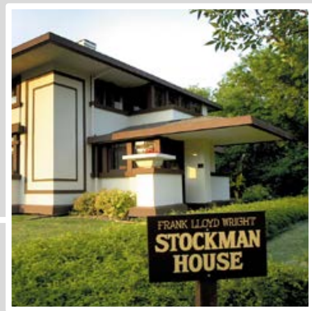
SEPTEMBER 2017



ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT & SWOT ANALYSIS

VISION NORTH IOWA

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC PLAN

TIP strategies AUSTIN • SEATTLE

VISION NORTH IOWA

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TIP Strategies would like to thank the many individuals and organizations who participated in the development of the Vision North Iowa Economic Assessment and SWOT Analysis. Your insight and expertise helped us build a better understanding of the North Iowa region's assets and opportunities. We are especially grateful to the leadership of the Clear Lake Area Chamber of Commerce, Mason City Chamber of Commerce, and North Iowa Corridor EDC for their partnership, oversight, and investment in this important project. And a special thank you to the Project Steering Committee and Key Stakeholder group for contributing their time and input throughout the planning process.

KEY PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

- Cerro Gordo County
- City of Clear Lake
- City of Mason City
- Clear Lake Chamber of Commerce
- Clear Lake Tourism
- Iowa Works
- John Pappajohn Entrepreneurial Center
- Mason City Chamber of Commerce
- North Iowa Area Community College
- United Way
- Various Community Groups
- Visit Mason City

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TIP STRATEGIES, INC. is a privately held Austin and Seattle based economic development consulting firm committed to providing quality solutions for public and private sector clients. Established in 1995, the firm's primary focus is economic development strategic planning.

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ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT

The Vision North Iowa initiative was formed to create a multi-jurisdictional strategy for economic growth and prosperity in the North Iowa region. The strategic plan will identify a diverse set of recommendations to bolster entrepreneurship and innovation in the area, position North Iowa among target industry decision-makers, support future growth sectors through effective workforce development initiatives, and enhance quality of place. The initiatives will balance the need to expand and diversify the region's industrial and employment base with the needs and interests of existing businesses and the local workforce.

The strategies contained in the plan will be formulated with the goal of developing successful people, businesses, and cultural initiatives by creating new jobs and opportunities, while building upon the North Iowa region's existing priorities, unique asset base, and past successes. The plan will be supported by an implementation strategy outlining the tools needed to effectively execute on the recommendations.

METHODOLOGY

To provide a common framework for our strategic recommendations, TIP conducted a demographic and economic assessment of the North Iowa region. We began by compiling quantitative data on Cerro Gordo County, with comparisons to the seven-county labor shed, state, and US where appropriate. Results of this analysis begin on page 17. We used this data as well as discussions with community stakeholders to prepare an analysis of North Iowa's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Results of this analysis, commonly referred to as SWOT, are presented on page 3. The purpose of the assessment is to understand the region's relative economic position and highlight its competitive advantages and disadvantages.

The findings presented in this section are based on the following elements:

- A review of relevant studies, plans, and other material provided by the Vision North Iowa executive committee and others.
- A review of economic and demographic data from primary and secondary sources, including the US Census Bureau, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Economic Modeling Specialists Inc. (EMSI), Moody's Analytics, and ESRI.
- Findings from community site visits, interviews, and focus groups with over 100 community representatives and stakeholders over a six-month period.
- Findings from a16-question community survey which received 736 responses.
- TIP Strategies' 20 years of experience working with communities across the country and compiling best practices.

KEY FINDINGS

The economic assessment revealed numerous insights into the North Iowa regional economy. The most significant findings are highlighted below:

- *Steady population decline.* Over the last decade, Cerro Gordo County's population declined by approximately 1,400 residents. The county experienced a sharper decline in total population than its peer communities, the state, and the US between 2010 and 2015. The population is projected to decline by 1,000 additional residents by 2020.

- *Imbalance in age distribution.* Cerro Gordo County's median age is higher than the state and US median age estimates by approximately five years. The county has a smaller than average young adult population (20-34) and a larger than average senior population (65+). This imbalance could present challenges in the future as fewer young adult workers will be available to replace the experienced working age population (35-64) as they retire.

- *Comparatively low levels of bachelor degree attainment.* The county and seven-county region fall below the state and US in terms of the share of the adult population with a bachelor's degree or higher. However, the county and region have a greater number of residents with "some college" than the state and nation, which includes those who complete certificates, obtain associates degrees, or enter college but do not graduate.

- *Low income levels.* The median household income in Cerro Gordo County is $45,012, which is approximately 15 percent less than the state median household income ($52,716) and about 16 percent less than the national median household income ($53,482).

- *Net importer of labor.* Cerro Gordo County is a net importer of workers, with a net increase in daytime population of about 2,200. Of the 21,720 workers that held jobs in Cerro Gordo County in 2014, 43 percent lived outside the county. Of the 19,437 residents employed in 2014, 37 percent commuted to jobs outside the county. The healthcare sector represents the largest share of inbound commuting workers, while the manufacturing sector pulls away the largest share of outbound commuting workers.

- *Higher-than-average labor force participation.* The county has a labor force participation rate of roughly 67 percent, which is 3.5 percentage points higher than the national average.

- *Steady employment decline and comparatively low average annual pay.* Total employment in Cerro Gordo County has mostly declined over the last decade. Among the peer communities represented in the competitive analysis, Cerro Gordo County saw the only decline in total employment between 2010 and 2015, while the two other Iowa communities and the state saw a significant increase in total employment. Cerro Gordo County had the second lowest average annual pay after Webster County, IA.

- *Concentration of employment in a stable industry sector.* Approximately half of the county's job base (44.9 percent) is comprised of three industries: healthcare, retail trade, and manufacturing. Healthcare represents the largest share at approximately 20 percent and is the most stable of the three. Healthcare is also projected to see the highest increase in total employment through 2020. While traditionally considered somewhat stable, the retail and manufacturing sectors are more susceptible to economic fluctuations and the impacts of globalization and technology change that have occurred over the past couple of decades.

- *Shortage of affordable mid-level housing.* Cerro Gordo County was outpaced in housing development by the state and US in 2015. According to Figure 31, housing in Cerro Gordo County is relatively affordable in relation to the rest of the US. However, the consulting team's community outreach indicated that, while sufficient entry-level housing is available, affordable intermediate housing is scarce.

SWOT ANALYSIS

In addition to our review of statistical data, our understanding of the North Iowa region was informed by discussions with stakeholders over a four-month period. Based on this work, and our experience working in communities across the US, we have developed a SWOT analysis. The results of this analysis are based on 1) the statistical data analysis that begins on page 17; and 2) qualitative research conducted to date, including 7 stakeholder interviews, 18 focus groups, a community tour, a community perception survey, 4 community visioning and values workshops, and a target industry survey. In total, over 1,000 North Iowa residents contributed to the qualitative research that was conducted. Findings from the community perception survey, community visioning and values workshops, and target industry survey are incorporated in the SWOT analysis below. A more detailed community perception survey SWOT analysis is presented separately on page 5.

The SWOT can be defined as follows:

- **STRENGTHS.** Assets and resources that can be built on to grow, strengthen, and diversify the local economy.
- **WEAKNESSES.** Liabilities and barriers to economic development that could limit the city's growth potential.
- **OPPORTUNITIES.** Competitive advantages and positive trends that hold significant potential for the attraction of new businesses, investments, and skilled workers.
- **THREATS.** Unfavorable factors and trends (often external) that could negatively impact the local economy.

STRENGTHS

- Location (mid-continent, proximity to the I-35 corridor, and relatively short distance to two major metro areas)
- Quality and proximity of transportation assets (confluence of major roads and highways, access to a variety of rail lines, and an exceptional regional airport)
- Productive and stable key industries
- Infrastructure quality and capacity
- Work ethic
- Site availability
- Local financial capital outlets (decisions made locally)
- Low cost of living (20 points below the national average based on COLI figures compiled by C2ER – www.coli.org)
- Civic engagement among residents
- Diverse cultural landmarks and amenities (e.g. music, architecture)
- Community events (e.g. RAGBRAI, fireworks show)
- Economic hub status
- Agricultural influence
- Collaboration among Clear Lake, Mason City, and the County
- Quality and breadth of educational options (public and private)
- NIACC and the Pappajohn Entrepreneurship Center
- POLICOM economic strength ranking of the Micropolitan Statistical Area (#76 out of 551 in 2017, up from 160 in 2016)
- Revitalization projects and public facilities upgrades
- Local television broadcast affiliate
- Quality of people (i.e. friendly, welcoming, and community-minded)
- Quality of life
- Optimism among residents about the future of North Iowa

WEAKNESSES

- Economic stagnancy and lack of industry diversity
- Perception of agriculture industry dependency
- Population decline
- Availability of high-wage jobs
- Workforce age, availability, and skill-level
- Shortage of appropriately-sized existing buildings (prospect demand for ~200K SF of space)
- Largest employers are not locally-owned
- "Flyover country" perception
- Shortage of mid-level affordable housing
- Shortage of young adult population
- Shortage of community facilities and activities for young families
- Limited entertainment and nightlife activities for young professionals
- Community polarization; negative perceptions of the community among some citizen groups
- Appearance of entryways into communities
- Regulatory environment viewed as too restrictive by some

OPPORTUNITIES

- Increased community collaboration and unity for economic success
- Increased coordination with NIACC to address industry needs (e.g. skills training programs)
- Expansion of the entrepreneur ecosystem
- Capacity to provide incentives for the right project
- Leverage infrastructure capacity
- Certified site availability
- Communication strategy to increase community pride
- Increased youth civic engagement
- Young adult and former resident attraction
- Finding new ways to leverage tourism as a community branding and economic development tool
- Innovative agriculture
- "Changing the perception of change"
- Successful past projects as blueprints for future endeavors
- Regional branding
- Expanded carrier service at the airport

THREATS

- Continuation of demographic and economic trends
- Continuation or escalation of negative perceptions among internal and external audiences
- Global retail attrition
- Economic downturn
- Escalation of anti-modern agriculture activism
- Shortage of healthcare professionals (especially physicians) for a key regional employer

COMMUNITY PERCEPTION SURVEY

Broad community involvement and support are essential elements of developing and implementing an effective strategic plan. From the outset, a primary objective of the Vision North Iowa project has been to engage regional residents in an ongoing dialogue to understand what community issues matter most, now and in the future.

In addition to conducting numerous stakeholder interviews and focus groups, a 16-question community perception survey was crafted to glean as much insight as possible. The survey questions were constructed in an open-ended format with no limitation on length of responses. The pool of questions was vetted based on the most relevant topics and their potential to extract the highest quality information possible regarding the community. The survey was made available online via the Vision North Iowa website, and was promoted through a number of media channels. Hard copies were also distributed upon request. The survey opened on February 6, 2017 and closed on March 17, 2017, yielding 736 responses (650 online responses and 86 handwritten responses).

The final slate of survey questions was as follows:

1. Please provide your contact information (name, organization, email, phone, and home and work zip codes).
2. What do you love most about living in the North Iowa region?
3. What would you like to see change about our region (within our collective control)?
4. What about our region would you like to keep the same?
5. Why should someone from outside our region choose to move here?
6. What is happening in your community that is working well?
7. What three words best describe North Iowa?
8. What would be the best way for North Iowa communities to collaborate for mutual success?
9. What have been some major successes in the region?
10. In your opinion, what is the proudest achievement for North Iowa and/or your community?
11. Are there peer regions we should look to for examples of success that can be replicated locally? Please list any that come to mind.
12. Are there potential challenges we must overcome to make this strategic planning project successful?
13. What are common or historical barriers to economic growth in the region?
14. What do you see as the most realistic threat(s) to the future?
15. Where do you see the most opportunity in the region?
16. May we follow up with you by phone or email if we have further questions?

The TIP team chose a representative group of 50 of the most comprehensive survey responses to identify recurring themes and opinions regarding the North Iowa region. The group consisted of an equal number of men and women from a diverse mix of occupations, from a high-ranking corporate employee to a stay-at-home mom, and even a high school student. A separate SWOT analysis was developed based on these responses as shown in the chart below. The findings are organized by recurring topic, which are followed by a sampling of direct quotes.

COMMUNITY PERCEPTION SURVEY SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

COMMUNITY REVITALIZATION

- *"Improvements to downtown"*
- *"River City Sculpture Tour, Historic Park Inn, development of 122 West...all revitalization projects"*
- *"The Historic Park Inn Hotel and other downtown MC growth spots, potentially the Reinvestment Plan that has the ice arena, performing arts center, hotel/conference center, and more."*
- *"Downtown revitalization of Mason City, RAGBRAI, shovel ready work sites, Tree Town"*
- *"In addition we have a very progressive local government which has voted many community improvements including a new fire station, city hall remodel, expanded recreation facilities, and millions of dollars of infrastructure upgrades."*
- *"Downtown Clear Lake renovations, cleaning the lake, McKesson, combining EDC efforts into one."*

PEOPLE

- *"The community in general is very friendly and welcoming"*
- *"The communities and the people that call it home."*
- *"Strong community pride and support"*
- *"The people. It truly is a big neighborhood, where people will help you."*
- *"Great volunteers to support various in-kind efforts, and great city fathers."*
- *"Community support of activities, schools, & community festivities."*
- *"Friendly people, easy pace of life, many opportunities for community involvement"*

QUALITY OF LIFE / COMMUNITY EVENTS

- *"No crime, Thursdays on main, 4th of July festival."*
- *"The various events that happen in our area. With the Surf, as well as Band Fest and other events in the communities." "parties, bands, concerts, hockey"*
- *"Band fest, Clear Lake 4th of July, Surf Ball Room concerts, North Iowa event horse shows"*
- *"It is a nice place to raise a family" "Recreation"*
- *"Relaxing"*
- *"FUN"*
- *"The momentum in growth of breweries, wine culture, restaurants, music, art and decor establishments "*
- *"Kite Festival, Christmas by the Lake, Fourth of July"*
- *"Good schools, safe and secure feel"*
- *"West side retail on 122, hosting many events in CL & MC. Promoting the Surf and Wright on the park, Beautiful school facilities."*
- *"Strong church community and no box stores, thriving downtown."*

QUALITY OF INDUSTRY & WORKFORCE

- *"We have had major successes in expansions of businesses in Mason City such as Cargill, Golden Grain Energy and REG."*
- *"In terms of business and jobs: McKesson, Mitas Tires, Valent BioScience, Simply Essentials, expansions from Cargill, Mercy Medical, Cambrex, Grain Millers and many others."*
- *"The McKesson facility. Mercy Hospital's continued expansion, NIACC growth, retention of Kraft and Curries."*
- *"NIACC-Park Inn Hotel - Medical facilities - Westward growth of the business area"*

STRENGTHS

QUALITY OF INDUSTRY & WORKFORCE—*CONTINUED*

- *"The biofuel plants, Certa, etc."*
- *"Lower tax structure. Financial incentives (for business)."*
- *"Agriculture base, positive attitudes, entrepreneurship, manufacturing, great people"*
- *"The growth of new businesses coming in."*
- *"Job opportunities."*
- *"New business."*
- *"Golden Grain Energy"*
- *"Clear Lake continues to thrive due to strong support of local businesses."*
- *"We have a strong retail base that draws people here to shop."*
- *"We've had a lot of business-to-business partnerships at our brewery we are so excited about. When small businesses work together everybody benefits."*
- *"Sukup Manufacturing Co., Winnebago, McKesson, Alliant Energy plant, Mercy Medical Center, NIACC, Kingland Systems."*
- *"We have a good educational system that allows for young people to be trained and get a job."*
- *"variety of employers in Clake"*
- *"The support and selection of businesses and industry that is here is good."*

WEAKNESSES

GOVERNMENT

- *"Lack of regional long term goals; the 8 or so Boards of Supervisors forming a group that meets quarterly to discuss areas of concern and areas of potential growth"*
- *"Iowa Legislature, too conservative; unwilling to listen to anyone outside of the Golden Triangle"*
- *"Seek out consensus and don't try to duplicate resources."*
- *"Being too provincial."*
- *"I am relatively new to the area (2.5 years) but I have gathered that the city council (Mason City) has a hard time getting things done."*
- *"I have heard the Mason City Council has repeatedly opposed growth. I worry that there may be a racial component disguised as an economic one."*
- *"Lack of trust, faith, confidence in local elected leaders due to recent decisions & happenings, fixing the current government ON the people with government OF the people"*
- *"Tell the Legislature to get serious about protecting water quality and don't be slaves to the agricultural interests. Have them provide $ incentives to farmers, to support water quality practices. "*
- *"A willingness to accept new ideas and projects"*

POPULATION/DIVERSITY

- *"It needs to grow"*
- *"Population growth"*
- *"Perhaps add to population diversity."*

WEAKNESSES

POPULATION/DIVERSITY—*CONTINUED*

- *"Weather, and diversification. I think that many people in this area are afraid of people who are not like them that think differently, and I feel this is something to embrace."*
- *"I would like to see more young people choose to live here. I'd like to see more people become stakeholders in the future of the region rather than the few that have stepped up."*
- *"Stop worrying about growing our population and making things better for who we have here, and finding ways to keep the next generation interested in staying here"*
- *"An aging population and a lack of or negative overall growth."*
- *"Limited population growth"*
- *"Continuing population decline"*

COMMUNITY IDENTITY/MINDSET

- *"Lack of identity in who we are as a community"*
- *"I would like to see a more positive (less defeatist) attitude by the majority of residents regarding what the region can achieve"*
- *"The attitude that nothing can be done, rivalries between communities"*
- *"Divisive, negative thinking and tone, lack of leadership, lack of regional cohesiveness and strategy. Each is looking out for its own (city, county) as opposed to ensuring the success of North Iowa."*
- *"I feel there are separations in the community and we need to pull everyone together to get on the same page. We all have a lot of opportunity, but some feel as if they don't."*
- *"Less resistance to change. A newer approach to solving problems."*
- *"Make sure members of the communities work together, not in silos."*

QUALITY OF LIFE / COMMUNITY AMENITIES

- *"It's boring"*
- *"Depressing"*
- *"Isolated"*
- *"We need an indoor play area, children's museum, imaginative play area, better grocery stores with affordable organic meats, fruits and vegetables. We need shopping outside Walmart, Target and Kohls."*
- *"More 100-140k housing"*
- *"This is a good place to raise a family (but is not exciting enough/have enough activities for young adults)."*
- *"People being bored in Mason"*
- *"High cost of living, lack of community access to recreation, other communities attract our individuals due to wages- cost of living, weather."*
- *"Better environmental quality & concern"*
- *"Our last resurgence downtown is fading, market forces and proper decisions are whittling away at out downtown even after concerted effort has been made in last 10-20 years to make more parking & revitalize our downtown."*
- *"Better roads- clean up these neighborhoods, we have junkyards inside city limits "*
- *"Fewer blight-type houses (North End in MC and other neighborhoods, too), less drugs/crime"*
- *"Less violence at HS & North end of MC.'*
- *"Not maintaining/building on what we have. MC is not a draw; it needs to be more attractive, appealing."*
- *"Demographics, thorough ways, cleanliness, high first responded service calls, community apathy, financial contributions"*

WEAKNESSES

QUALITY OF INDUSTRY & WORKFORCE

- *"Income. This area needs more of a career oriented population, high paying trade jobs"*
- *"Lack of workforce"*
- *"Not enough high paying jobs, or the skilled workforce to cover everything we have now"*
- *"The traditional manufacturing base that is found in most of the Midwest"*
- *"The general public to have a better understanding of the businesses and industry we have locally. Not only what products and services they offer, but understanding what they do and what they need in order to prevail in this area."*
- *"More and better paying jobs"*
- *"Quality paying jobs."*
- *"large corporations, low wages"*
- *"Need more jobs with good wages & benefits."*
- *"more professional career opportunities "*
- *"Jobs growth"*
- *"After what happened in 2016 with Prestige - Nobody is going to be looking at us- why would they??"*
- *"We need to increase the population to keep our area viable. To do this we need viable jobs to draw people"*
- *"We need to draw business to the area that can provide jobs that can support families. Retail jobs do not do that, however."*

OPPORTUNITIES

COMMUNICATION/COLLABORATION/UNIFICATION

- *"I think we could reach out to Forest City, Garner, Charles City, Northwood, and even Hampton to make a solid NORTH IOWA AREA improvement. Think about all the natural resources, as well as the diverse population, the possibilities are endless!"*
- *"North Mason City, as well as redevelopment of the Mall."*
- *"We need to think regional; in the past regionalism for Mason City is the region comes and only relies on Mason City and Mason City is the hub of all activity"*
- *"We need to figure out how to have the Farm Bureau actively backing our goals at the Iowa Legislature"*
- *"Regional grants"*
- *"More communication between so as not to conflict"*
- *"Unification on the direction we are going"*
- *"Share a common vision about who/what we are"*
- *"Combine more entities with Mason City and Clear Lake. Example: EDC (done already and working well), Chambers (next easiest to do) and then eventually city services, including government (council, mayors, admin, utilities, etc.)"*
- *"Find common ground on what we do well, pull funding together into one regional effort. When funds and result measurement are done by county or city that tends to ensure local silos instead of one collaborative regional effort to market North Iowa. Each is only looking out for its own county."*
- *"Use the Corridor to find additional ways to promote more area cooperation among local governmental units. It seems to me we have to find ways to build more trust among the councils and supervisors through more collective involvement possibly through the corridor. "*
- *"Community meetings, leaders need to be open and up front about what is going on and how they are communicating with each other"*

OPPORTUNITIES

COMMUNICATION/COLLABORATION/UNIFICATION—*CONTINUED*

- *"Neighboring small towns partnering with MC and Clear Lake. A greater North Iowa partnership?"*
- *"Hold Quarterly 'Networking events'"*
- *"a) Decide what M.C. wants to do (goals). b) Decide if M.C. can do it alone. c) If not alone, then work with other communities, employers, and colleges. d) Do it all in a sustainable way."*
- *"Communities have to discuss what type of North Iowa they want and achieve a unified plan to try and make it happen. Clear Lake was definitely against having a hog processing plant built in Mason City. We have one economic development group in the North Iowa Corridor that is to work for all residents in Mason City, Clear Lake, and Cerro Gordo County. Because of Prestige I have heard rumblings that Clear Lake should as in the past go it alone for economic development. "*
- *"Have the city councils meet or discuss what could benefit each other at the city level and county level."*

QUALITY OF LIFE / COMMUNITY AMENITIES

- *"Better restaurants and shopping, redevelopment of downtown Mason City and Clear Lake"*
- *"I would like to see a more vibrant downtown, more local shopping and boutiques as well as a box store like Gordmans. More "fun" activities for the young adults."*
- *"Increase in bike/running trail system."*
- *"Health/wellness centers, options, trail systems"*
- *"Outdoor recreational spaces (trails) need to be expanded. It would help with recruitment. People want access to their environment and they want it to be clean. Stronger action plan for change."*
- *"Festivals, concerts, bars (locally owned) festivals (beer fests, themed festivals) Food trucks"*
- *"Build off of our success! Grow lake access, increase small business & employees, provide more recreation for community/visiting individuals."*
- *"More bike paths"*
- *"Continue to look at options for restaurants and retail shopping that is not currently here. Entertainment offerings increased would be nice as well."*

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND REVITALIZATION

- *"More airlines out of Mason City Clear Lake- Better parking downtown Mason City- no 2 hr limits- More events and back up from Main Street and Mason City Chamber"*
- *"Hockey in Mall Event Center Mason City- continue to revitalize downtown in both cities"*
- *"Continue moving in a forward direction with renovations and updates to downtown Mason City, including the building of the multipurpose arena. I would also like to see our lower income areas receive some attention to clean up the city." "I love what has been done in downtown MC and look forward to us continuing our movement in a forward direction."*
- *"Grow the downtown. Celebrate the cold. Get rid of or build up the Downtown Mall. More economic growth, easy access in and around Northern Mason City; possible by pass to Western Commerce Corridor. More commerce, shopping on Eastern side of Mason City"*

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS

- *"More activities for youth-personally I would love to see us become a regional training center for youth activities that draws from all of North Iowa. We should be leading the way in this area and many others."*
- *"Providing opportunities for youth: it could provide economic impact through trainings and tournaments offered in many sports. Ames and Ankeny have something going on almost every weekend and they have the facilities to do it. I would love to be a part of this for North Iowa!"*

OPPORTUNITIES

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS—*CONTINUED*

- *"More/diverse cultural opportunities & festivals"*
- *"Heightened cultural events"*
- *"Convention center - I travel to central Iowa at least once a month for some type of agriculture conference. Those could be bringing people here!"*
- *"Promote what we have going on. So many times I hear people say there's nothing to do. Every weekend of the year could be filled if you look to a neighboring zip code"*
- *"Have unique celebrations (seasonal). "*

BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

- *"What can we capitalize on with this quality: Distribution centers, data centers???"*
- *"Tourism, technology and distribution points"*
- *"Developing, retaining and recruiting young professionals and those in technology fields"*
- *"From a 'macro' perspective I see a tremendous amount of opportunity in our region for production, manufacturing, and distribution industries. We have low cost of living, safe neighborhoods, and good schools. These are necessary to attract new workforce considering moving from other areas. We also have prime location to support transportation out of those facilities."*
- *"The momentum in growth of breweries, wine culture, restaurants, music, art and decor establishments "*
- *"NIACC- Agribusiness- Medical Care-Small Businesses."*
- *"We need a REAL greenhouse-not big box vendors."*
- *"Look to growing smaller businesses (including retail). People come to shop at the big box stores, but we need an artsy shopping district too"*
- *"Development of technology based jobs -provided our broad band infrastructure is up to speed-"*
- *"I think it's in production. We have a community college that can provide training to new and existing workers, and the production industry we attract will only enhance the service industry sector that we already have. "*
- *"I also think that if we were to invest in our regional internet capability it would expand on opportunity to telecommute for work and increase opportunity for things like telehealth."*
- *"Agriculture & potential employment growth"*
- *"New logistical/shipping centers taking advantage of our solid transportation access, insurance companies looking to expand in Iowa to take advantage of domicile laws here, food production facilities that can benefit from our access to ag products"*
- *"I see the continued opportunity in agriculture supporting industry and process of food products."*

THREATS

GOVERNMENT

- *"Lack of expanding local control from the feds & state governments"*
- *"transparency and the people who are against everything"*
- *"Improve communication between the cities as well as the county officials"*
- *"The competition between cities (residents and city officials)*

THREATS

GOVERNMENT—*CONTINUED*

- *"Perception by some that certain areas of the city receive more attention/money than others"*
- *"Many. Political challenges. Financial challenges, turf challenges. Long term engagement and commitment. "*
- *"All of the major organizations need to collaborate; the Chambers, visitor's bureau, EDC, Main Street, JPEC, etc. This has worked well for others such as Fort Dodge and Burlington. The lack of collaboration has caused us to fall behind." "Long time leaders need to share power and work with new leadership. Organizations need to come out of their silos and collaborate."*
- *"City & state zoning restrictions, funding, lack of high paying jobs."*
- *"MC council all on the same page; collaboration, not divisive"*
- *"In Mason City, in particular, I fear that the group of leaders that have been advocating for change and development will be disheartened by recent defeats and simply give up. Is there a group of people in North Iowa that are willing to keep fighting against those whose response to anything new or different is "No, we can't/shouldn't/won't do that."*

DEMOGRAPHICS

- *"Young Millennials not choosing to live and work in North Iowa. As a whole, North Iowa is a very old demographic. We need more college grads and young entrepreneurs to WANT to reside here and work. Otherwise what will happen to all entry level jobs? Stores will close and the opportunity of a work force is gone. "*
- *"Young people are more interested in living in a metro area"*
- *"Demographics are not favorable - little to no population growth for many decades."*
- *"Aging population creates threats. The need for new, young families are great. "*
- *"We send our best kids off to college and we expect them to never come back. We need to emphasize that there is no shame in learning and working in the trades."*
- *"An aging population combined with a millennial generation that is attracted to the city life."*

WORKFORCE

- **"***We have seen (are seeing) a continued challenge to get young professionals back to this area." "It makes it very hard to be in the professional service industry during this time (can't find people to hire) "*
- *"Lack of skilled workforce, aging workforce"*
- *"Workers who are not equipped to handle 21st century jobs (and often can't pass a drug test)"*
- *"Young people move out of area for job opportunities, low unemployment rate, availability of workers"*
- *"Business leaving. Winnebago moving executive positions to Minneapolis could have a very negative affect on many area cities."*
- *"No enough local risk takers who will try and start their own business, stagnant and declining population that hinders new business from moving to the area, older population with a shrinking labor pool, very dependent on agriculture profitability. When farmers make money we all make money. When farmers do not make money the entire region suffers. "*
- *"No mid to upper level jobs. Some smaller town got a phone/call center. Great idea for working moms. (St. Ansgar, or maybe a town in southern MN.)"*

KEY WORD ANALYSIS

Specific questions were selected for key word analysis based on their applicability and subject matter. "Word clouds" were constructed as visual representations of the most commonly used words and phrases contained in participant responses. Words lacking specific meaning (a, an, the, and, is, are, etc.) were filtered out for clarity. The relative size of the words represents their frequency among responses.

FIGURE 1. QUESTION 2 WORD CLOUD

Question two asked participants, "What do you love most about living in the North Iowa region?" The word cloud below indicates that the most common themes in question two were "community" (appearing 101 times), "small town" (83), and "family" (59). A total of 736 responses were received for this question.

FIGURE 2. QUESTION 3 WORD CLOUD

Participants were asked to describe what they would like to see change about the region (within their collective control), in question two. The most frequent responses were "jobs" (appearing 81 times), "activities" (76), and "business" (65), out of 685 responses.

FIGURE 3. QUESTION 5 WORD CLOUD

Question five asked participants, "Why should someone from outside our region choose to move here?" The word cloud below reveals that the most common themes in question four were "living" (103), "community" (91), and "place" (81). A total of 736 responses were received for this question.

FIGURE 4. QUESTION 7 SUMMARY

MOST COMMON WORDS USED TO DESCRIBE NORTH IOWA

Question seven asked participants to provide three words they felt best described North Iowa. The graphic below represents the most common responses, regardless of the order in which they were provided.

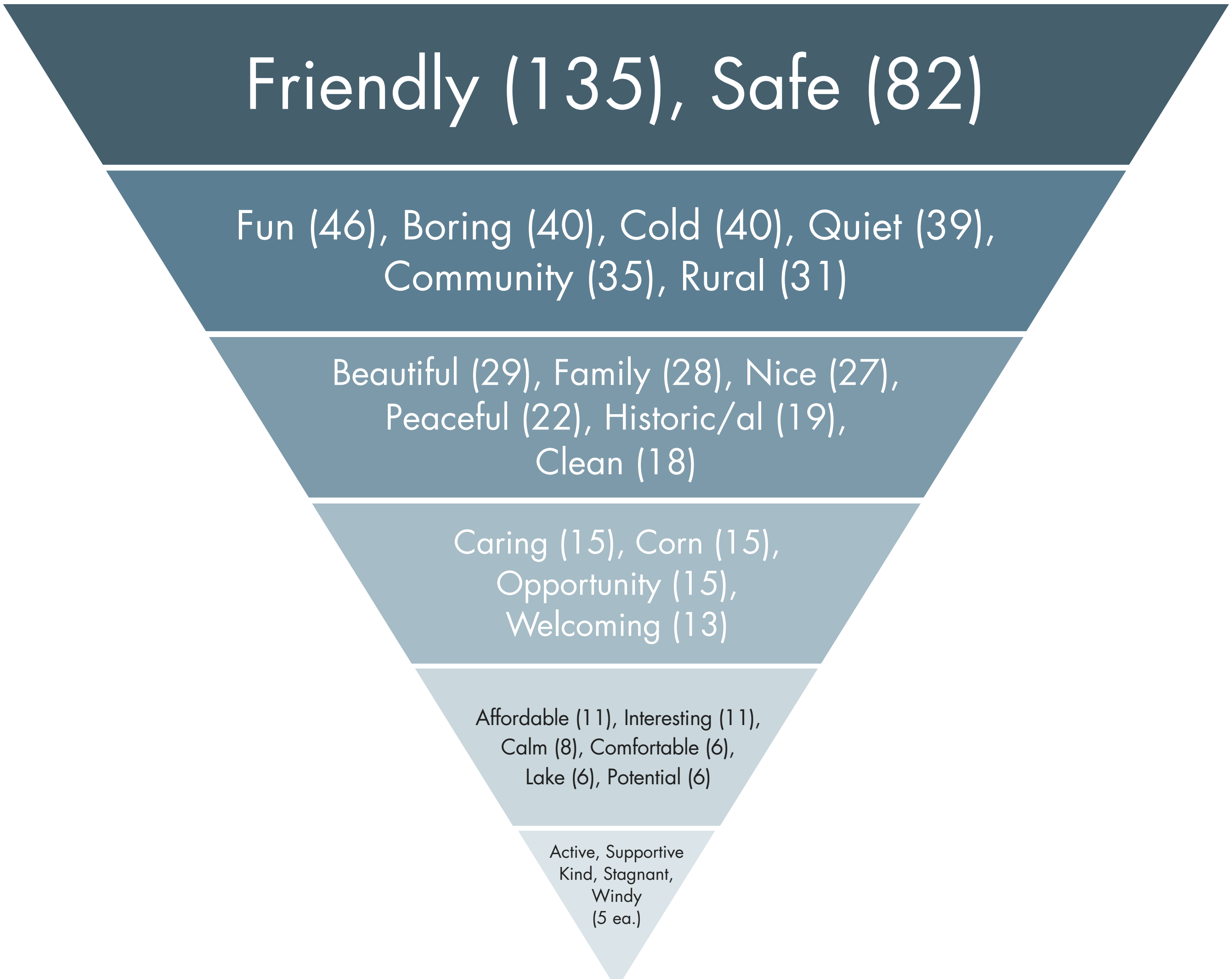


FIGURE 5. QUESTION 9 WORD CLOUD

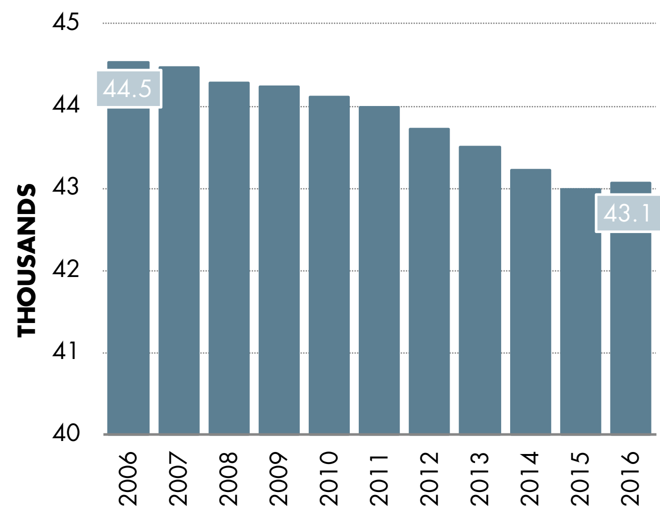
In question nine participants were asked, "What have been some major successes in the region?" The most frequent responses were "McKesson" (108), "Park" (70), and "Clear Lake (66), out of a total of 736 open-ended responses. It might be concluded that "Park" in this context refers to the Historic Park Inn hotel revitalization.

DEMOGRAPHICS, EDUCATION & WORKFORCE

FIGURE 6. POPULATION TRENDS, CERRO GORDO COUNTY
ANNUAL ESTIMATES JULY 1 OF EACH YEAR

Over the last decade, the population of Cerro Gordo County declined from approximately 44,500 to 43,100, or 3.1 percent. EMSI projects that the population will decline by 2 percent to around 42,100 by 2020.

Source: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates program. Projection provided by EMSI. Population figures are rounded to the nearest 100. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth. Note: via Moody's economy.com;



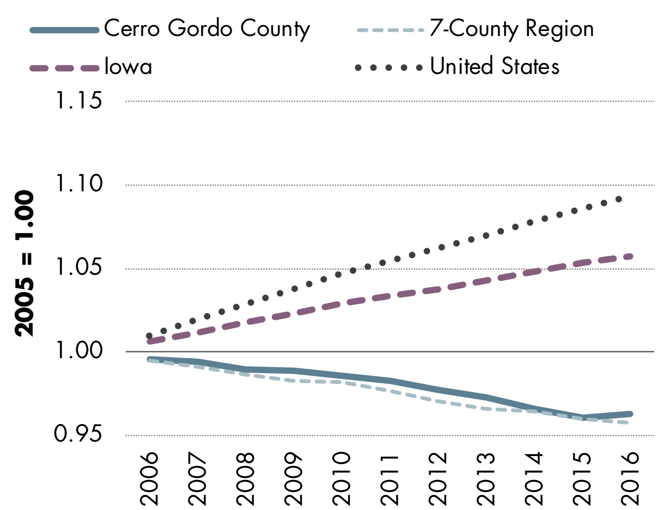


FIGURE 7. POPULATION TRENDS, CERRO GORDO COUNTY
GROWTH SINCE 2006

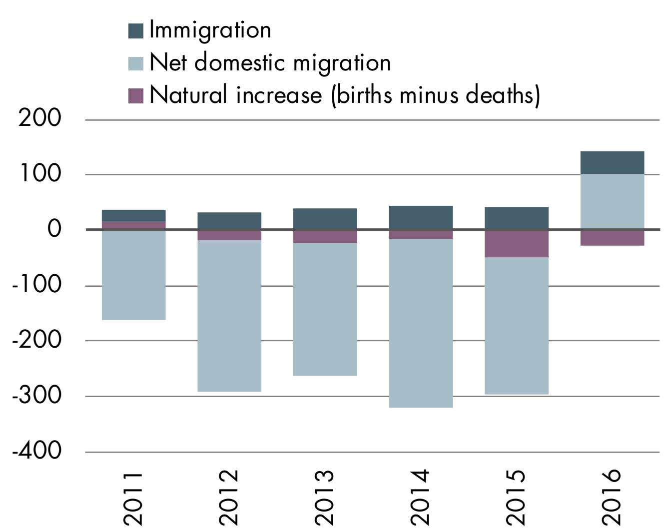
Between 2006 and 2016, the population of the 7-county region declined from 113,200 to 108,900, or 3.8 percent. At the same time, the State of Iowa's population increased by 5 percent and the US population increased by 8 percent.

Source: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates program. Population figures are rounded to the nearest 100. Percentages are rounded to the nearest tenth. Note: via Moody's Analytics.

FIGURE 8. COMPONENTS OF POPULATION CHANGE, CERRO GORDO COUNTY
GROWTH SINCE 2011

From 2011 to 2015, net domestic migration was negative and thus was the largest contributor to the county's population decline. Modest gains were realized in 2016. Natural increase was modestly positive in 2011 but has declined since then. Immigration held fairly constant over the five-year period.

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (history) via Moody's Analytics.



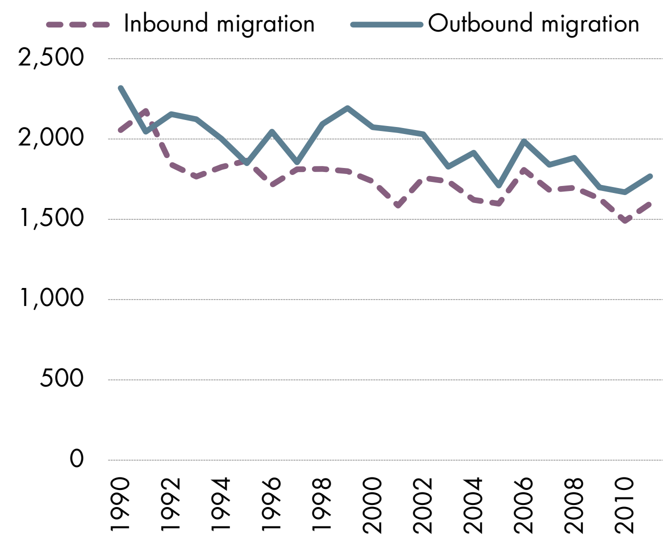


FIGURE 9. INBOUND & OUTBOUND MIGRATION PATTERNS (1990-2010)

Outbound migration has primarily exceeded outbound migration since 1990. One exception occurred in 1992, when inbound migration spiked slightly—the high point for the 20-year period. In the last four years for which data was available, the difference between the inbound and outbound migration was lower than the previous 10 years.

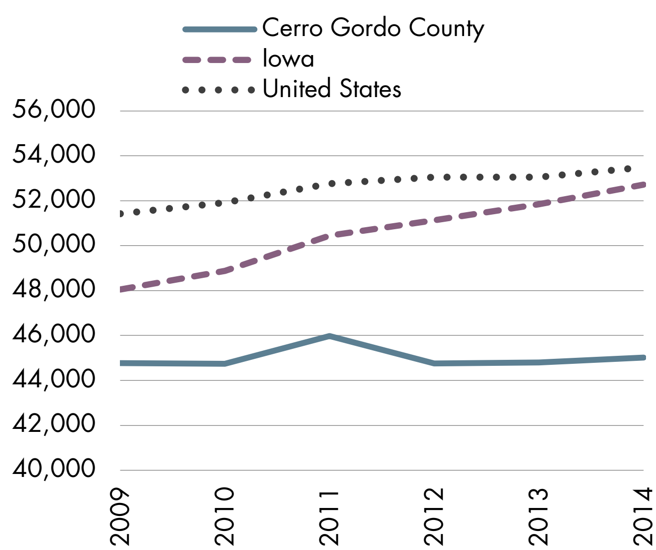
Source: U.S. Internal Revenue Service via Moody's Analytics

FIGURE 10. MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME

As of 2014, Cerro Gordo County's median household income was $45,012, approximately 15 percent less than the state median household income ($52,716) and about 16 percent less than the national median household income ($53,482).

In the last five years, Cerro Gordo County's median household income remained relatively stable. When adjusted for inflation, however, it decreased marginally.

Source: ACS via Moody's Economy.com



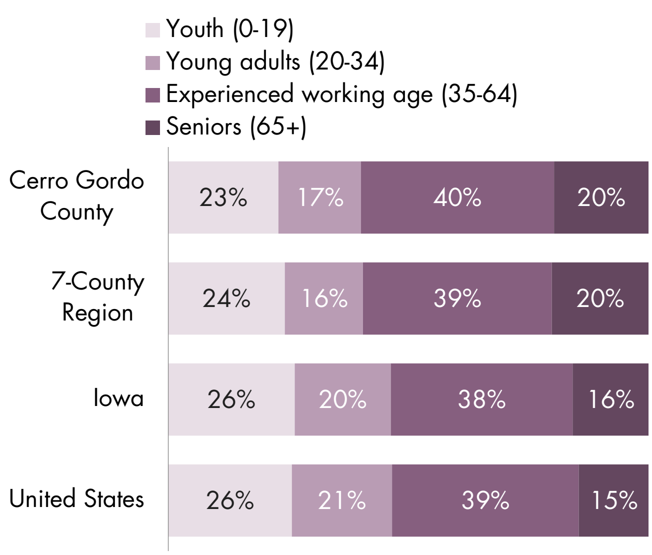


FIGURE 11. AGE DISTRIBUTION

Cerro Gordo County's median age was 42.7 years as of the 2010 census. Estimates for 2015 indicate an increase to 44 years. This is older than both the 2015 state and US median age estimates, at 38.1 years and 37.8 years respectively.

The young adults (20-34) cohort represents a smaller share of the population in the county and the region than at state and national levels, while the senior cohort (65+) is larger. The youth and experienced working age populations are on par with those of the state and nation.

Source: ACS via Moody's Economy.com

FIGURE 12. EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

At the low end of the educational attainment spectrum, the county, region, and state are between 5 percent and 7 percent below the national average. The percentage of county, region, or state residents with a high school diploma or equivalent, or "some college", is greater than the nation. (The "Some college" category includes those who complete certificates or associates degrees as well as students who enter college but do not graduate.) The region falls well below bachelor degree attainment compared to the nation. The county and state are incrementally higher, but fall short of the national average.

Source: ACS via Moody's Economy.com

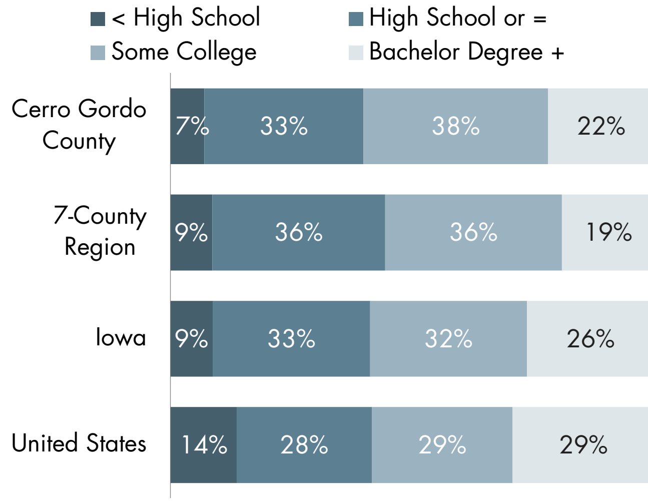
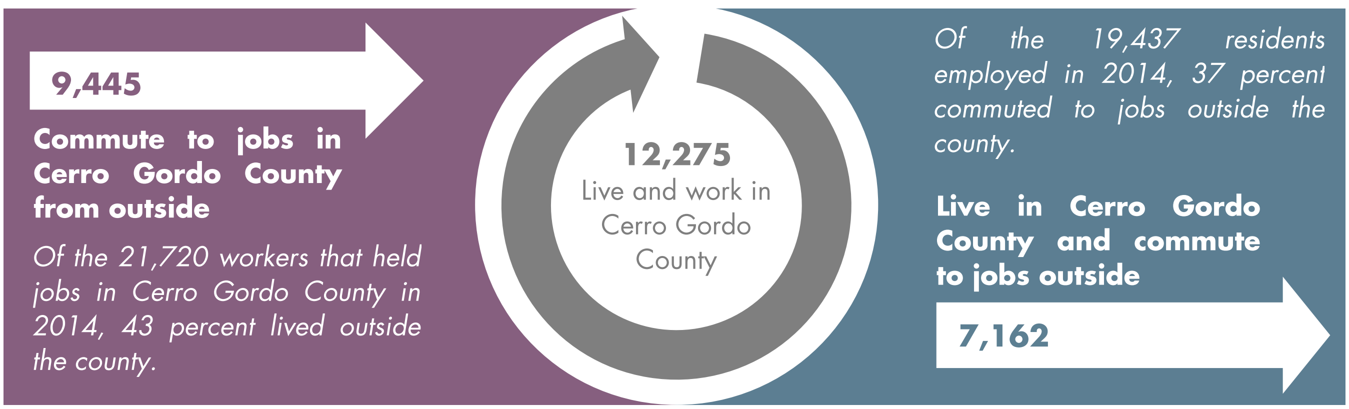


FIGURE 13. COMMUTING PATTERNS

The graphic below illustrates the commuting patterns of Cerro Gordo County workers. Calculations of these figures conclude that the county is a net importer of workers and thus produce a net increase in daytime population of about 2,200. Figure 15 breaks down commuting flows by NAICS industry sector.



Source: US Census Bureau, Local Employment Dynamics.
Note: Overlay arrows are for illustrative purposes and do not indicate directionality of worker flow between home and employment locations.

FIGURE 14. CERRO GORDO COUNTY INDUSTRY CLASS

The share of internal jobholders working in goods producing industries and trade, transportation, and utilities is lower than in the shares of the same industries for inbound and outbound commuters. However, the share of internal jobholders who work in all other services is significantly higher than the other two groups.

Source: US Census Bureau, Local Employment Dynamics.

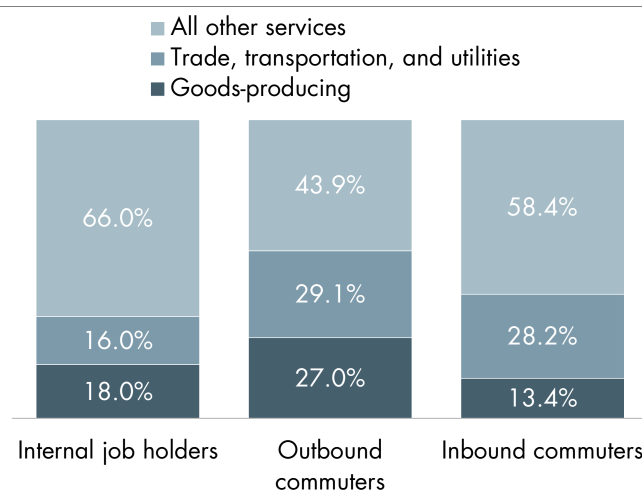
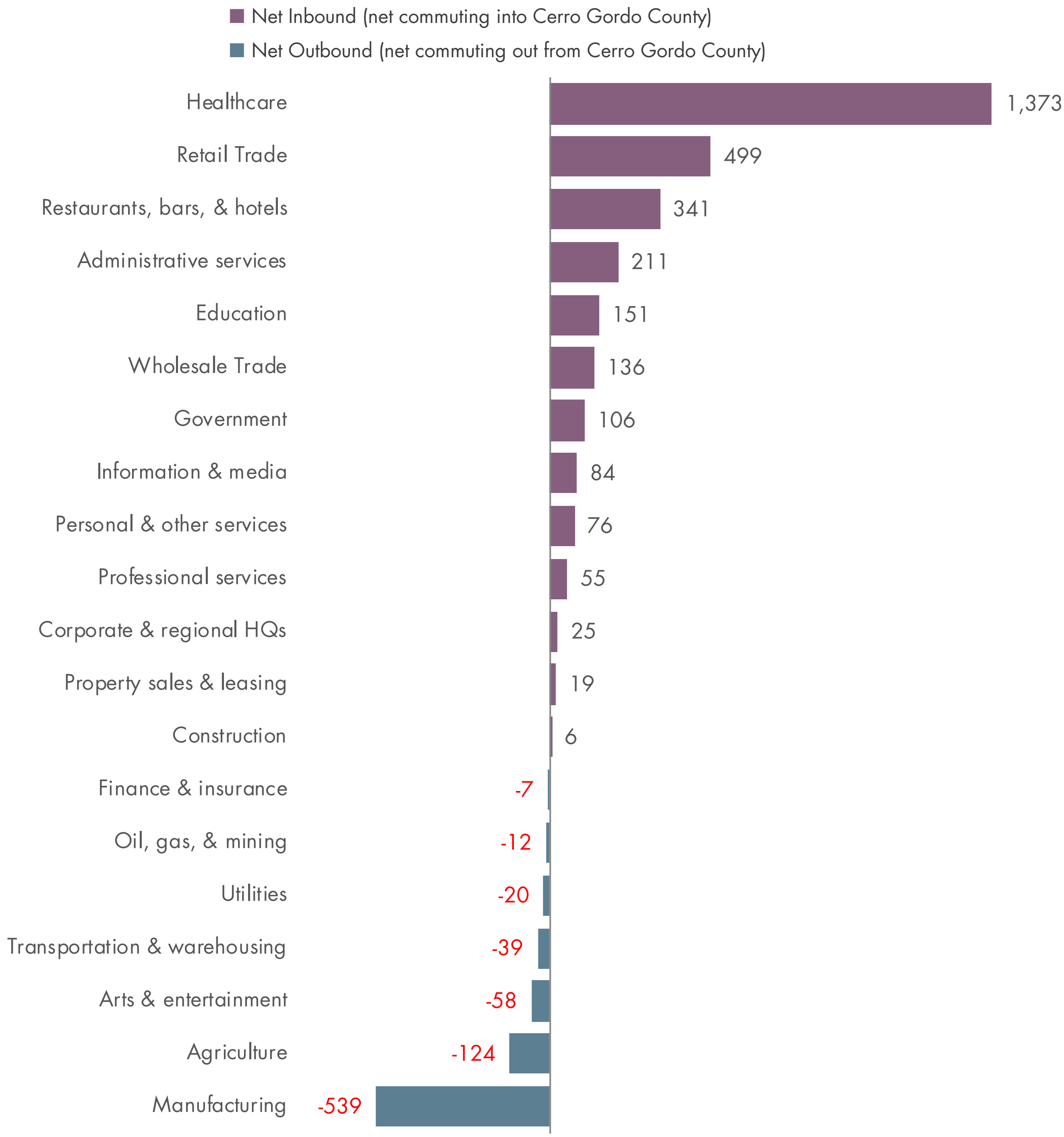


FIGURE 15. NET COMMUTING FLOWS BY NAICS INDUSTRY SECTOR



Source: US Census Bureau, Local Employment Dynamics

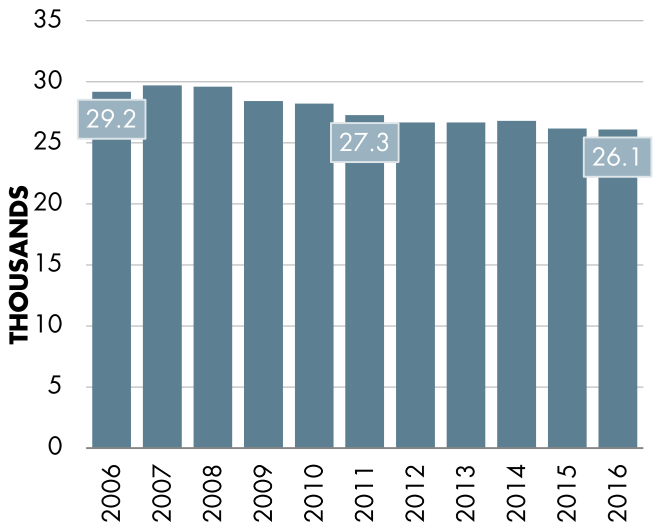


FIGURE 16. CERRO GORDO COUNTY TOTAL EMPLOYMENT (2006-2016)

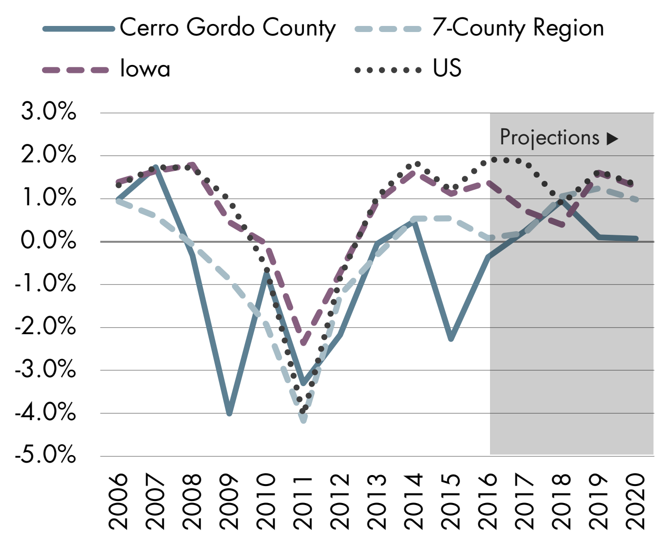
After a brief and modest increase from 2007 to 2008, total employment in Cerro Gordo County declined steadily for the ensuing eight-year period. Between 2006 and 2016, total employment in Cerro Gordo County declined by 3,100 jobs, or 11 percent.

Source: EMSI 2017.1 – QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed

FIGURE 17. EMPLOYMENT CHANGE WITH FIVE-YEAR PROJECTIONS

County and region employment growth has roughly tracked state and US growth through the Great Recession, while the county experienced some sharper declines in employment during 2009 and 2015. Growth is projected to converge between 2018 and 2019 and stabilize thereafter.

Source: EMSI 2017.1 – QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed



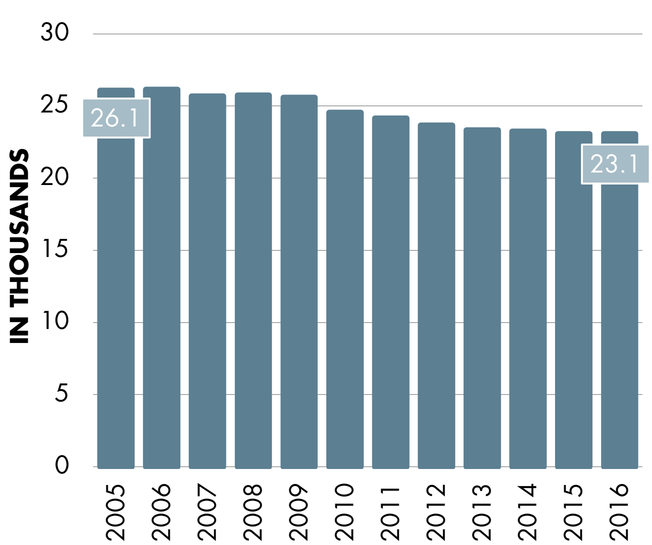


FIGURE 18. CERRO GORDO COUNTY CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE, 2005-2016

As of 2016, Cerro Gordo County had a civilian labor force of 23,100, after experiencing steady declines over the last 10 years. The figure translates to a labor force participation rate of roughly 67 percent, which is higher than the national average of 63.5 percent.

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics via Moody's

FIGURE 19. COMPARATIVE LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES, 2014
CIVILIAN LABOR FORCE, PERCENT OF TOTAL

The labor force participation rate of the county, 7-county region, and state are within just a few of percentage points of each another and several percentage points higher than the national rate.

Source: 2010-14 American Community Survey.

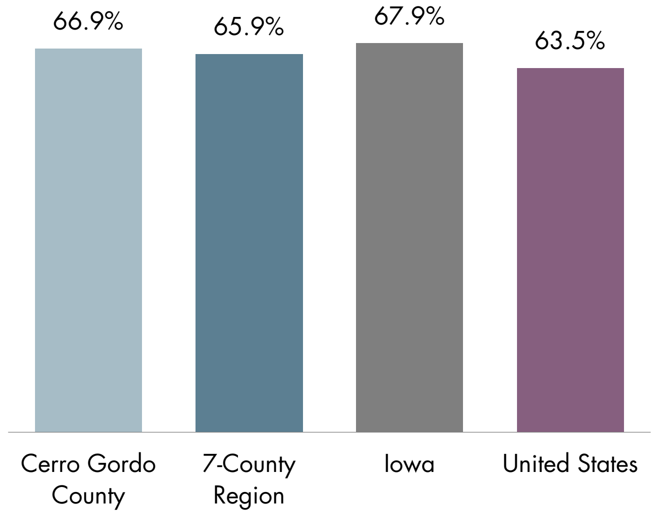
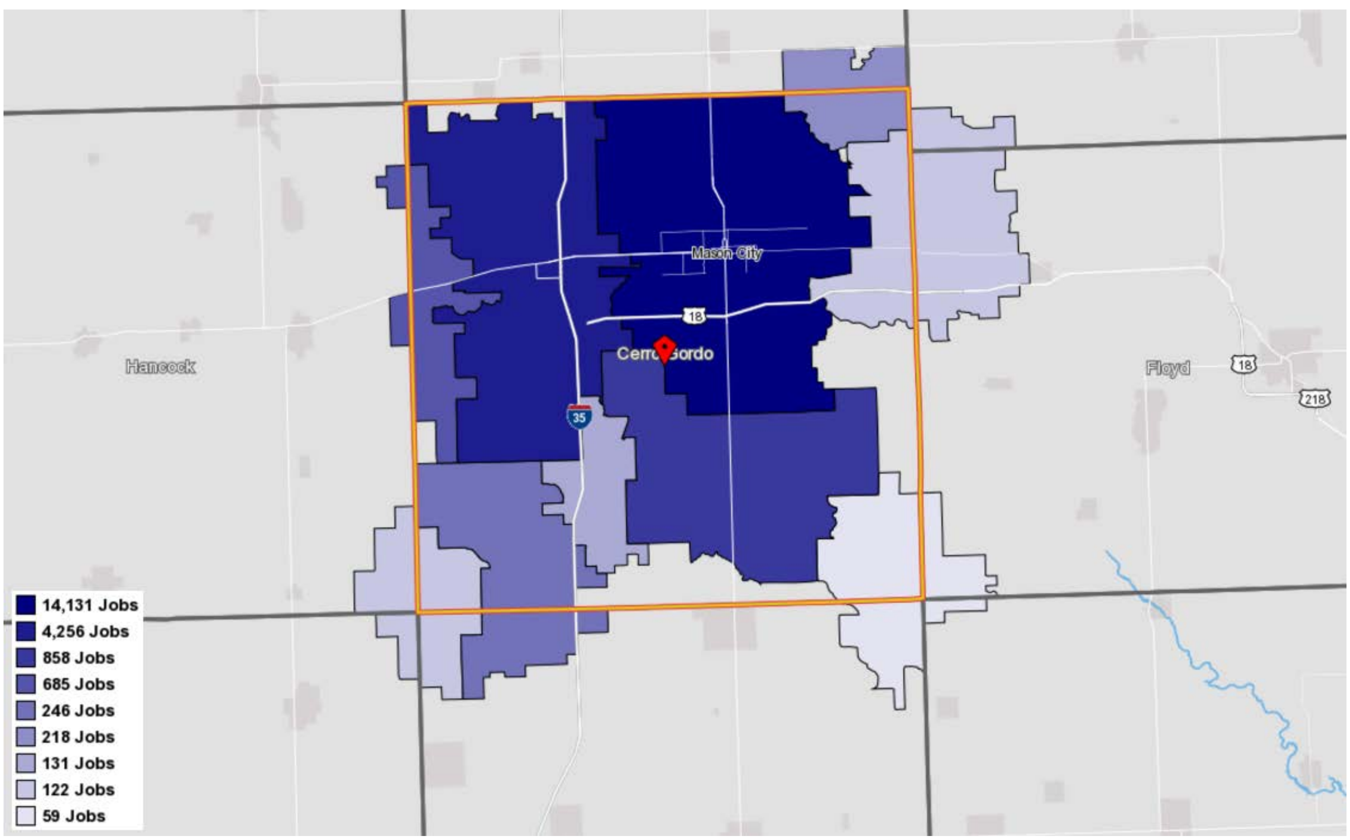


FIGURE 20. CERRO GORDO COUNTY LABORSHED
EMPLOYEES BY ZIP CODE

In 2014, about 78 percent of workers in Cerro Gordo County lived in the 10 ZIP codes shown in the map below. Approximately two-thirds of workers lived in a single zip code, 50401, which encompasses the Mason City area. The second largest share of workers, roughly one-fifth, lived in 50428.

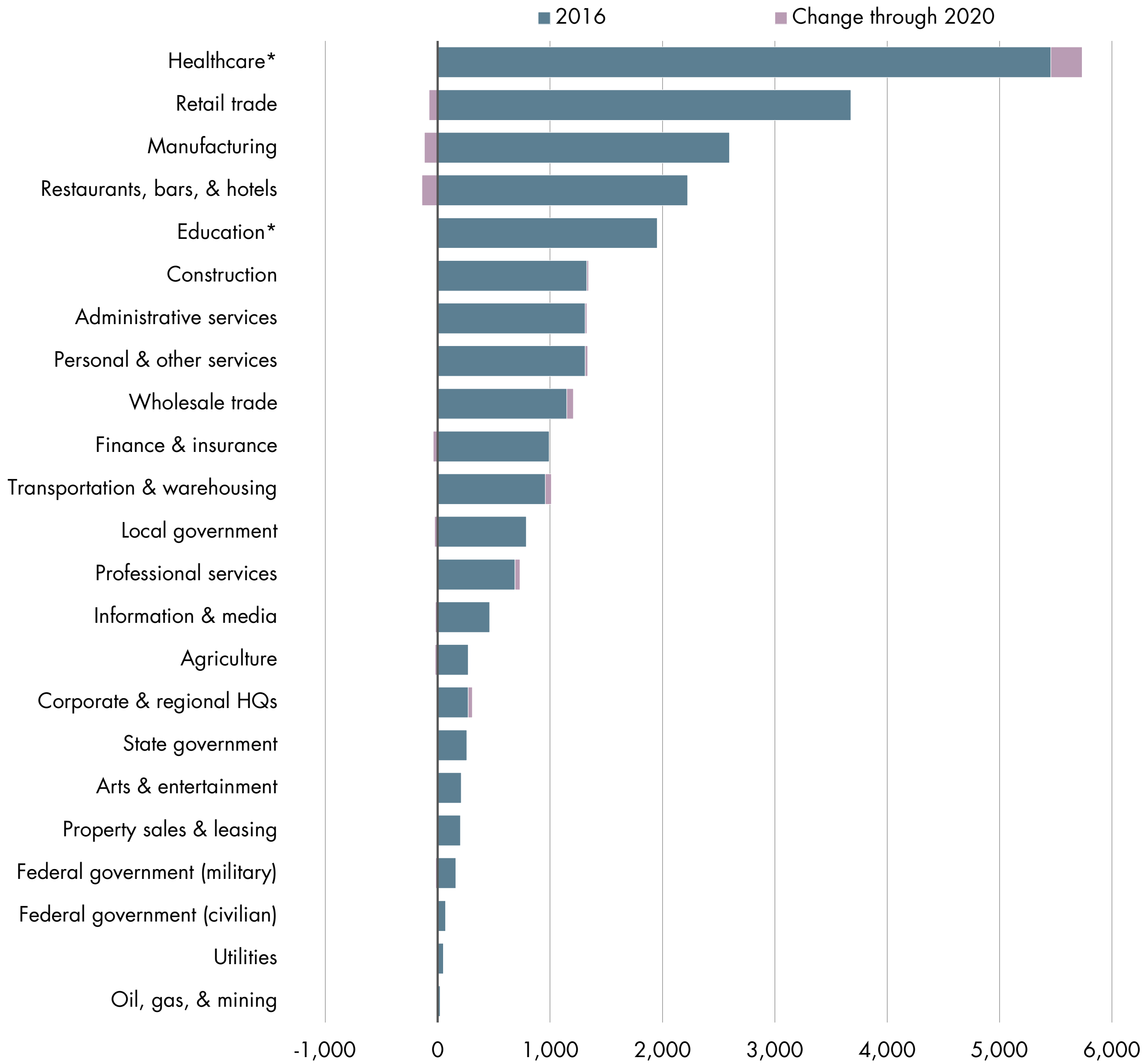


Source: LEHD, On the Map, TIP Strategies Research.
Note: Top 10 ZIP codes (in order) are 50401, 50428, 50469, 50482, 50479, 50464, 50477, 50457, 50458, 50433

ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

FIGURE 21. CERRO GORDO COUNTY TOTAL EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY
JOB BASE 2016 + PROJECTED CHANGE THROUGH 2020

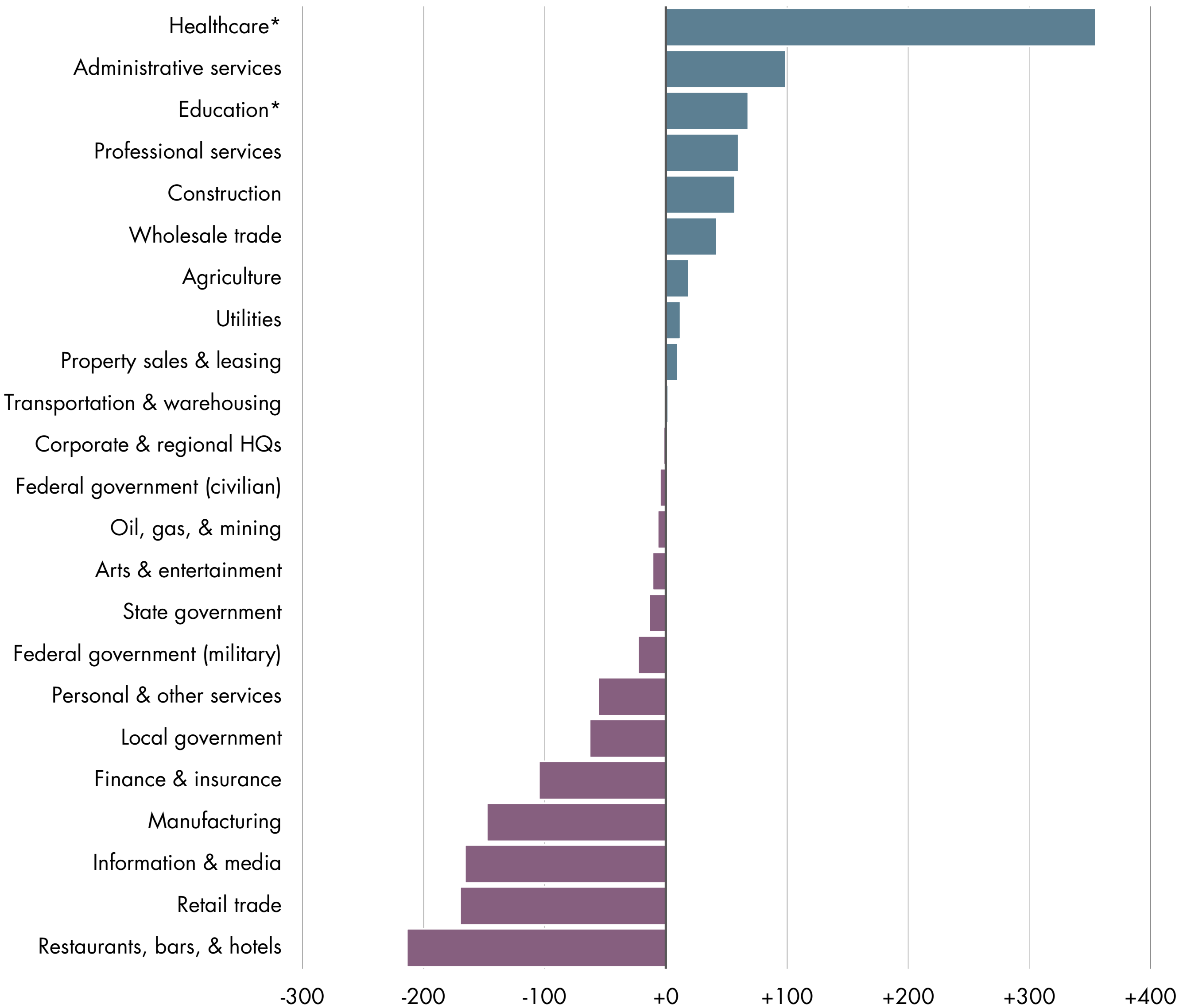
Healthcare holds the largest share of employment in the county. This industry is also projected to see the highest increase in total employment through 2020. While the county remains a regional center for retail, manufacturing, hospitality, and education, employment is projected to decline modestly in retail, manufacturing, and hospitality over the next five years.



Source: EMSI 2017.1 – QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed. Excludes military and unclassified employment.
*Note: Education includes all public schools, colleges, & universities, and healthcare includes all public hospitals.

FIGURE 22. CERRO GORDO COUNTY NET JOB CHANGE BY INDUSTRY (2011-2016)

Healthcare was also the dominant job creator in the county between 2011 and 2016, followed by administrative services**, education, professional services, construction, and wholesale trade. Restaurants, hotels & bars; retail trade; information & media; manufacturing, and finance & insurance saw the largest declines during this period.



Source: EMSI 2017.1 – QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed.
*Note: Education includes all public schools, colleges, & universities (i.e., these jobs are not included with local or state government), and healthcare includes all public hospitals. Excludes military and unclassified employment.
**Industries in the Administrative and Support Services subsector group establishments engaged in activities that support the day-to-day operations of other organizations. The processes employed in this sector (e.g., general management, personnel administration, clerical activities, cleaning activities) are often integral parts of the activities of establishments found in all sectors of the economy. The establishments classified in this subsector have specialization in one or more of these activities and can, therefore, provide services to clients in a variety of industries and, in some cases, to households. The individual industries of this subsector are defined on the basis of the particular process that they are engaged in and the particular services they provide.

FIGURE 23. INDUSTRY DISTRIBUTION (PERCENT OF TOTAL)

COMPARISON OF CERRO GORDO COUNTY WITH THE REGION, STATE, AND NATION

The county's top three industry sectors account for about half of the total employment base. Healthcare and retail account for a greater share of the county's employment base than they do in the region, state, and nation. Cerro Gordo's manufacturing sector accounts for a smaller share than in the region and state but accounts for a slightly larger share than in the nation.

NAICS Code & Description		Cerro Gordo County	7-County Region	Iowa	US
62	Healthcare & social assistance*	**20.8%**	**15.6%**	**13.3%**	**13.3%**
44-45	Retail trade	**14.0%**	**10.9%**	**10.9%**	**10.6%**
31-33	Manufacturing	**9.9%**	**18.1%**	**12.6%**	8.1%
72	Lodging, restaurants, & bars	8.5%	5.9%	7.2%	8.6%
61	Education*	7.4%	7.7%	10.4%	**9.3%**
23	Construction	5.1%	5.3%	5.9%	5.4%
56	Administrative & support services	5.0%	3.3%	4.4%	6.3%
81	Personal & other services	5.0%	5.7%	4.7%	4.9%
42	Wholesale trade	4.4%	4.3%	4.0%	3.9%
52	Finance & insurance	3.8%	3.3%	5.6%	3.9%
48-49	Transportation & warehousing	3.3%	3.3%	3.8%	3.5%
9039	Local govt.	3.0%	3.7%	3.2%	3.6%
54	Professional services	2.6%	2.0%	3.3%	6.5%
51	Information	1.8%	1.3%	1.4%	1.9%
11	Agriculture & forestry	1.0%	4.5%	3.2%	1.3%
55	Corporate & regional offices	1.0%	1.1%	1.1%	1.4%
9029	State govt.	1.0%	0.6%	1.1%	1.5%
71	Arts, entertainment, & recreation	0.8%	1.6%	1.3%	1.7%
53	Property sales & leasing	0.8%	0.5%	1.0%	1.7%
9011	Federal govt. (civilian)	0.6%	0.7%	1.0%	1.8%
22	Utilities	0.2%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
21	Mining (incl. oil & gas)	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.4%

Source: EMSI 2017.1 – QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed
*Note: Education includes all public schools, colleges, & universities, and healthcare includes all public hospitals. Excludes military and unclassified employment. Three largest industries are highlighted.

FIGURE 24. INDUSTRY CONCENTRATION (LQ)

COMPARISON OF CERRO GORDO COUNTY WITH THE REGION, STATE, AND NATION

Cerro Gordo County has a higher-than-average concentration of employment in healthcare and retail employment relative to the nation. The county also shows strengths in manufacturing, as evidenced by its LQ of 1.23. However, Cerro Gordo's employment levels in the sector lag that of the 7-county region and the state, with LQs of 2.25 and 1.57, respectively. In addition to its high manufacturing LQ, the region has concentrations of employment in agriculture & forestry related employment (LQ= 3.64) and utilities (LQ = 1.21). Neither the county nor the region match the state's concentration in finance & insurance employment, illustrated by an LQ of 1.43 for the sector.

NAICS Code & Description		Cerro Gordo County	7-County Region	Iowa	US
62	Healthcare & social assistance*	**1.56**	1.17	1.00	1.00
44-45	Retail trade	**1.34**	1.04	1.04	1.00
31-33	Manufacturing	**1.23**	**2.25**	**1.57**	1.00
42	Wholesale trade	1.14	1.10	1.04	1.00
81	Personal & other services	1.03	1.18	0.98	1.00
72	Lodging, restaurants, & bars	0.99	0.69	0.84	1.00
52	Finance & insurance	0.97	0.85	**1.43**	1.00
48-49	Transportation & warehousing	0.97	0.96	1.10	1.00
23	Construction	0.94	0.99	1.09	1.00
51	Information	0.94	0.71	0.75	1.00
9039	Local govt.	0.84	1.04	0.89	1.00
11	Agriculture & forestry	0.83	**3.64**	**2.56**	1.00
56	Administrative & support services	0.80	0.52	0.70	1.00
61	Education*	0.80	0.83	1.11	1.00
55	Corporate & regional offices	0.73	0.75	0.79	1.00
9029	State govt.	0.68	0.40	0.76	1.00
22	Utilities	0.54	**1.21**	1.06	1.00
53	Property sales & leasing	0.47	0.33	0.58	1.00
71	Arts, entertainment, & recreation	0.47	0.92	0.75	1.00
54	Professional services	0.41	0.31	0.52	1.00
9011	Federal govt. (civilian)	0.33	0.36	0.56	1.00
21	Mining (incl. oil & gas)	0.18	0.39	0.29	1.00

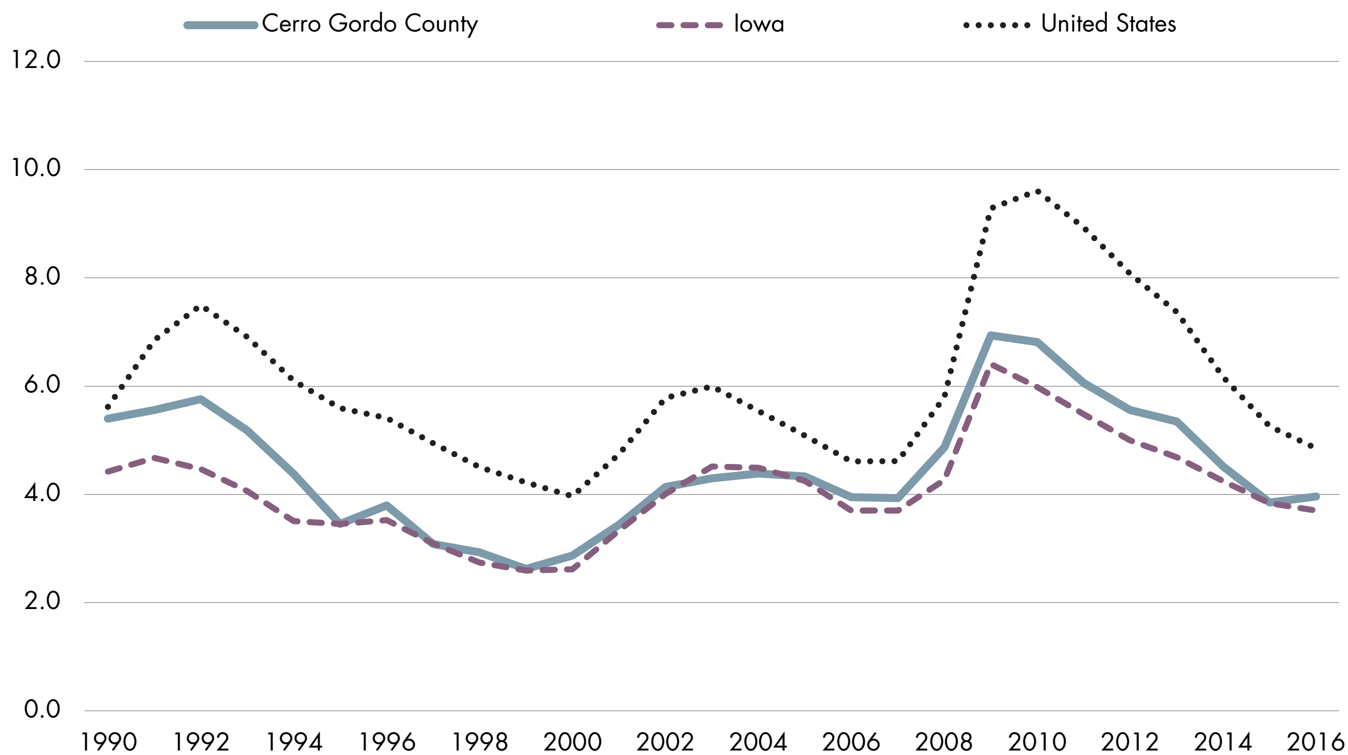
Source: EMSI 2017.1 – QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed

*Notes: Education includes all public schools, colleges, & universities, and healthcare includes all public hospitals. Excludes military and unclassified employment. LQs greater than 1.2 are presumed to show competitive advantage and are highlighted.

LOCATION QUOTIENT (LQ) ANALYSIS is a statistical technique used to suggest areas of relative advantage based on a region's employment base. LQs are calculated as an industry's share of total local employment divided by the same industry's share of employment at the national level. If the local industry and national industry are perfectly proportional, the LQ will be 1.00. LQs greater than 1.2 are presumed to indicate a comparative advantage; those below 0.75 suggest areas of weakness but also point to opportunities for expansion or attraction.

FIGURE 25. UNEMPLOYMENT
ANNUAL RATE COMPARISON

As of December 2016, Cerro Gordo County's unemployment rate was 4 percent. This was marginally higher than the state unemployment rate of 3.7 percent and lower than the national rate of 4.9 percent. The chart to the right shows the county's unemployment rate in comparison to the state and nation over the last quarter century. The county's unemployment rate has largely been on par with the state rate but lower than the national rate.



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (state and local), Current Population Survey (national)

FIGURE 26. ANNUAL UNEMPLOYMENT RATES
25-YEAR RANGE

The chart to the right shows a comparison of county, state, and national unemployment rates with historical ranges of fluctuation (represented by the vertical line) over the last 25 years.

Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Local Area Unemployment Statistics (state and local), Current Population Survey (national)

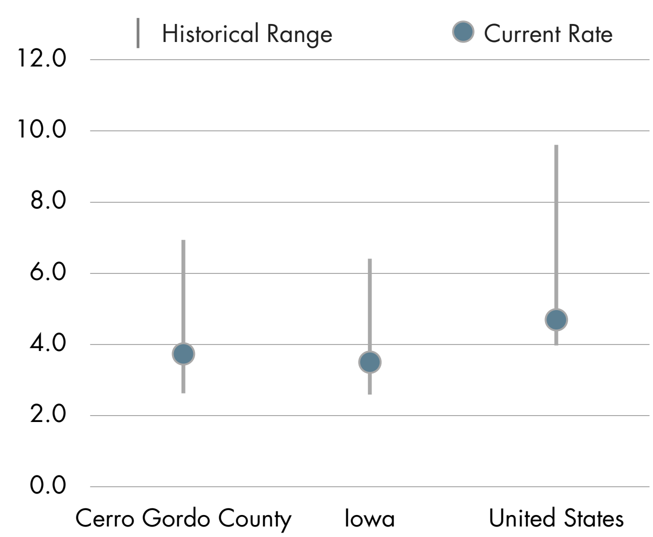


FIGURE 27. OCCUPATIONAL DISTRIBUTION (PERCENT OF TOTAL)

COMPARISON OF CERRO GORDO COUNTY WITH THE REGION, STATE, AND US

Office and administrative support is the largest occupational group in Cerro Gordo County. Combined with sales-related jobs and food preparation and serving workers, the three occupational groups account for more than one-third of the county's total employment (34 percent). By comparison, these three groups account for a slightly smaller share of employment in the region (29 percent) and the state (31 percent). As noted previously, the county, region, and state have above–average levels of employment in manufacturing industries, suggesting an area of specialization. This specialization can also be seen when looking at employment by occupation. At the regional level, nearly one in eight workers are employed in production occupations (12.9 percent), while at the national level this figure is closer to one in 17.

SOC Code & Description		Cerro Gordo County	7-County Region	Iowa	US
43	Office & Administrative Support	**13.7%**	**12.4%**	**14.1%**	**15.2%**
41	Sales & Related	**11.1%**	**9.1%**	**9.2%**	**10.2%**
35	Food Preparation & Serving Related	**9.5%**	7.6%	7.8%	**8.4%**
51	Production	8.0%	**12.9%**	**9.1%**	6.0%
53	Transportation & Material Moving	7.9%	7.6%	7.7%	6.6%
29	Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	7.2%	5.1%	5.0%	5.5%
11	Management	5.2%	6.9%	7.2%	5.5%
39	Personal Care & Service	5.1%	5.0%	4.3%	4.1%
25	Education, Training, & Library	4.9%	5.3%	5.9%	5.8%
47	Construction & Extraction	4.5%	4.9%	4.9%	4.5%
31	Healthcare Support	4.2%	3.5%	2.8%	2.8%
49	Installation, Maintenance, & Repair	3.8%	4.7%	4.4%	3.8%
37	Building/Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	3.7%	3.4%	3.5%	3.8%
13	Business & Financial Operations	3.0%	2.8%	4.1%	5.1%
21	Community & Social Service	2.6%	1.9%	1.6%	1.6%
27	Arts, Design, Entertainment, & Media	1.3%	1.2%	1.5%	1.8%
15	Computer & Mathematical	1.2%	1.0%	2.0%	2.8%
33	Protective Service	0.9%	1.0%	1.4%	2.3%
17	Architecture & Engineering	0.7%	0.9%	1.2%	1.7%
45	Farming, Fishing, & Forestry	0.6%	2.0%	1.2%	0.8%
19	Life, Physical, & Social Science	0.5%	0.7%	0.7%	0.8%
23	Legal	0.2%	0.3%	0.5%	0.8%

Source: 2017.1 – QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed
Note: Excludes military and unclassified employment. Distribution table: Three largest occupations are highlighted.

FIGURE 28. OCCUPATIONAL CONCENTRATION (LQ)
COMPARISON OF CERRO GORDO COUNTY WITH THE REGION, STATE, AND US

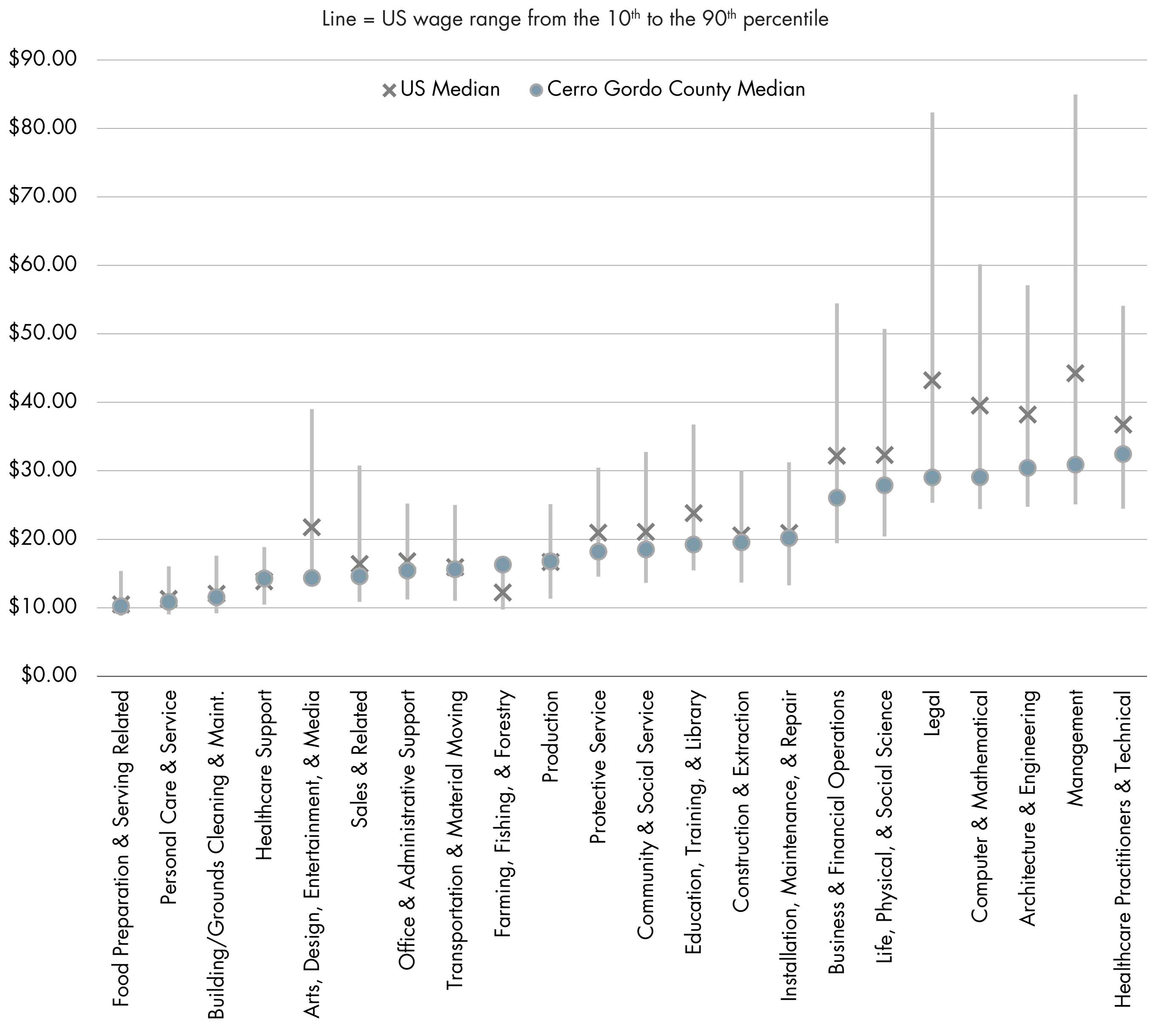
The county has a higher concentration of community & social service, healthcare support, production, and healthcare practitioners & technical occupations than the region, state, and nation. Occupations that are less concentrated relative to the nation include management (0.94) and farming, fishing, & forestry (0.73).

SOC Code & Description		Cerro Gordo County	7-County Region	Iowa	US
21	Community & Social Service	**1.57**	1.18	1.00	1.00
31	Healthcare Support	**1.52**	**1.26**	0.99	1.00
51	Production	**1.34**	**2.13**	**1.50**	1.00
29	Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	**1.32**	0.94	0.92	1.00
39	Personal Care & Service	**1.23**	**1.21**	1.05	1.00
53	Transportation & Material Moving	**1.20**	1.15	1.16	1.00
35	Food Preparation & Serving Related	1.13	0.90	0.92	1.00
41	Sales & Related	1.09	0.89	0.90	1.00
47	Construction & Extraction	1.01	1.08	1.08	1.00
49	Installation, Maintenance, & Repair	0.98	**1.21**	1.13	1.00
37	Building/Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	0.97	0.90	0.93	1.00
11	Management	0.94	**1.26**	**1.31**	1.00
43	Office & Administrative Support	0.90	0.81	0.92	1.00
25	Education, Training, & Library	0.86	0.91	1.02	1.00
45	Farming, Fishing, & Forestry	0.73	**2.53**	**1.55**	1.00
27	Arts, Design, Entertainment, & Media	0.73	0.65	0.80	1.00
19	Life, Physical, & Social Science	0.66	0.83	0.87	1.00
13	Business & Financial Operations	0.59	0.55	0.82	1.00
17	Architecture & Engineering	0.44	0.55	0.70	1.00
15	Computer & Mathematical	0.43	0.35	0.71	1.00
33	Protective Service	0.41	0.43	0.63	1.00
23	Legal	0.28	0.31	0.60	1.00

Source: EMSI 2017.1 – QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed
Note: Excludes military and unclassified employment. Distribution table: Three largest occupations are highlighted. LQ table: LQs greater than 1.2 are presumed to show competitive advantage and are highlighted.

FIGURE 29. CERRO GORDO COUNTY WAGES IN THE CONTEXT OF US WAGE RATES
BY MAJOR OCCUPATIONAL GROUP, 2015

Among the 22 major occupational groups shown below, Cerro Gordo County's median hourly wage rates are on par with US rates in 8 occupational groups, but fall below the US in the remaining 13. Farming, fishing, & forestry is the only occupational group with higher median wages than the US in 2015.



Source: 2017.1 – QCEW Employees, Non-QCEW Employees, and Self-Employed

COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

As a part of the economic assessment, TIP provided statistical comparisons between the North Iowa region and several similarly situated benchmark regions nearby and around the nation. State and US data was also included in these comparisons. The regions were chosen based on TIP research, stakeholder feedback, and responses from community surveys. They include Belknap County, NH (Laconia, NH); Carter County, OK (Ardmore, OK); Dubuque County, IA (Dubuque, IA); Mower County, MN (Austin, MN); and Webster County, IA (Fort Dodge, IA). Below are rationales for the two peers chosen outside of the Mid-West region.

BELKNAP COUNTY, NH (LARGEST CITY: LACONIA, NH):

Similarities:

- Tourist area with a small city and a major lake (Lake Winnipesaukee)
- Two-hour drive time from Boston and Portland
- Similar micropolitan population size to North Iowa
- Includes an interstate highway
- Similar racial/ethnic composition

Differences:

- More of a recreational economy than agricultural
- No architectural legacies

CARTER COUNTY, OK (LARGEST CITY: ARDMORE, OK):

Similarities:

- Midway between the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex (2 hours) and Oklahoma City (2 hours)
- Along the same interstate that runs through North Iowa
- Agricultural region
- Micropolitan population size is similar to North Iowa
- Touristy lake area nearby (Lake Murray)

Differences:

- Growing population (different dynamic than North Iowa)
- No architectural legacy to draw upon

FIGURE 30. TOTAL POPULATION, 2010 AND 2016
WITH MEDIAN AGE (2015)

Cerro Gordo County experienced a sharper decline in total population than its peer communities, the state, and the US between 2010 and 2016, as shown in the chart below. Webster County, the closest community geographically to Cerro Gordo County, experienced a similar decline during the same period. The median age of Cerro Gordo's population was higher than the US, the state, and all the peer communities except Belknap County.

Geography	2010	2016	2010 to 2016 Net Chg.	2010 to 2016 % Chg.	Median Age (2015)
United States	309,348,193	323,127,513	+13,779,320	+4.5%	37.7
Dubuque County (IA)	93,926	97,003	+3,077	+3.3%	38.8
Iowa	3,050,738	3,134,693	+83,955	+2.8%	38.1
Carter County (OK)	47,791	48,556	+765	+1.6%	38.6
Belknap County (NH)	60,100	60,779	+679	+1.1%	46.1
Mower County (MN)	39,188	39,163	-25	-0.1%	39.0
Cerro Gordo, IA	44,116	43,070	**-1,046**	-2.4%	**44.2**
Webster County (IA)	37,876	36,769	-1,107	**-2.9%**	39.7

Source: US Census Bureau, Population Estimates Program (population); ACS 5-year estimates (median age) accessed via Moody's Analytics

FIGURE 31. RESIDENTIAL BUILDING PERMITS 2016
TOTAL UNITS PERMITTED, SEASONALLY ADJUSTED ANNUAL ESTIMATES

Residential development was not as brisk as the rest of the state and US in 2016. However, significantly more building activity occurred in Cerro Gordo County compared to its closest neighbor, Webster County. Cerro Gordo's construction was on part with neighboring Mower County, MN.

Geography	Total Units 2016	Population 2016 (in thousands)	Total Units Permitted per 1,000 Residents
Iowa	14,317	3,135	4.6
Dubuque County (IA)	368	97	3.8
United States	1,206,642	323,128	3.7
Belknap County (NH)	198	61	3.3
Carter County (OK)	70	49	1.4
Mower County (MN)	39	39	1.0
Cerro Gordo, IA	**38**	**43**	**0.9**
Webster County (IA)	18	37	0.5

Source: Moody's Analytics seasonally adjusted annual estimates based on monthly permit data collected by the US Census Bureau.

FIGURE 32. HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

HOME VALUE TO INCOME RATIO

Cerro Gordo County falls in the middle of the pack in terms of housing affordability. The county has significantly lower housing costs compared to the US, but slightly more expensive housing than the state and two neighboring peer counties (Mower and Webster).

Geography	Median Home Values* (2015)	Median Household Income (2015)	Housing Affordability**
Belknap County, NH	$219,600	$62,159	3.53
United States	$194,500	$55,775	3.49
Dubuque County, IA	$149,400	$54,605	2.74
Cerro Gordo, IA	**$115,200**	**$46,122**	**2.50**
Iowa	$129,200	$53,183	2.43
Mower County, MN	$111,700	$49,427	2.26
Carter County, OK	$97,000	$44,531	2.18
Webster County, IA	$85,900	$42,408	2.03

Source: 2015 American Community Survey 5 year estimates accessed via Moody's Analytics
Notes: *Owner-occupied units. **Housing affordability: Home value/income ratio (Lower = more affordable)

FIGURE 33. LABOR FORCE AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATES, 2010 TO 2016

LABOR FORCE IN THOUSANDS

Between 2010 and 2016, Cerro Gordo County experienced a more significant decline (5.6%) in labor force than its peers, the state, and the nation. It had a lower unemployment rate than Carter County and was close to par with Webster County. It had a higher unemployment rate than the remaining three peer communities.

			2010 to 2016		Unemp. Rate
Geography	2010	2016	Net Chg.	% Chg.	(As of Nov 2016)
Carter County (OK)	21.2	22.6	+1.4	+6.5%	5.4
United States	153,885.3	159,186.4	+5,301.2	+3.4%	5.3
Webster County (IA)	20.1	20.7	+0.6	+2.8%	4.1
Dubuque County (IA)	54.2	55.0	+0.8	+1.4%	3.4
Iowa	1,676.9	1,699.3	+22.4	+1.3%	3.8
Mower County (MN)	20.9	20.4	-0.4	-2.0%	3.2
Belknap County (NH)	32.3	31.4	-0.9	-2.7%	2.6
Cerro Gordo,IA	**24.5**	**23.2**	-1.4	-5.6%	**4.0**

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics accessed via Moody's Analytics

FIGURE 34. TOTAL EMPLOYMENT, 2006 TO 2015

ALL DATA EXCEPT FOR PERCENTAGES AND AVG ANNUAL PAY IN THOUSANDS

Among the peer communities, the state, and the US, Cerro Gordo County saw the only decline in total employment between 2010 and 2015. Similarly, Mower County only experienced a modest increase during the same period. The two other Iowa communities and the state as a whole saw a significant increase in total employment. Cerro Gordo County had the second lowest average annual pay after Webster County, IA.

Geography	2010	2015	2010 to 2015 Net Chg.	2010 to 2015 % Chg.	Average Annual Pay
Carter County, OK	22	24	+2	+10.6%	$41,210.00
United States	1,278,204	+1,394,917	+116,713	+9.1%	$52,876.00
Dubuque County, IA	54	58	+4	+8.3%	$42,570.00
Webster County, IA	18	19	+1	+7.0%	$42,200.00
Iowa	14,363	15,302	+939	+6.5%	$43,530.00
Belknap County, NH	25	26	+1	+2.6%	$40,260.00
Mower County, MN	16	+16	+0	+1.3%	$47,490.00
Cerro Gordo, IA	**24**	**24**	**-0**	**-1.4%**	**$40,350.00**

Source: Household Survey (CPS)-Employment and QCEW -annual wages via Moody's Analytics