% since 2010, more than doubling the statewide growth rate of 30.6%. Over 44% (8,611 people) of these immigrants were from Africa, while the second largest number of foreign born residents were from Asia, accounting for just under one fourth of immigrants. The fastest growing wave of new immigrants to Region 7W came from Africa, rising by 6,905 people from 2010 to 2021, a 405% jump, while the number from Asia increased about 18%. Another 23% of immigrants were from Central and South America, after increasing about 4.6% since 2010, and about 8.6 % were from Europe and 2.6% were from Canada (Figure 1).



**POPULATION BY AGE GROUP**

Region 7W’s population is younger than the state’s, with 36% of the population aged 24 years and younger in 2022, compared to 32% statewide. Another 38.4% of people in Region 7W were between 25 and 54 years of age, which is typically considered the “prime working years,” similar to statewide. Region 7W also had a much smaller percentage of people aged 55 years and older as the state, including just 13.3% of people aged 65 years and over (Figure 2).

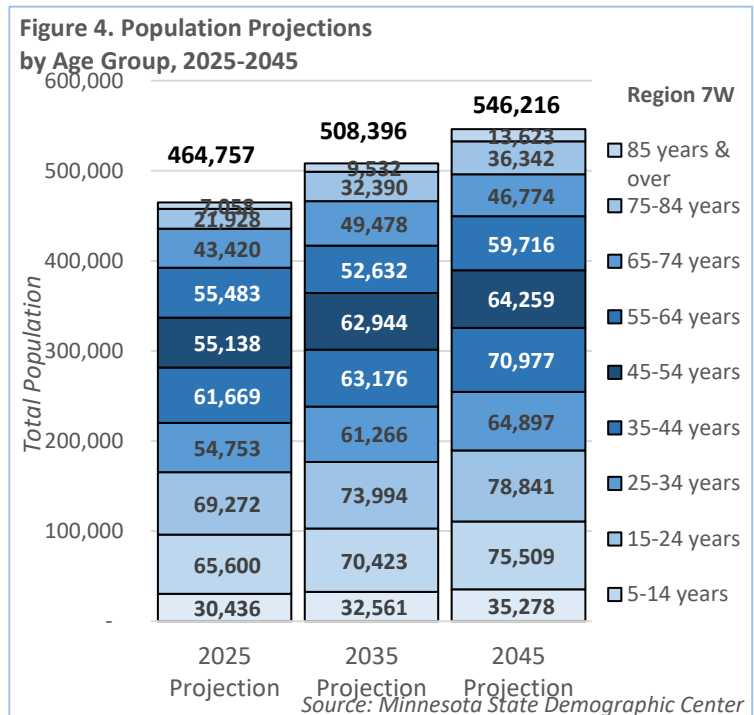


A large portion of the region’s population is a part of the Baby Boom generation, people born between 1946 and 1964, which is creating a significant shift in the population over time. While the number of younger and middle-aged residents was rising steadily, the number of residents aged 55 years and over was rapidly increasing. This included a huge jump in the number of people from 55 to 74 years of age, and a 94% increase in people aged 65 years and over (Figure 3).

**POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY AGE GROUP**

Region 7W is projected to enjoy continued growth in the future as well. According to the [State Demographic Center](#), Region 7W is expected to gain about 43,639 net new residents from 2025 to 2045, a 9.4% increase (Figure 4). In comparison, the state of Minnesota is projected to grow 7.4% from 2025 to 2045.

Despite the region’s younger population, much of this demographic growth is expected to be in the older age groups. Region 7W is projected to add 24,000 people aged 65 years and over, a 34% increase. But growth is expected across all age cohorts. The region is expected to gain about 19,000 people in the 25- to 44-year-old age group, as well as about 4,800 children under 5. The region’s growth is enviable in comparison to other more rural parts of the state.



**POPULATION BY RACE**

Region 7W’s population is less racially diverse than the state, but is becoming more diverse over time. In 2021, 89.1% of the region’s residents reported White alone as their race, compared to 80.7% of residents statewide. Region 7W had a smaller

Table 3. Race and Hispanic Origin, 2021	Region 7W				Minnesota	
	Number	Percent	Change from 2011-2021		Percent	Change from 2011-2021
			Numeric	Percent		
<b>Total</b>	<b>434,910</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>+36,316</b>	<b>+9.1%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>+7.4%</b>
White	387,309	89.1%	+13,184	+3.5%	80.7%	+0.4%
Black or African American	18,821	4.3%	+11,035	+141.7%	6.6%	+42.2%
American Indian & Alaska Native	1,143	0.3%	-436	-27.6%	0.9%	-8.0%
Asian & Other Pac. Islander	6,681	1.5%	+863	+14.8%	5.0%	+35.8%
Some Other Race	6,384	1.5%	+2,759	+76.1%	2.1%	+66.5%
Two or More Races	14,572	3.4%	+8,911	+157.4%	4.6%	+121.8%
Hispanic or Latino origin	14,122	3.2%	+4,541	+47.4%	5.6%	+31.6%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017-2021 American Community Survey*

percentage of all other race groups than the state, with the largest populations other than white being Black or African American, Two or More Races, and Hispanic or Latino (Table 3).

**EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**

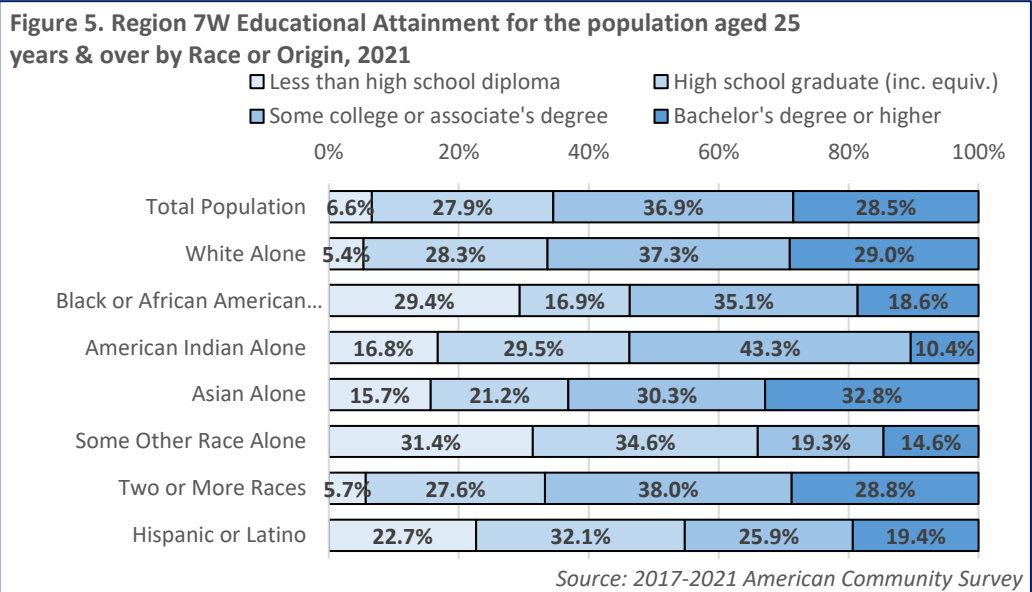
With 39% of adults aged 18 years and over having a college degree, Region 7W has lower educational attainment than the state, where 46% of adults have an associate, bachelor’s, or advanced degree. In contrast, Region 7W has a higher percentage of people with some college but no degree, and a higher percentage of people with associate’s degrees, but a lower percent of people with a bachelor’s degree or higher (Table 4).

Table 4. Educational Attainment for the Adult Population, 2021	Region 7W		Minnesota
	Number	Percent	Percent
<b>Total, 18 years &amp; over</b>	<b>322,834</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Less than high school	22,583	7.0%	7.1%
High school graduate (incl. equiv.)	90,865	28.1%	24.5%
Some college, no degree	83,460	25.9%	22.4%
Associate’s degree	42,353	13.1%	11.1%
Bachelor’s degree	59,077	18.3%	23.3%
Advanced degree	24,496	7.6%	11.6%

*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2017-2021 American Community Survey*

Educational attainment varied significantly by race and ethnicity in Region 7W. For example, almost 95% of the White alone population reported having at least a high school diploma or equivalent, compared to around 70% of Black adults and people of Some Other Race, and 77% of Hispanic or Latino residents. On the other end of the education spectrum, nearly one-third of Asian residents aged 25 years and over had attained a bachelor’s degree or higher,

followed by about 29% of both Whites and people of Two or More Races. Despite having the lowest share with the highest educational attainment, a higher percentage of American Indians had attended some college or earned an associate’s degree than Whites (Figure 5).

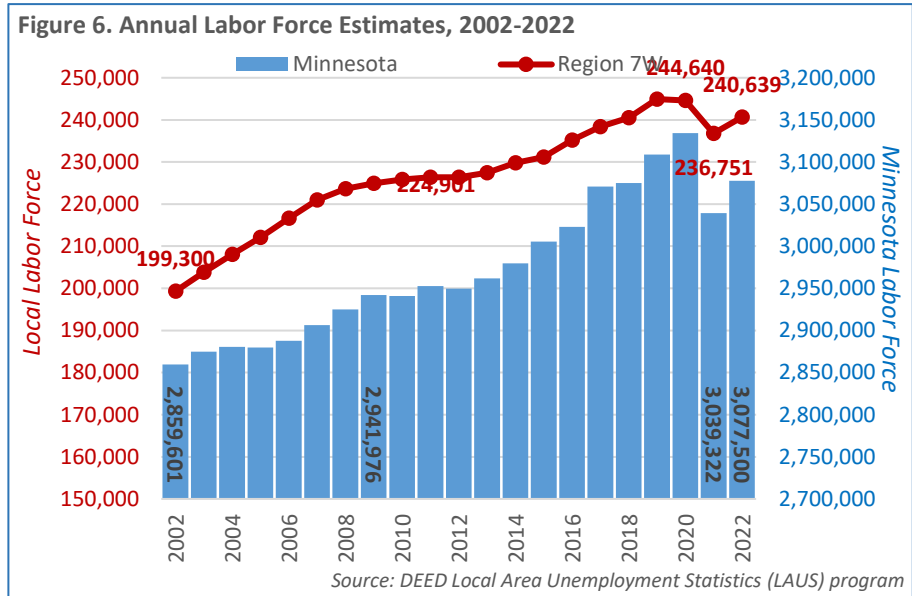


## LABOR FORCE

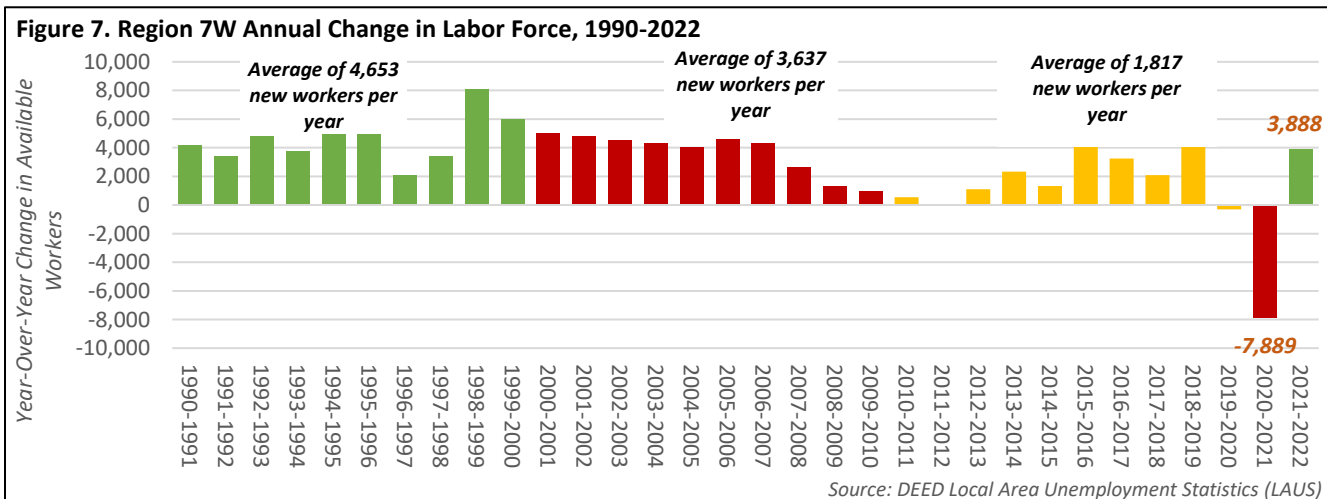
### LABOR FORCE CHANGE

According to data from DEED’s [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#) program, Region 7W had an annual average labor force count of just over 240,600 workers in 2022. The regional labor force had been increasing since 2004, adding 20,000 new workers from 2009 to 2019. But the pandemic and related recession reversed the growth trend and the region lost over 8,100 workers from 2019 to 2021.

Region 7W saw a rebound in labor force growth in 2022, similar to the state and nation. Although the regional labor force and economy continued to grow for years, the two-month pandemic recession and labor force exits created a situation where job losses from 2020 are unlikely to recover without recovering workers that were lost in 2020 and 2021, or until new labor force growth replaces enough workers. Pandemic-related labor force losses could be temporary as increasing economic uncertainty pushes many older workers who left the labor force to seek employment once again (Figure 6).



Averaging a net gain of 4,653 additional labor force participants per year between 1990 and 2000, employers in Region 7W were able to tap into a large and growing pool of talented workers. Although the regional labor force and economy continue to grow, the rate of labor force growth has slowed down considerably, demonstrated by Region 7W adding an average of 1,817 workers per year from 2010 to 2019 (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 Region 7W. It’s probable that labor force growth will continue in the future, but how long it takes to recover to pre-pandemic labor force levels is uncertain. Thankfully, 2022 welcomed a number of new workers similar to the average annual growth in the early 2000’s.



## LABOR FORCE PROJECTIONS

Applying current labor force participation rates to future population projections by age group, as shown in Figure 4 above, would lead to a steady increase in labor force in Region 7W, adding about 1,800 additional workers per year through 2035 (Table 5). The labor force will also see a shift in composition over time, with sizable gains in the number of workers aged 65 years and over wiping out declines in the number of workers aged 55 to 64 years. The region is also projected to gain younger workers, and the largest number of new workers are expected to be 25 to 54 years old.

	2025 Labor Force Projection	2035 Labor Force Projection	2025-2035 Change	
			Numeric	Percent
16 to 19 years	16,959	17,555	+597	+3.5%
20 to 24 years	28,809	31,788	+2,979	+10.3%
25 to 44 years	103,712	110,857	+7,144	+6.9%
45 to 54 years	49,799	56,849	+7,050	+14.2%
55 to 64 years	41,959	39,803	-2,156	-5.1%
65 to 74 years	11,488	13,091	+1,603	+14.0%
75 years & over	1,740	2,516	+776	+44.6%
<b>Total Labor Force</b>	<b>254,466</b>	<b>272,459</b>	<b>+17,993</b>	<b>+7.1%</b>

Source: calculated from [MN State Demographic Center projections](#), and [2017-2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates](#).

## EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

With 72.3% of the population aged 16 years and over in the labor force, Region 7W had a higher labor force participation rate than the state's 69.2%. The region had higher participation rates than the state in all of the age groups, except for workers 65 years and older (Table 6).

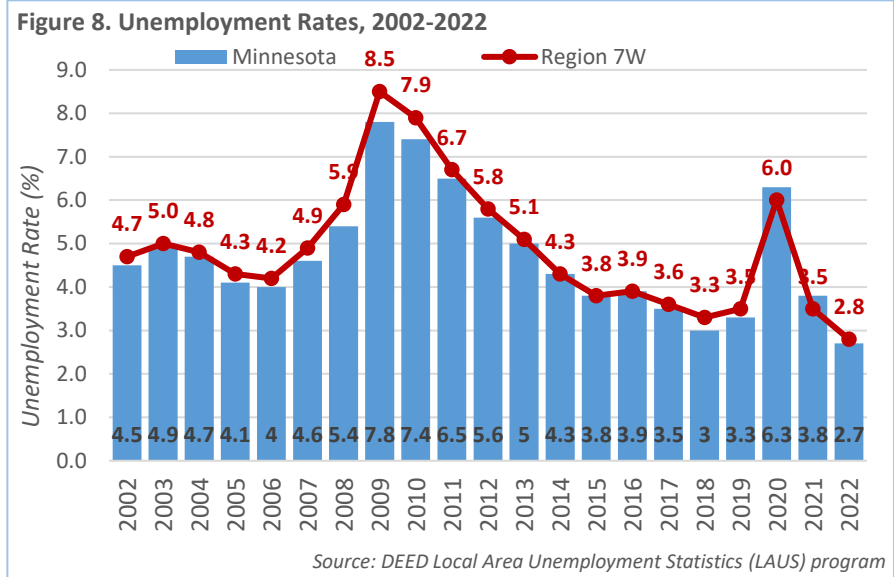
	Region 7W			Minnesota		Percent of Total Labor Force	
	In Labor Force	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate	Region 7W	Minnesota
<b>Total Labor Force</b>	<b>243,022</b>	<b>72.3%</b>	<b>3.5%</b>	<b>69.2%</b>	<b>4.0%</b>		
16 to 19 years	15,704	59.2%	9.2%	52.3%	10.7%	6.5%	4.9%
20 to 24 years	26,608	86.0%	6.1%	83.3%	6.7%	10.9%	9.5%
25 to 44 years	100,037	89.1%	2.7%	88.8%	3.6%	41.2%	42.6%
45 to 54 years	49,397	90.3%	2.7%	87.6%	3.0%	20.3%	19.4%
55 to 64 years	40,648	75.6%	2.9%	73.1%	3.2%	16.7%	17.9%
65 to 74 years	9,182	26.5%	2.3%	28.0%	3.2%	3.8%	4.8%
75 years & over	1,392	6.0%	0.8%	6.6%	2.9%	0.6%	0.8%
<b>Employment Characteristics by Race &amp; Hispanic Origin</b>							
White alone	220,173	72.2%	3.0%	68.5%	3.4%	90.6%	82.6%
Black or African American	9,440	75.3%	12.6%	71.9%	8.6%	3.9%	6.0%
American Indian & Alaska Native	538	55.5%	11.9%	57.4%	12.9%	0.2%	0.7%
Asian or Other Pac. Islanders	4,143	76.9%	8.0%	72.7%	4.1%	1.7%	5.0%
Some Other Race	3,332	74.6%	2.5%	75.8%	6.2%	1.4%	2.1%
Two or More Races	5,407	70.6%	4.3%	74.1%	7.3%	2.2%	3.5%
Hispanic or Latino	7,113	77.3%	3.9%	77.0%	6.6%	2.9%	5.2%
<b>Employment Characteristics by Disability</b>							
With Any Disability, 20 to 64 years	11,315	55.4%	8.4%	53.6%	9.9%	5.2%	5.7%
<b>Employment Characteristics by Educational Attainment</b>							
Population, 25 to 64 years	190,029	86.1%	2.8%	84.4%	3.4%	78.2%	79.9%
Less than H.S. Diploma	8,849	70.3%	3.3%	66.6%	4.6%	4.7%	4.7%
H.S. Diploma or Equivalent	44,417	80.6%	1.9%	77.3%	2.5%	23.4%	19.4%
Some College or Assoc. Degree	76,246	88.4%	3.0%	85.1%	3.6%	40.1%	33.3%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	60,552	90.7%	1.4%	90.3%	2.1%	31.9%	42.6%

Source: [2017-2021 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates](#)

The region also had higher labor force participation rates than the state for several races such as Blacks, Asians, and Hispanic or Latinos. The highest unemployment rates were reported for Black or African Americans and American Indians. Region 7W also had 11,315 workers with disabilities in the workforce, despite lower participation rates and higher unemployment rates than the labor force overall.

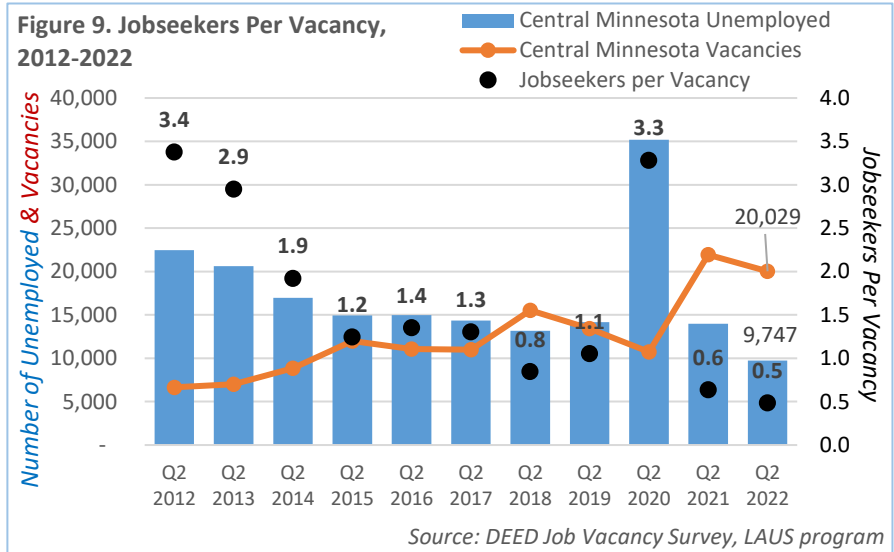
**UNEMPLOYMENT RATE**

Region 7W has consistently reported very similar unemployment rates to the state, typically hovering just slightly above, but within 0.2% of the state rate. According to DEED’s [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#), Region 7W’s rate rose as high as 8.5% in 2009, which was 0.7% above the state rate. Since then, the state and region’s economies recovered before spiking briefly during 2020 due to COVID-19. By 2021, unemployment rates dropped to historic lows in the region, a nod to the tight labor market facing employers (Figure 8).



**JOBSEEKERS PER VACANCY**

As the growth in the number of available workers slowed and then declined in 2020 and 2021, the number of unemployed workers dropped as well, recently to the lowest number of unemployed workers ever recorded in the region. One clear demonstration of the labor market conditions is the ratio of unemployed jobseekers per vacancy, which now stands at 0.5-to-1 in Region Central Minnesota. According to the recent Job Vacancy Survey results, there was



a record high number of openings (20,029) and a record low number of unemployed workers (9,747). The ratio climbed as high as 10.7-to-1 in the depths of the recession in 2009 when labor was in surplus (Figure 9).

**COMMUTE SHED AND LABOR SHED**

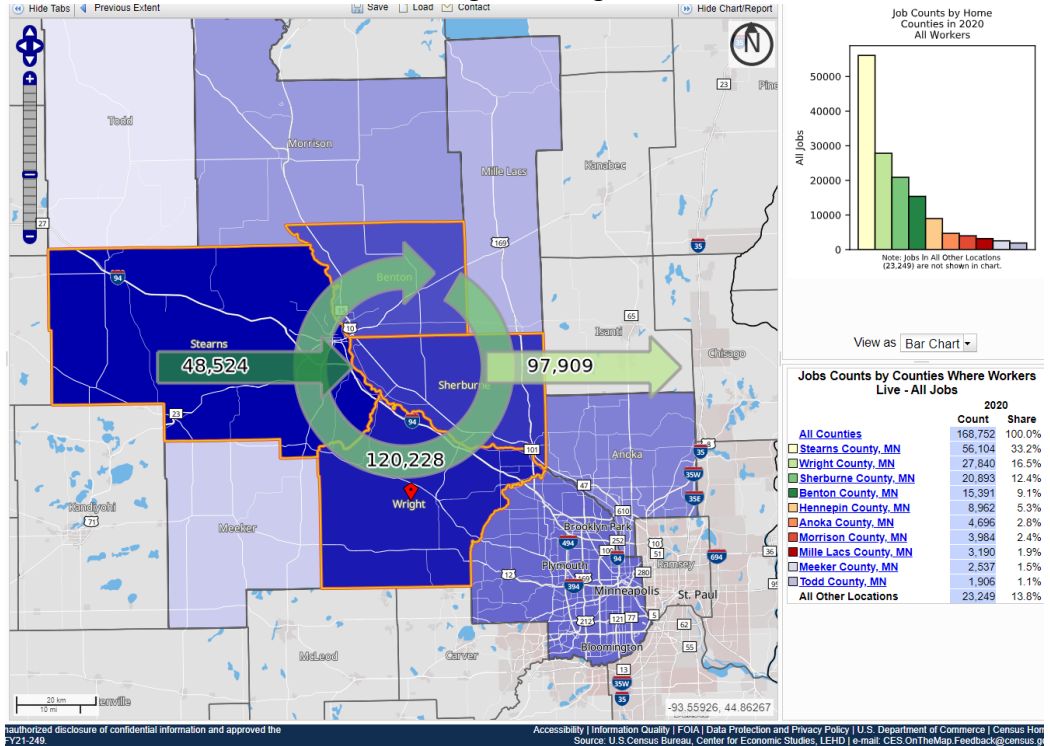
According to commuting data from the [Census Bureau](#), Region 7W is a net labor exporter, having more workers than available jobs. In sum, 120,228 workers both lived and worked in Region 7W in 2020, while 48,524 workers drove into the region from surrounding counties for work, compared to 97,909 workers who lived in the region but drove to surrounding counties for work (Table 7).

	2020	
	Count	Share
Employed in the Selection Area	168,752	100.0%
Employed in the Selection Area but Living Outside	48,524	28.8%
Employed and Living in the Selection Area	120,228	71.2%
Living in the Selection Area	218,137	100.0%
Living in the Selection Area but Employed Outside	97,909	44.9%
Living and Employed in the Selection Area	120,228	55.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap

Anchored by St. Cloud, Stearns is the largest county and the largest employment center in the region and was the biggest draw for workers, actually seeing a net import of workers. In contrast, Benton, Sherburne, and Wright had significant labor outflows, primarily into the Twin Cities metro area as well as St. Cloud (Figure 10). Region 7W has a net outflow of workers, being commuter counties.

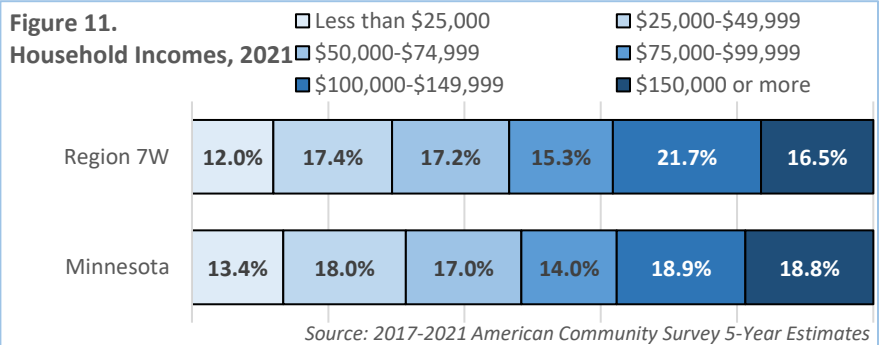
Figure 10. Region 7W Labor and Commute Shed, 2020



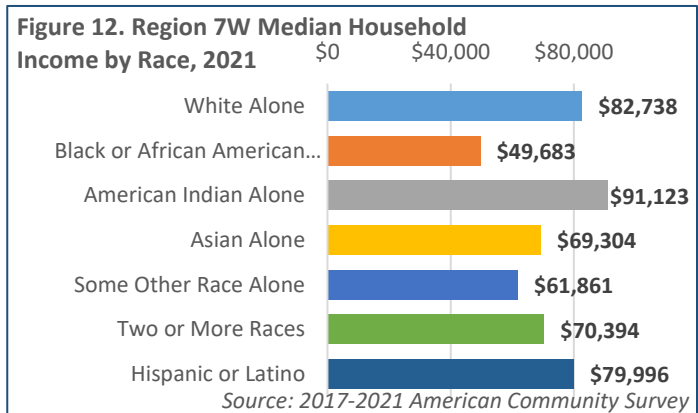
## INCOMES, WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS

### HOUSEHOLD INCOMES

Median household incomes were slightly higher in Region 7W than the rest of the state. The median household income in Region 7W was \$81,192 in 2021, compared to \$77,706 in Minnesota. About 29% of the households in the region had incomes below \$50,000 in 2021, compared to 31% statewide. Another 32% of households earned between \$50,000 and \$100,000 in the region. 38% of households in Region 7W earned over \$100,000 per year, a half point higher than statewide (Figure 11).



Median household incomes varied by race or origin in the region. Whites accounted for 91% of households reporting incomes in 2020 and had the second highest median income level. But incomes were relatively high across all but one race, with Black or African American households reporting the lowest incomes in Region 7W, with a median of \$49,683. All other races had median incomes above \$60,000 per year, though with small sample sizes, saw some variability (Figure 12).





**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 \$60,720 in 2022. The cost of living for a similar family in Region 7W was \$58,320 – which was the third highest of the 13 economic development regions in the state, behind only the Twin Cities metro area and Region 7E. The highest monthly costs were for transportation, housing, and food. In order to meet the basic cost of living for the region, the workers in the family scenario described would each need to earn \$18.69 per hour over the course of 60 hours per work week (Table 8).

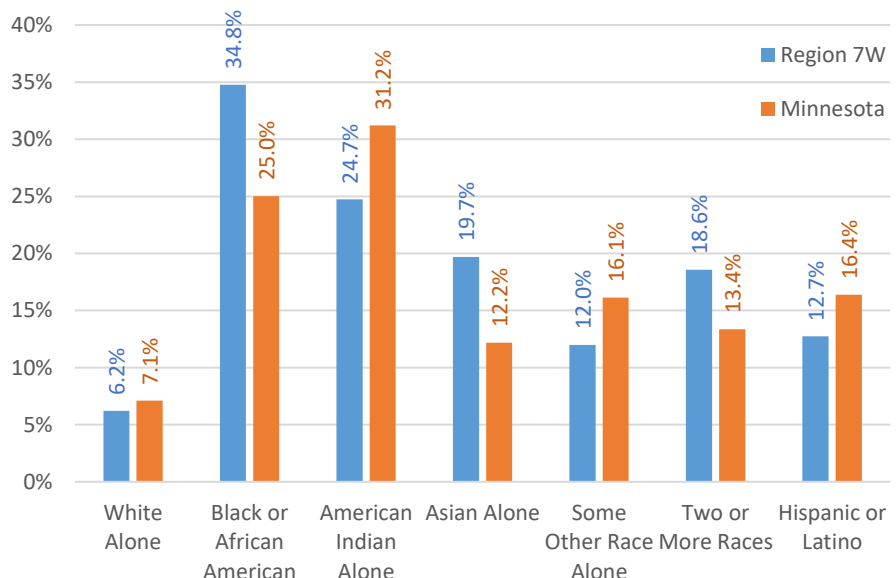
Table 8. Region 7W Cost of Living, 2022										
Family Composition	Number of Workers	Yearly Cost of Living	Hourly Wage Required	Monthly Costs						
				Child Care	Food	Health Care	Housing	Transportation	Other	Taxes
<b>Region 7W</b>										
Single, 0 children	1 FT	\$35,712	\$17.17	\$0	\$394	\$161	\$957	\$820	\$327	\$317
Single, 1 child	1 FT	\$54,804	\$26.35	\$807	\$582	\$404	\$1,194	\$825	\$430	\$325
<b>2 parents, 1 child</b>	<b>1 FT, 1 PT</b>	<b>\$58,320</b>	<b>\$18.69</b>	<b>\$403</b>	<b>\$901</b>	<b>\$556</b>	<b>\$1,194</b>	<b>\$961</b>	<b>\$507</b>	<b>\$338</b>
2 parents, 2 children	2 FT	\$82,140	\$19.75	\$1,212	\$1,175	\$567	\$1,648	\$1,015	\$683	\$545
<b>State of Minnesota</b>										
Single, 0 children	1 FT	\$34,992	\$16.82	\$0	\$403	\$159	\$961	\$760	\$330	\$303
<b>2 parents, 1 child</b>	<b>1 FT, 1 PT</b>	<b>\$60,720</b>	<b>\$19.46</b>	<b>\$574</b>	<b>\$921</b>	<b>\$555</b>	<b>\$1,216</b>	<b>\$886</b>	<b>\$517</b>	<b>\$391</b>

Source: DEED Cost of Living tool

DEED’s Cost of Living tool provides 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 Region 7W would be \$34,992, which would require an hourly wage of \$16.82 to meet the basic needs standard of living. That was also the third highest of the 13 EDRs in the state.

Overall, Region 7W’s poverty rate was 8%, which was just below the statewide rate of 9%. Like incomes, poverty levels varied widely by race and origin. It was estimated that over 34% of the region’s Black or African American population was below the poverty level in 2021, compared to 6.2% of the White population. Likewise, poverty levels hovered near 20% for Asians and people of two or more races, and around 12% for people of some other race and people of Hispanic or Latino origin. The region’s poverty rate was lower than the state’s poverty rate for Whites, American Indians, some other race, and Hispanic or Latinos (Figure 13).

**Figure 13. Percent Below Poverty by Race or Origin, 2021**



Source: 2017-2021 ACS, U.S. Census

**WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS**

According to DEED’s [Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics](#) program, the median hourly wage for all occupations in Region 7W was \$23.10 in the first quarter of 2023, which was the third highest wage level of the 13 EDRs in the state. Region 7W’s median wage was \$1.15 below the state’s median hourly wage, equaling 95% of the statewide wage rate, and \$2.57 below the median hourly wage in the 7-County Twin Cities metro area, which would amount to over \$5,400 per year for a full-time worker. Region 7W had much higher wages than surrounding regions like Region 4, 5, 7E, and 6E, (Table 9).

Region 7W had a higher share of jobs in Construction & Extraction occupations, which was much more concentrated than in the state as a whole. Based on location quotients, Region 7W also had a higher share of workers in Production; Education, Training, & Library; Installation, Maintenance, & Repair; Transportation & Warehousing; Building & Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance, Food Preparation & Serving, and Sales & Related occupations. The largest employing occupational group was Office & Administrative Support, followed closely by Production, Transportation & Material Moving, and Sales & Related occupations (Table 10).

	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment
EDR 1 - Northwest	\$22.83	35,000
EDR 2 - Headwaters	\$21.90	31,370
EDR 3 - Arrowhead	\$22.57	136,490
EDR 4 - West Central	\$21.88	87,550
EDR 5 - North Central	\$19.98	62,060
EDR 6E - Southwest Central	\$21.20	49,510
EDR 6W - Upper MN Valley	\$20.82	16,160
EDR 7E - East Central	\$22.48	48,210
<b>EDR 7W - Central</b>	<b>\$23.10</b>	<b>172,540</b>
EDR 8 - Southwest	\$21.23	51,900
EDR 9 - South Central	\$22.61	99,520
EDR 10 - Southeast	\$23.44	236,590
EDR 11 - 7-County Twin Cities	\$25.67	1,718,290
<b>State of Minnesota</b>	<b>\$24.25</b>	<b>2,827,310</b>

*Source: DEED Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics*

Occupational Group	Region 7W				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
<b>Total, All Occupations</b>	<b>\$23.10</b>	<b>172,540</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>1.0</b>	<b>\$24.25</b>	<b>2,827,310</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Office & Administrative Support	\$22.21	19,860	11.5%	0.9	\$23.06	345,830	12.2%
Production	\$21.81	17,830	10.3%	1.4	\$22.07	209,380	7.4%
Transportation & Material Moving	\$19.78	16,720	9.7%	1.2	\$21.05	227,780	8.1%
Sales & Related	\$17.48	15,960	9.3%	1.1	\$18.14	239,500	8.5%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	\$14.83	14,560	8.4%	1.1	\$14.89	216,970	7.7%
Education, Training & Library	\$25.15	11,490	6.7%	1.2	\$24.82	158,830	5.6%
Construction & Extraction	\$30.45	11,080	6.4%	1.6	\$31.00	113,930	4.0%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical Management	\$41.37	11,000	6.4%	1.0	\$41.07	186,700	6.6%
Healthcare Support	\$47.37	9,400	5.4%	0.8	\$51.58	193,760	6.9%
Healthcare Support	\$17.60	8,540	4.9%	0.9	\$17.40	162,400	5.7%
Business & Financial Operations	\$34.12	7,400	4.3%	0.6	\$38.19	201,940	7.1%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	\$27.45	7,270	4.2%	1.2	\$27.95	98,670	3.5%
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	\$18.10	5,330	3.1%	1.1	\$18.26	76,210	2.7%
Personal Care & Service	\$16.34	3,220	1.9%	0.9	\$16.96	58,120	2.1%
Community & Social Service	\$28.56	2,720	1.6%	0.8	\$25.82	54,820	1.9%
Protective Service	\$29.24	2,330	1.4%	0.9	\$25.83	40,620	1.4%
Computer & Mathematical	\$38.55	2,180	1.3%	0.4	\$49.73	99,250	3.5%
Architecture & Engineering	\$38.84	2,020	1.2%	0.6	\$40.60	53,100	1.9%
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	\$25.03	1,690	1.0%	0.7	\$28.80	37,630	1.3%
Life, Physical & Social Science	\$35.92	1,060	0.6%	0.6	\$39.37	29,070	1.0%
Legal	\$38.02	610	0.4%	0.5	\$47.87	18,730	0.7%
Farming, Fishing & Forestry	\$17.58	260	0.2%	1.0	\$19.84	4,060	0.1%

*Source: DEED Occupational Employment Statistics, Qtr. 1 2023*

Not surprisingly, the lowest-paying jobs are in Food Preparation & Serving, Personal Care & Service, Sales, and Healthcare Support, which tend to have lower educational and training requirements. For the most part, the gap in pay between Region 7W and the state is lower in these jobs. In contrast, the highest paying jobs are found in Management, Computer, Business & Financial Operations, Healthcare Practitioners, and Architecture & Engineering 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 bigger in these occupations.

### JOB VACANCY SURVEY

Employers in Central Minnesota reported 20,029 job vacancies in 2022, similar to the record high numbers that were posted the year prior. The median hourly wage offer was \$18.05 across all occupations but ranged from a low of \$13.43 per hour for Food Prep & Serving occupations, to nearly \$40 per hour for Management occupations. Reflecting changing demand for occupations and for the workers to fill the openings, nominal wage offers increased, but record high inflation limited real wage offers. Typically, such a tight labor market would provide real wage growth as employees gain leverage to negotiate higher wages, but through 2022, employers have been challenged to keep up with inflation.

The largest number of vacancies were in Food Prep & Serving occupations, followed by Sales & Related and Transportation & Material Moving occupations. Over a third of the vacancies in the region were in these three occupational groups. Overall, just 19% of the openings were part-time, only 23% required any postsecondary education, and 40% required a year or more of experience (Table 11). In sum, educational requirements in the region have been declining over the past 5 years, while previous work experience requirements were rising, largely the result of an expanding economy and tightening labor market.

**Table 11. Job Vacancy Survey Results, 2022**

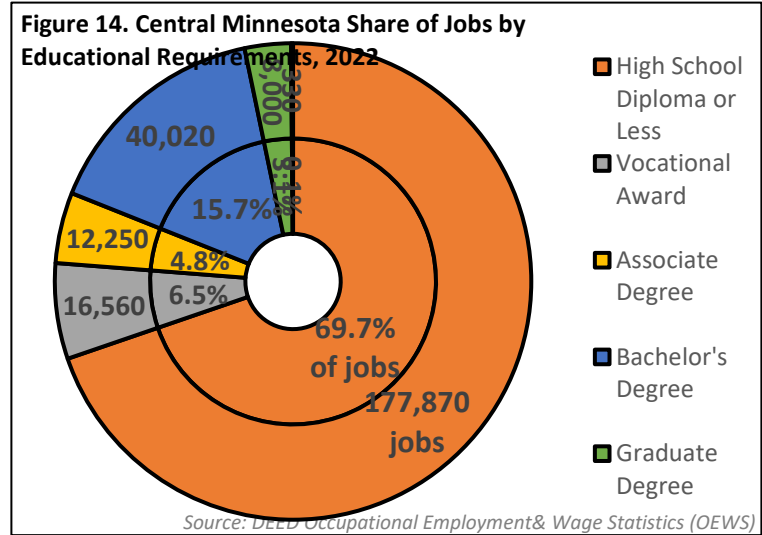
Central Minnesota	Number of Total Vacancies	Median Hourly Wage Offer	Percent Part-Time	Percent Temporary or Seasonal	Requiring Post-Secondary Education	Requiring 1 or More Years of Work Exp.	Percent Requiring Certificate or License	Job Vacancy Rate
<b>Total, All Occupations</b>	<b>20,029</b>	<b>\$18.05</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>7.5%</b>
Management	320	\$39.17	12%	1%	66%	94%	39%	2.3%
Business & Financial Operations	202	\$27.62	9%	0%	78%	96%	27%	2.0%
Computer & Mathematical	171	\$23.54	4%	0%	96%	87%	71%	5.9%
Architecture & Engineering	158	\$24.47	2%	0%	87%	94%	62%	4.6%
Life, Physical & Social Sciences	621	\$18.79	84%	85%	8%	12%	8%	39.8%
Community & Social Service	254	\$23.73	49%	10%	67%	61%	84%	4.9%
Legal	37	\$29.33	0%	5%	98%	98%	90%	3.7%
Education, Training & Library	1,003	\$22.10	52%	42%	81%	82%	76%	6.0%
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	218	\$15.89	75%	16%	28%	58%	32%	9.7%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	1,788	\$32.69	35%	14%	91%	49%	89%	10.5%
Healthcare Support	1,330	\$15.48	56%	4%	20%	10%	61%	7.9%
Protective Service	133	\$17.93	59%	20%	26%	45%	85%	3.1%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	2,629	\$13.43	72%	6%	0%	21%	7%	11.6%
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	669	\$15.07	61%	22%	0%	30%	18%	8.5%
Personal Care & Service	650	\$14.19	59%	11%	25%	16%	30%	11.9%
Sales & Related	2,437	\$15.93	35%	2%	1%	25%	5%	9.5%
Office & Administrative Support	1,264	\$15.74	48%	2%	10%	29%	5%	4.3%
Construction & Extraction	1,479	\$24.86	1%	37%	6%	73%	69%	9.7%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	620	\$22.53	11%	1%	27%	57%	60%	5.8%
Production	1,690	\$17.91	3%	2%	6%	25%	4%	6.4%
Transportation & Material Moving	1,845	\$20.33	37%	50%	4%	46%	79%	7.6%

*Source: DEED Job Vacancy Survey, 2022*

### EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Similar to Job Vacancy Survey results, data from DEED’s Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics program shows that only about 30% of jobs in the region require postsecondary education for entry. The other 70% 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 licensed 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 \$19,000 and over \$52,000 per year in Minnesota. For those who go to college, choice of major matters – different programs lead to jobs that earn different amounts of money.

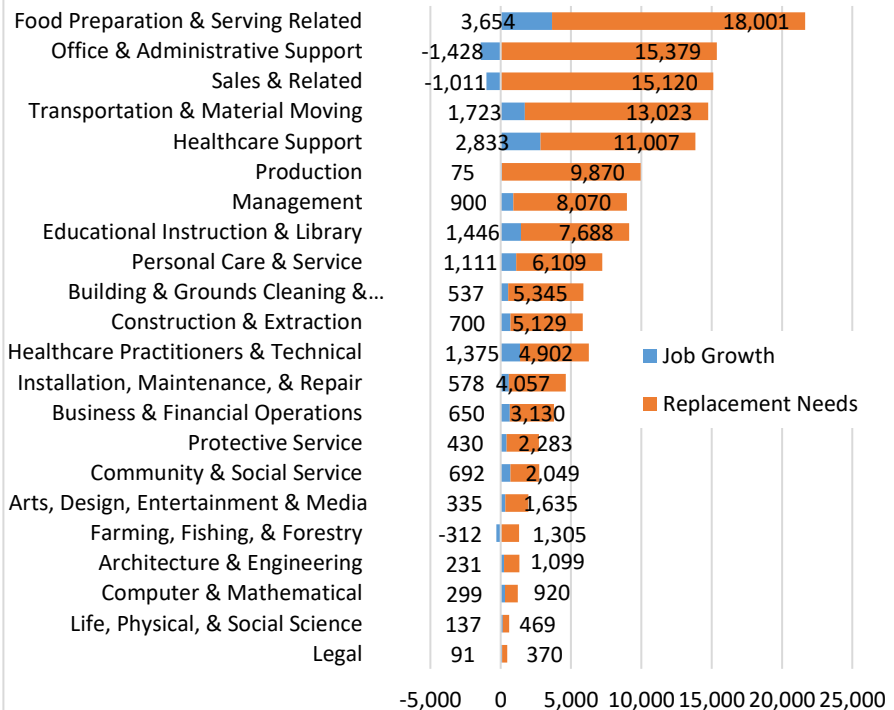


### EMPLOYMENT PROJECTIONS

Overall, the 13-county Central Minnesota planning area is projected to grow 5% from 2020 to 2030, a gain of 15,046 new jobs. The revised slower growth makes the region the second slowest growing region out of the 6 planning areas.

In addition, the region is also expected to need 136,960 replacement openings to fill jobs left vacant by retirements and other career changers. Healthcare Support, Food Prep & Serving, Community & Social Service, and Personal Care & Service occupations are expected to see the most new growth, but every occupational group will show some future demand either through new jobs or replacement openings (Figure 15).

Figure 15. Central Minnesota Employment Projections, 2020-2030



## OCCUPATIONS IN DEMAND

According to DEED's [Occupations in Demand](#) tool, there are roughly 300 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, Nursing Assistants, Personal Care Aides, Home Health Aides, Licensed Practical and Registered Nurses, Electricians, Industrial Engineers, Machinists, Truck Drivers, and Teachers are all in high demand (Table 12).

High School or Less	Vocational Training	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree or Higher
Fast Food Workers (\$30,214)	Nursing Assistants (\$39,353)	Registered Nurses (\$86,694)	Elementary School Teachers (\$64,300)
Home Health & Personal Care Aides (\$32,476)	Agricultural Technicians (\$50,734)	Police and Sheriff Officers (\$74,178)	Secondary School Teachers (\$64,602)
Retail Salespersons (\$31,947)	Licensed Practical Nurses (\$52,954)	Clinical Lab Technologists & Technicians (\$62,998)	General & Operations Managers (\$79,121)
Cashiers (\$29,935)	Automotive Service Technicians (\$50,038)	Dental Hygienists (\$84,542)	Accountants & Auditors (\$69,793)
First Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers (\$45,819)	Machinists (\$57,338)	Radiologic Techs/Technologists (\$76,318)	Financial Managers (\$120,404)
Laborers and Freight, Stock Movers (\$39,815)	Medical Assistants (\$46,901)	Architectural and Civil Drafters (\$60,894)	Medical and Health Services Managers (\$100,201)
Janitors and Cleaners (\$36,758)	Hairdressers, Hairstylists, and Cosmetologists (\$35,910)	Computer Network Support Specialists (\$75,592)	Substance Abuse, Behavioral & Mental Health Counselors (\$51,463)
First-Line Supervisors of Food Prep and Serving Workers (\$39,562)	Electricians (\$63,794)	Surgical Technologists (\$64,849)	Middle School Teachers (\$65,007)
CDL Truck Drivers (\$57,479)	HVAC Mechanics (\$64,161)	Computer Network Support Specialists (\$72,592)	Substitute Teachers (\$43,575)
Teaching Assistants (\$38,154)	Industrial Machinery Mechanics (\$63,521)	Paralegals and Legal Assistants (\$53,999)	Preschool Teachers (\$36,959)

*Source: DEED Occupations in Demand*

## ECONOMY

### INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT

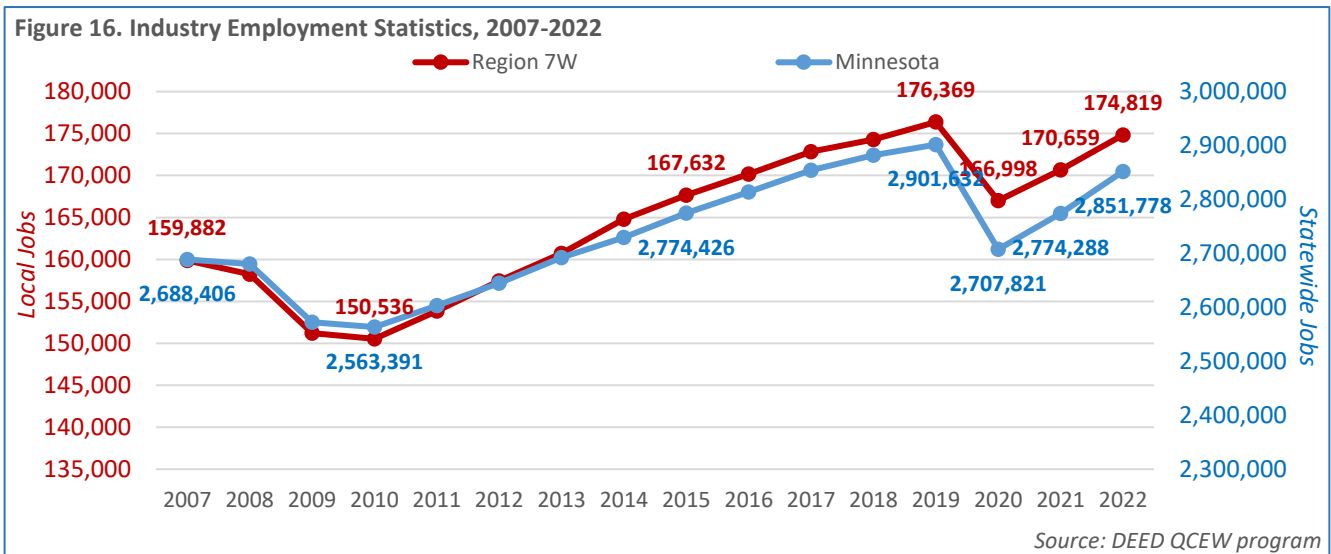
According to DEED's [Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages \(QCEW\) program](#), Region 7W was home to 11,777 business establishments providing 174,819 covered jobs through 2022, with a total payroll of just under \$10 billion. That was about 4.9% of total employment in the state of Minnesota, making it the third largest of the 13 EDRs in the state. Average annual wages were \$55,685 in the region, which was about \$14,040 lower than the state's average annual wage.

Stearns County is the largest employment center in the region and the seventh largest in the state, with 84,224 jobs at 4,593 firms; accounting for about half of the region's jobs. Wright County was the next largest, with 46,074 jobs at 3,743 firms, followed by Sherburne County with 2,397 firms and 26,913 jobs and Benton County with 17,607 jobs at 1,045 firms. The region lost a smaller share of jobs in the pandemic recession and as a result is growing slightly slower recently, but still is sitting better relative to Minnesota overall. In fact, Stearns County is the only county in in the region that hasn't fully recovered to 2019 employment levels, while Wright, Sherburne, and Benton are all above 2019 job counts (Table 13).

Geography	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll	Average Annual Wage	2021-2022		2019-2022	
					Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
<b>Region 7W – Central</b>	<b>11,777</b>	<b>174,819</b>	<b>\$9,734,766,399</b>	<b>\$55,685</b>	<b>+4,160</b>	<b>+2.4%</b>	<b>-1,550</b>	<b>-0.9%</b>
Benton Co.	1,045	17,607	\$916,357,179	\$52,045	+378	+2.2%	+190	+1.1%
Sherburne Co.	2,397	26,913	\$1,451,943,567	\$53,950	+869	+3.3%	+550	+2.1%
Stearns Co.	4,593	84,224	\$4,960,890,051	\$58,901	+1,874	+2.3%	-3,313	-3.8%
Wright Co.	3,743	46,074	\$2,405,575,602	\$52,211	+1,038	+2.3%	+1,023	+2.3%
<b>State of Minnesota</b>	<b>199,603</b>	<b>2,851,778</b>	<b>\$198,839,398,672</b>	<b>\$69,725</b>	<b>+77,490</b>	<b>+2.8%</b>	<b>-49,854</b>	<b>-1.7%</b>

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

Region 7W has seen job gains and losses over the past decade but ended 2022 with about 1,550 fewer jobs than it had in 2019, a 0.9% decline. In comparison, the state was still down 1.7% from its 2019 employment peak in 2019. Like the state, the region suffered severe job declines in 2009 and 2010 and again in 2020. Since then, Region 7W has seen a slightly slower recovery than the rest of the state, which gained jobs at a 2.8% clip from 2021 to 2022, compared to a 2.4% increase in the region. The slightly slower job growth in 2022 is somewhat a result of a more resilient economy during 2020 that saw a smaller share of jobs lost (Figure 16).



With 28,204 jobs at 1,529 firms, Health Care and Social Assistance is the largest employing industry in Region 7W, accounting for 16.1% of total jobs in the region. Due to the region’s population growth and regional hub status, the largest sectors were Ambulatory Health Care Services and Hospitals, which both had over 8,200 jobs but are well below 2019 employment levels. The region also had 6,210 jobs in Nursing and Residential Care Facilities and 4,533 jobs in Social Assistance.

After regaining about 1,879 jobs since 2014, Manufacturing lost jobs in 2020 and had 341 fewer jobs by 2022. Annual wages in Manufacturing were 8,870 higher than in the total of all industries. In contrast, wages were relatively low in Retail Trade, the region’s third largest industry, with 23,370 jobs at 1,260 stores. The related Accommodation and Food Services Industry had 13,471 jobs at 775 establishments. Combined, those two industries provide 21% of total jobs. Despite suffering from Pandemic related jobs losses the two sectors held employment remarkably well compared to other areas of the state and the Twin Cities in particular. Fifteen of the 20 main industries in the region lost jobs since 2019, and four of 20 industries lost jobs in the past year (Table 14).

**Table 14. Industry Employment Statistics, 2022**

Region 7W	2022 Annual Data				2021-2022		2019-2022	
	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll (\$1,000s)	Avg. Annual Wage	Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
<b>Total, All Industries</b>	<b>11,777</b>	<b>174,819</b>	<b>\$9,734,766</b>	<b>\$55,685</b>	<b>4,160</b>	<b>2.4%</b>	<b>-1,550</b>	<b>-0.9%</b>
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & Hunt	221	2,428	\$107,534	\$44,289	106	4.6%	250	11.5%
Mining	11	245	\$17,703	\$72,256	-57	-18.9%	-23	-8.6%
Construction	1,801	14,953	\$1,198,722	\$80,166	650	4.5%	1,526	11.4%
Manufacturing	715	25,712	\$1,659,833	\$64,555	1,029	4.2%	-341	-1.3%
Utilities	29	1,653	\$207,334	\$125,429	19	1.2%	-55	-3.2%
Wholesale Trade	422	7,419	\$526,344	\$70,945	611	9.0%	497	7.2%
Retail Trade	1,260	23,370	\$842,147	\$36,035	63	0.3%	-753	-3.1%
Transportation & Warehousing	455	6,784	\$413,111	\$60,895	250	3.8%	-148	-2.1%
Information	151	1,892	\$128,762	\$68,056	11	0.6%	-39	-2.0%
Finance & Insurance	539	5,161	\$434,867	\$84,260	-393	-7.1%	183	3.7%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	373	1,338	\$51,799	\$38,714	67	5.3%	-101	-7.0%
Professional & Technical Services	788	3,857	\$286,634	\$74,315	-205	-5.0%	-353	-8.4%
Management of Companies	60	1,532	\$147,122	\$96,033	41	2.7%	-1,113	-42.1%
Admin. Support & Waste Mgmt. Svcs.	541	7,122	\$299,006	\$41,983	206	3.0%	-121	-1.7%
Educational Services	242	15,366	\$821,116	\$53,437	338	2.2%	-496	-3.1%
Health Care & Social Assistance	1,529	28,204	\$1,675,911	\$59,421	-159	-0.6%	-186	-0.7%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	226	2,000	\$34,944	\$17,472	171	9.3%	-28	-1.4%
Accommodation & Food Services	775	13,471	\$274,974	\$20,412	868	6.9%	-44	-0.3%
Other Services	1,434	5,614	\$193,655	\$34,495	389	7.4%	-265	-4.5%
Public Administration	207	6,694	\$413,248	\$61,734	156	2.4%	62	0.9%

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

## EMPLOYMENT DIVERSITY

According to DEED's Quarterly Employment Demographics (QED) program, the workforce in the region was aging over the past 10 years. Over one-in-five (21.7%) of workers in the region were 55 years or older, compared to 22.1% statewide and just 16.7% in the region one decade earlier. Gains in the percentage of teenaged workers reversed previous downward trends in 2020, and both wages and the number of hours worked was going up recently (Table 15).

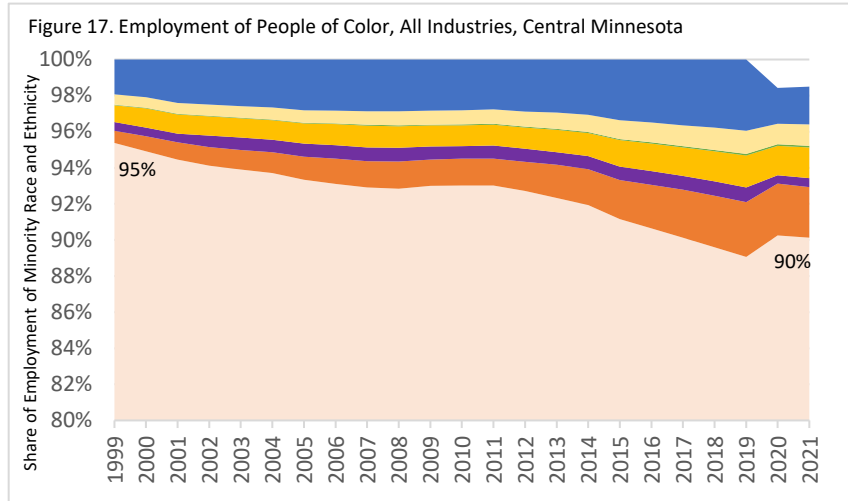
As noted above, wages were climbing across the board for all workers due to rising demand and a tight labor market. While wages were still lowest for the youngest and oldest workers who tend to fill lower-skilled, less-than-fulltime jobs in industries like Retail Trade and Accommodation & Food Services, the youngest age groups enjoyed the fastest percentage increase in wages from 2012 to 2022. Wages were highest for workers between 45 and 64 years of age, and females typically worked 74% of the hours that males did.

**Table 15. Workforce Demographics by Age Group and Gender, Total of All Industries, 2012-2022**

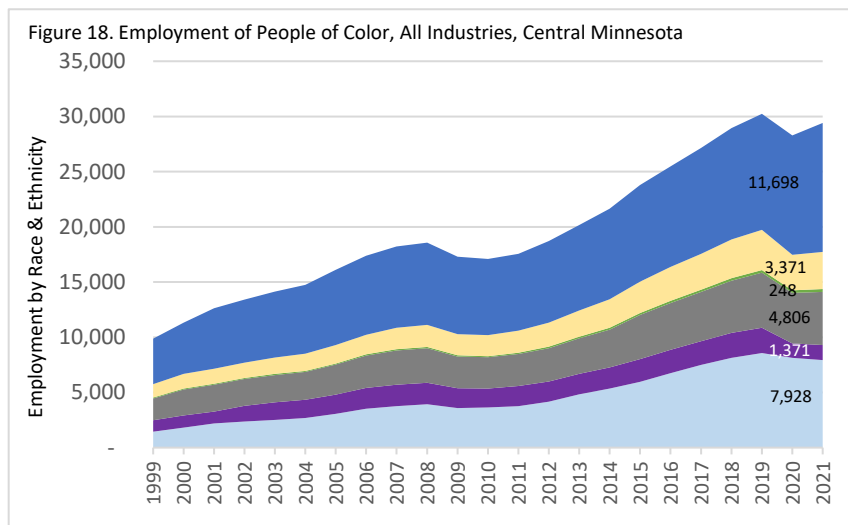
Region 7W	Percentage of Workers		Percent of Workers, Minnesota		Median Hourly Wage		Median Hours Worked (Per Qtr.)	
	2022	2012	2022	2012	2022	2012	2022	2012
Total, all ages	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	\$22.68	\$14.95	409	401
19 years & under	9.1%	8.7%	6.6%	6.3%	\$14.81	\$8.00	126	124
20 to 24 years	10.5%	13.3%	9.2%	11.3%	\$19.01	\$10.43	300	252
25 to 44 years	41.0%	40.5%	43.6%	42.3%	\$25.94	\$17.24	462	462
45 to 54 years	17.8%	20.8%	18.4%	21.9%	\$27.75	\$18.84	485	480
55 to 64 years	16.3%	13.2%	16.7%	14.7%	\$25.26	\$18.03	480	466
65 years & over	5.3%	3.5%	5.4%	3.5%	\$18.59	\$12.70	231	206
Male	50.2%	48.8%	49.1%	49.1%	\$25.28	\$16.84	477	470
Female	49.8%	51.2%	50.9%	50.9%	\$21.37	\$13.74	355	345

Source: DEED Quarterly Employment Demographics

People of color account for 7.7% of the total labor force in Central Minnesota and hold a slightly higher share of jobs, compared to the state overall where they amount to 16.2% of the labor force but only hold 15.7% of jobs. According to data from the Quarterly Workforce Indicators program, people of color held 29,422 jobs in Central Minnesota, compared to 215,563 jobs held by white workers. The number of jobs has nearly tripled since 2000 when People of color held 5% of jobs (Figure 17).

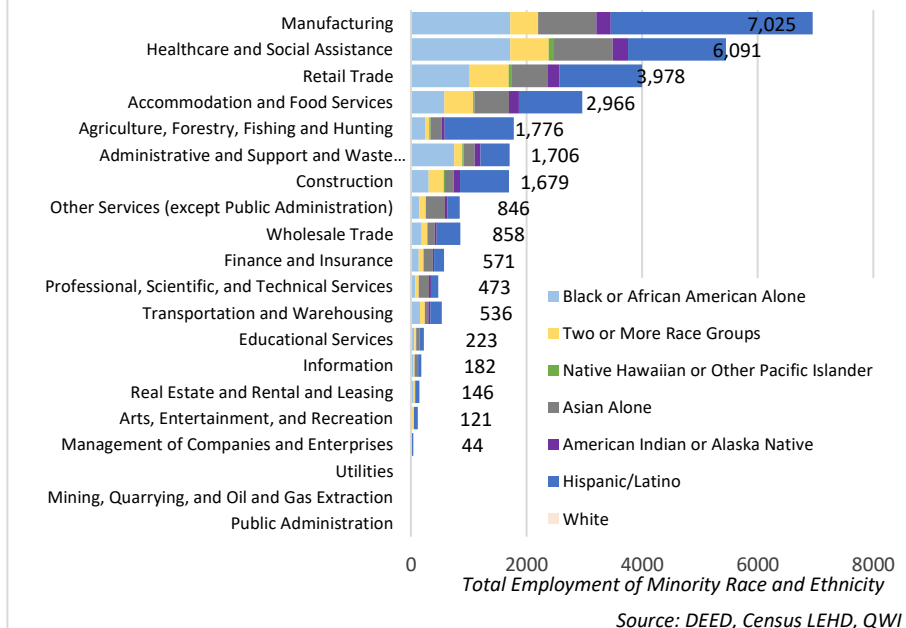


People of color held an additional 18,114 jobs since 2000 compared to 4,265 by White workers. Hispanic/Latino workers hold the largest number of jobs of the racial and ethnic minority groups with 11,698 jobs in 2021, a third of all minority held jobs. The next largest number of jobs held by a minority group was Black or African American, holding 7,928 jobs in 2020. The number of jobs held by this race has increased by 6,103 since 2000, amounting to a 334% increase (Figure 18).



The Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting sector, Administrative Support & Waste Management sector have the highest share of non-White employment at 27% and 18%, respectively. Accommodation & Food Services and Manufacturing also have 15% of jobs held by non-White workers. The largest numbers of non-White workers are employed in Manufacturing (7,025 jobs) and Health Care & Social Assistance (6,091 jobs). The least diverse industries include Utilities and Mining (Figure 19).

Figure 19. Employment of People of Color in Central Minnesota





### INDUSTRY PROJECTIONS

As noted above, Central Minnesota is projected to grow 5% from 2020 to 2030, a gain of 15,046 new jobs, which would make it the second slowest growing region in the state. The largest growing industry is expected to be Health Care & Social Assistance, which may account for one-third (36.8%) of total projected growth in the region by 2030. The fastest growth in the region is expected to be in the Accommodation & Food Services industry as employers try to recover from the aftermath of the pandemic, yet due to the substantial number of jobs that were lost in 2020 the sector is still not projected to be recovered to 2019 employment levels by 2030. (Table 16).

Industry	Estimated Employment 2020	Projected Employment 2030	Percent Change 2020-2030	Numeric Change 2020-2030
<b>Total, All Industries</b>	<b>301,170</b>	<b>316,216</b>	<b>+5.0%</b>	<b>+15,046</b>
Health Care & Social Assistance	46,672	52,213	+11.9%	+5,541
Manufacturing	39,543	40,646	+2.8%	+1,103
Retail Trade	35,588	33,781	-5.1%	-1,807
Educational Services	23,734	24,976	+5.2%	+1,242
Accommodation & Food Svcs	19,327	23,505	+21.6%	+4,178
Public Administration	19,239	20,198	+5.0%	+959
Construction	18,984	19,792	+4.3%	+808
Wholesale Trade	10,123	10,516	+3.9%	+393
Other Services	10,108	11,290	+11.7%	+1,182
Transportation & Warehousing	10,098	10,685	+5.8%	+587
Administrative & Waste Services	9545	10,066	+5.5%	+521
Finance and Insurance	7,796	7,912	+1.5%	+116
Professional & Technical Services	6,685	7,228	+8.1%	+543
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & Hunt	5,052	4,493	-11.1%	-559
Information	2,639	2,842	+7.7%	+203
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	2,636	3,456	+31.1%	+820
Utilities	1,952	1,686	-13.6%	-266
Management of Companies	1,877	1,891	+0.7%	+14
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	1,754	1,737	-0.1%	-17
Mining	364	386	+6.0%	+22

Source: DEED 2020-2030 Employment Outlook

### NONEMPLOYER ESTABLISHMENTS

Region 7W was home to 30,587 self-employed businesses or “nonemployers” in 2019, 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).” Region 7W saw a substantial increase in nonemployers over the past decade, but

	2019		2009-2019	
	Number of Firms	Receipts (\$1,000s)	Change in Nonemps.	Percent Change
<b>Region 7W</b>	<b>30,587</b>	<b>\$1,470,191</b>	<b>+2,601</b>	<b>+9.3%</b>
Benton Co.	2,634	\$120,022	+42	+1.6%
Sherburne Co.	6,783	\$306,667	+374	+5.8%
Stearns Co.	11,125	\$590,166	+1,320	+13.5%
Wright Co.	10,045	\$453,336	+865	+9.4%
<b>Minnesota</b>	<b>418,080</b>	<b>\$20,377,253</b>	<b>+39,926</b>	<b>+10.6%</b>

Source: U.S. Census, Nonemployer Statistics program

most of this difference is from the most recent year available in the nonemployer dataset not capturing the large economic disruptions in 2020. In sum, the region added 2,601 nonemployers from 2009 to 2019, a 9.3% increase. In sum, these nonemployers generated sales receipts of over \$1.47 billion in 2019. Every county in Region 7W saw increases in nonemployers, but only Stearns exceeded statewide growth (Table 17).

### CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

Like other parts of Greater Minnesota, agriculture is also a key industry in Region 7W, including 5,606 farms producing just over \$1.2 billion in the market value of products sold in 2017 according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. With almost 3,000 farms, Stearns County is the highest ranked agriculture county in the state. Like the state, the number of farms in the region was declining over time, but Region 7W still accounts for 20% of the farms in the state (Table 18).

	Number of Farms	Market Value of Products Sold	State Rank
<b>Region 7W</b>	<b>5,606</b>	<b>\$1,241,259,000</b>	<b>7</b>
Benton Co.	816	\$207,177,000	42
Sherburne Co.	501	\$89,597,000	60
Stearns Co.	2,951	\$747,977,000	1
Wright Co.	1,338	\$196,508,000	45
<b>Minnesota</b>	<b>68,822</b>	<b>\$18,395,390,000</b>	

Source: 2017 Census of Agriculture

Upon request, this information can be made available in alternate formats for people with disabilities by contacting Luke Greiner at 320-223-6992 or at [luke.greiner@state.mn.us](mailto:luke.greiner@state.mn.us)