

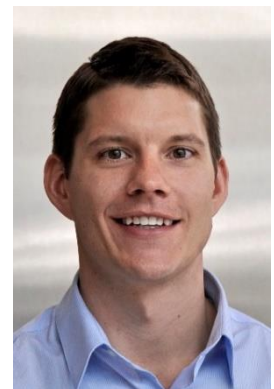
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT REGION 6E: Southwest Central

Covers counties:
Kandiyohi, McLeod, Meeker, and Renville

2024 REGIONAL PROFILE

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DEMOGRAPHICS

POPULATION CHANGE

Economic Development Region 6E – Southwest Central includes a total of 4 counties, and is located in the Central Minnesota planning region. Region 6E was home to 118,436 people in 2023, comprising 2% of the state’s total population. The region saw a small population decrease since 2020, making it the ninth largest of the 13 economic development regions (EDRs) in total population, and the tenth fastest growing. In comparison, the state of Minnesota saw a 0.6% gain from 2020 to 2023 (Table 1).

	2020 Population	2023 Estimates	2020-2023 Change	
			Number	Percent
Region 6E	118,626	118,436	-190	-0.2%
Kandiyohi Co.	43,732	43,813	+81	+0.2%
McLeod Co.	36,771	36,785	+14	+0.0%
Meeker Co.	23,400	23,490	+90	+0.4%
Renville Co.	14,723	14,348	-375	-2.5%
Minnesota	5,706,494	5,737,915	+31,421	+0.6%

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

Anchored by the regional center of Willmar, Kandiyohi County is the 23rd largest county (of 87) in the state, with just over 43,813 people in 2023, after gaining almost 100 people since 2020. After gaining 14 people this decade, McLeod County had just over 36,700 people, making it the 30th largest county. Meeker County is the 43rd largest county and saw a gain of 90 people since 2020, making it the fastest growing county in the region. Renville was the smallest county in the region and the 57th largest in the state, and it lost 375 people this decade, making it the 6th fastest declining county in the state.

COMPONENTS OF POPULATION CHANGE

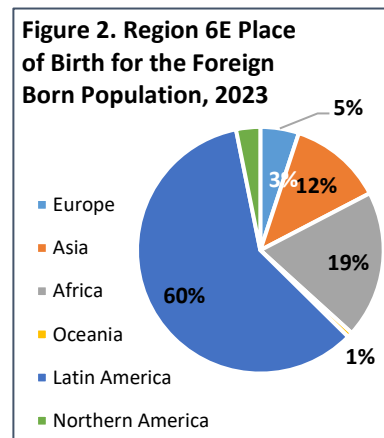
As the population continues aging, Region 6E experienced a natural decrease – more deaths than births – so far this decade, and the region also lost population due to out-migration, with 159 more people moving out of the region than moving in. However, the region did benefit from international immigration (Table 2).

	Total Change	Natural Increase	Vital Events		Net Migration		
			Births	Deaths	Total	Inter-national	Domestic
Region 6E	-189	-73	4,221	4,294	-159	+636	-795
Minnesota	+31,111	+40,368	207,857	167,489	-11,352	+34,624	-45,976

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

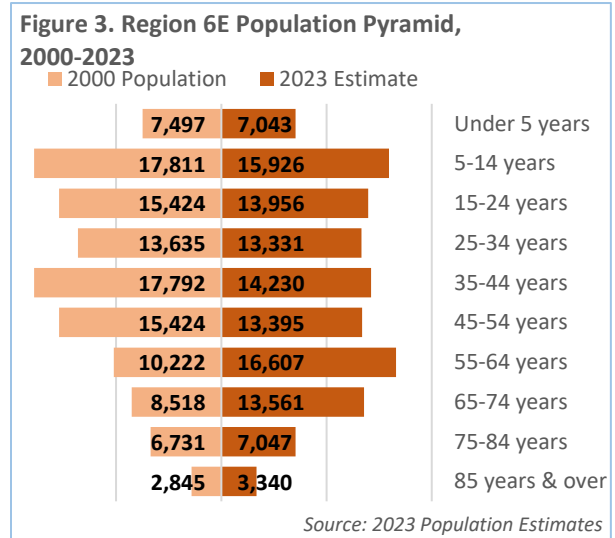
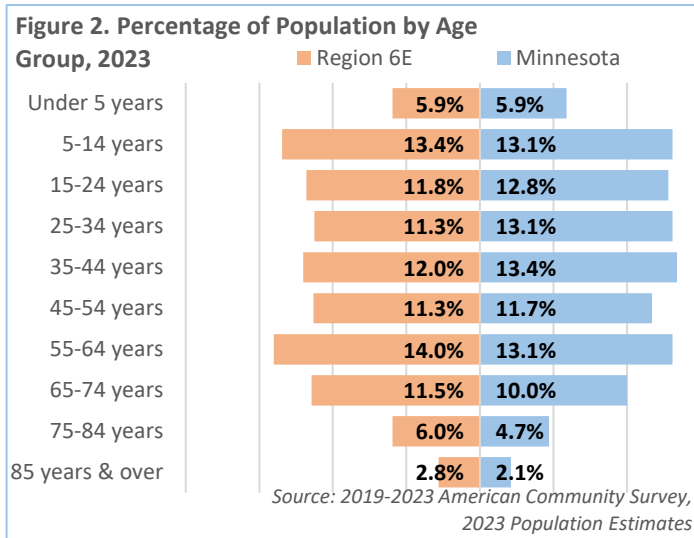
Region 6E is now home to 6,308 foreign born residents, or about 5.3% of the total population. The number of immigrants in the region jumped by 50% since 2013, faster than the statewide growth rate of 25%. Over half (3,949 people) of these immigrants were from Latin America, while the second largest number were from Africa, accounting for 19% of the region’s immigrants, and the fastest growth came from Africa, with 1,221 additional immigrants from 2013 to 2023.

Based on year of entry, Region 6E’s foreign born population was “younger” than the rest of the state. About 30% of the region’s immigrants entered the U.S. prior to 1990 and another 23% entered between 2000 and 2009, compared to 38 and 28% statewide, respectively. The remaining 48% of immigrants in the region settled in the region since 2010, compared to 35% statewide. Foreign-born residents are less likely to be young and old compared to the native-born population, with 21% being between 35 and 44 years of age, compared to 12% of the total population. However, there are some concerns for immigrants, as roughly 41% of foreign-born adults aged 25 years and over have not attained a high school diploma or GED compared to just 8% for the overall population, and 15% had a bachelor’s degree or more compared to 22% for the domestic population.



POPULATION BY AGE GROUP

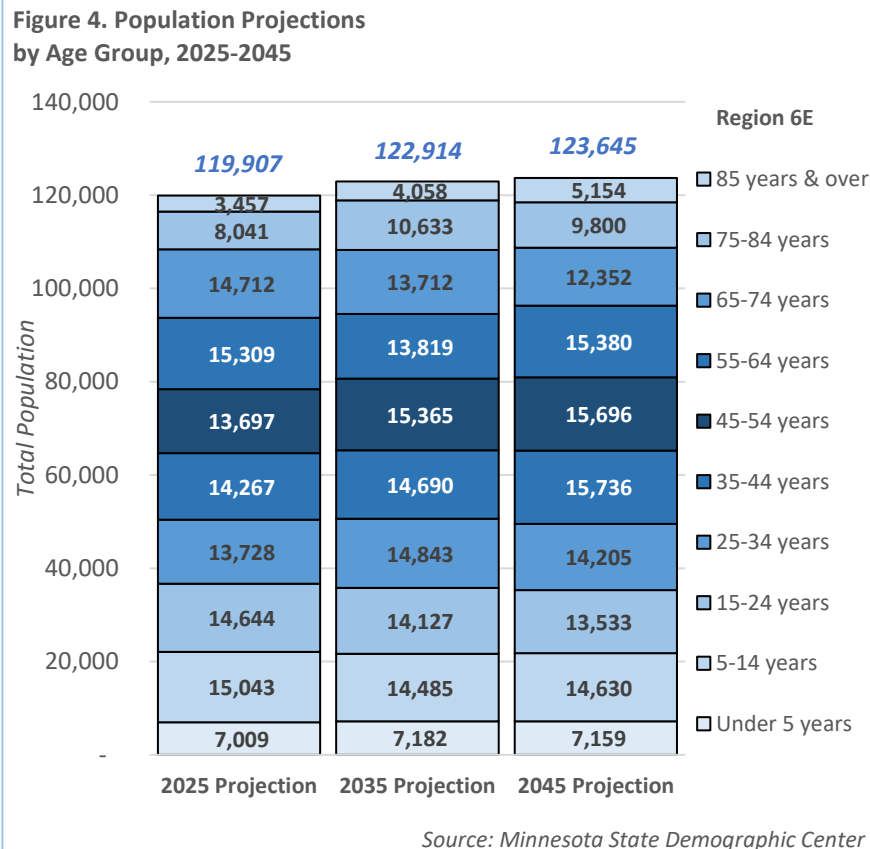
Region 6E has an older population than the state – 20% of the region’s population was 65 years or older, compared to 17% statewide, but 19% of the population was also under 15 years, the same as the state. In contrast, Region 6E had a smaller percentage of people in the 25-to-54-year age group - typically considered the “prime working years” - than the state. A large portion of the area’s population is a part of the Baby Boom generation, which is creating a significant shift in regional demographics over time. Between 2000 and 2023, over 5,800 more residents were in the 65 years or older groups (Figure 2 and Figure 3).



POPULATION PROJECTIONS BY AGE GROUP

After steady gains the previous five decades (from 1970 to 2020), Region 6E is projected to continue growing after the small setback the past few years. According to population projections from the [Minnesota State Demographic Center](#), Region 6E is expected to gain 3,738 residents from 2025 to 2045, a 3.1% increase (Figure 4). In comparison, the state of Minnesota is projected to grow 5.5%.

Despite the overall growth, Region 6E is projected to lose nearly 1,500 people under 24 years of age. The region is also expected to see a notable decrease in the 65- to 74-year-old age group as the Baby Boom generation moves through the population pyramid. This gain will pull the overall population up to about 123,645 people in 2045, the highest on record.



POPULATION BY RACE

Region 6E’s population is less racially diverse than the state’s, but is becoming more diverse over time. In 2023, about 88% of the region’s residents reported White alone as their race, compared to 78% of residents statewide. Less than 1% of the region’s residents reported being American Indian or Alaska Natives and Asian or Other Pacific Islanders, while 2.4% reported being Black or African American. However, at 9.4%, Region 6E had a much higher percentage of residents of Hispanic or Latino origin than the state (Table 3).

The region saw a notable decline in the number of White residents but saw fast increases in every other race group. People of two or more races rose by 4,005 and people of some other race and Hispanic or Latino origin grew by more than 2,600 people from 2013.

Table 3. Race and Hispanic Origin, 2023	Region 6E				Minnesota	
	Number	Percent	Change from 2013-2023 Numeric Percent		Percent	Change from 2013-2023
Total	118,537	100.0%	+1,255	+1.1%	100.0%	+6.8%
White	103,925	87.7%	-7,395	-6.6%	78.4%	-2.2%
Black or African American	2,821	2.4%	+1,389	+97.0%	6.8%	+38.9%
American Indian & Alaska Native	549	0.5%	+95	+20.9%	0.9%	-11.6%
Asian & Other Pac. Islander	1,084	0.9%	+515	+90.5%	5.1%	+29.6%
Some Other Race	4,741	4.0%	+2,646	+126.3%	2.7%	+96.1%
Two or More Races	5,417	4.6%	+4,005	+283.6%	6.2%	+168.3%
Hispanic or Latino origin	11,192	9.4%	+2,786	+33.1%	6.2%	+37.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2019-2023 American Community Survey

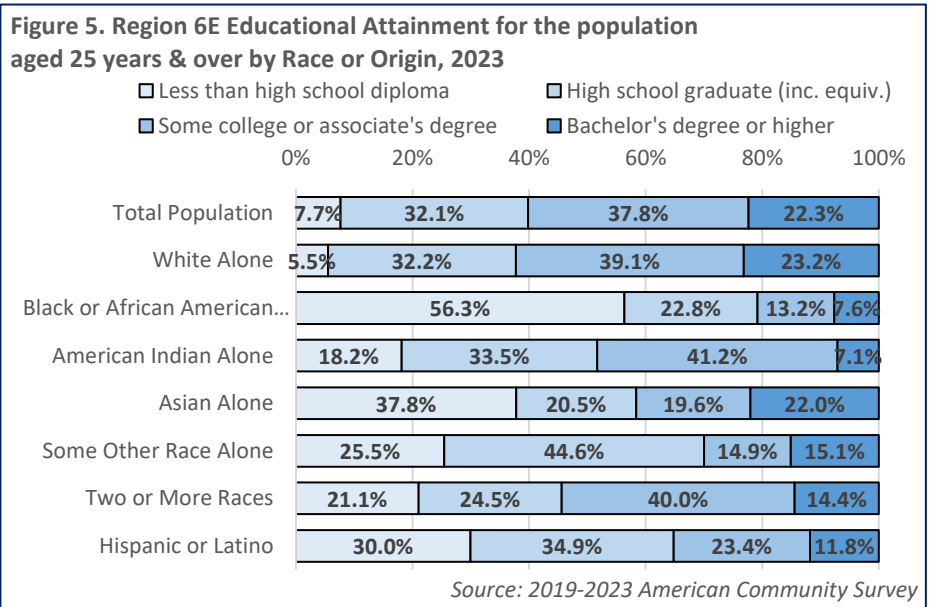
EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

With 38% of adults aged 25 years and over having a college degree, Region 6E has lower educational attainment than the state, where 51% of adults have an associate, bachelor’s, or advanced degree. However, 15.5% of adults in Region 6E have an associate degree, which outpaces the state. Another 22% have some college experience but no degree, which also outpaces the state. Region 6E also has a higher percentage of people with a high school diploma with 32% of adults in the region.

Table 4. Educational Attainment for the Population Aged 25 years & over	Region 6E		Minnesota
	Number	Percent	Percent
Total, 25 years & over	81,580	100.0%	100.0%
Less than high school	6,262	7.7%	6.1%
High school graduate (incl. equiv.)	26,257	32.2%	23.5%
Some college, no degree	18,229	22.3%	19.8%
Associate's degree	12,626	15.5%	11.7%
Bachelor's degree	12,725	15.6%	25.3%
Advanced degree	5,481	6.7%	13.6%

Source: 2019-2023 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

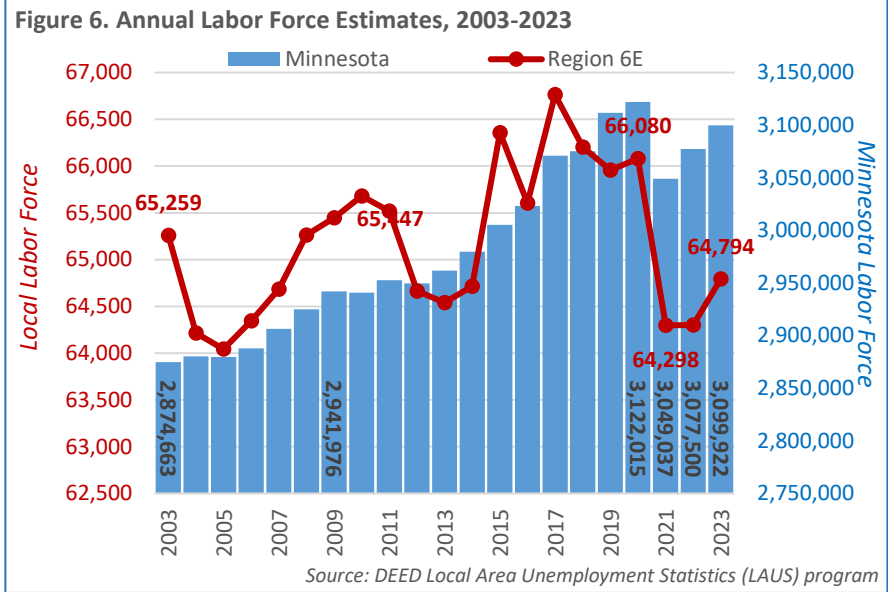
Educational attainment varied significantly by race and ethnicity in Region 6E. Over half of Black or African American and a third of Asian and Hispanic or Latino adults had less than a high school diploma, compared to just 5.5% of White residents. Likewise, a smaller percentage of people of color have completed a bachelor’s degree or higher. However, several race groups have high percentages of adults with some college or an associate’s degree.



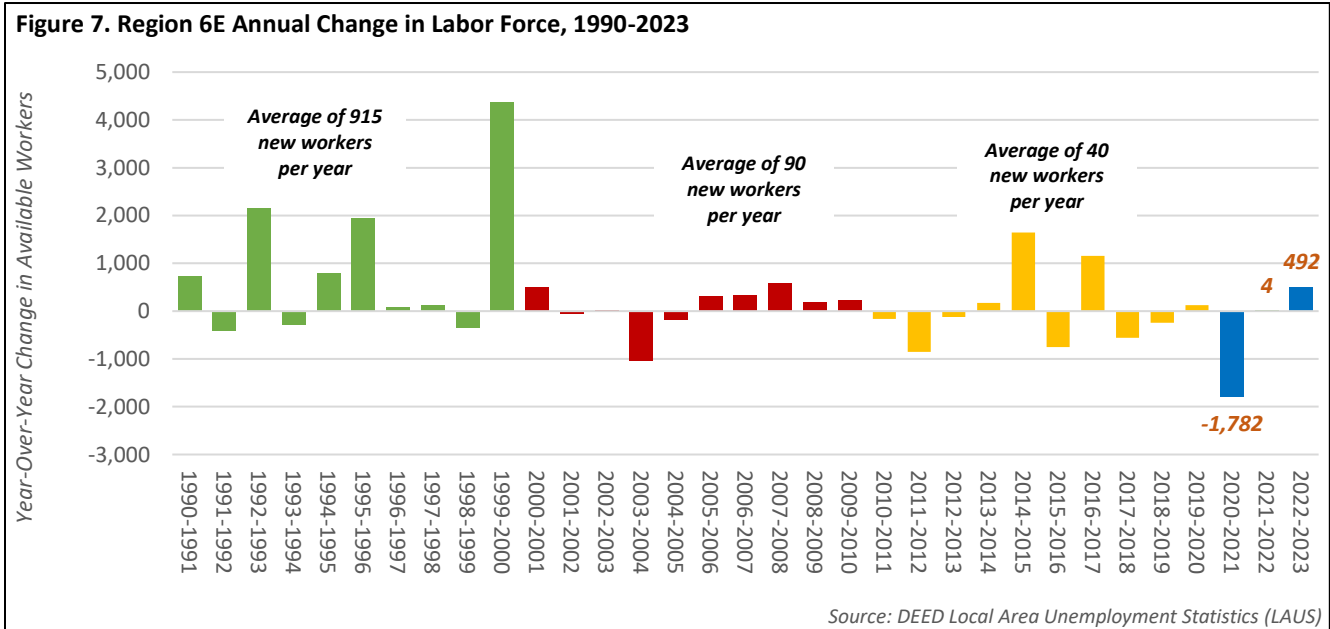
LABOR FORCE

LABOR FORCE CHANGE

According to data from DEED’s [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#) program, Region 6E has experienced ups and downs in the size of the available labor force over the last 20 years in response to changing economic conditions. During the recessions in both 2001 and 2007, workers flooded into the labor market to earn extra income. However, since the pandemic recession in 2020, the region lost nearly 1,300 workers. The increase of workers from 2013 to 2019 was more than offset by recent losses. By the end of 2023, the region is estimated to have about 500 less workers than it did two decades ago.



Averaging a net gain of 915 additional labor force participants per year between 1990 and 2000, employers in Region 6E were able to tap into a large and growing pool of talented workers. Although the regional labor force and economy continued to grow, the rate of labor force growth slowed down considerably, demonstrated by Region 6E adding an average of 40 workers per year from 2010 to 2020 (Figure 7). Recent losses since 2020 create an average annual loss of 429 workers through the end of 2023. It’s possible that labor force growth will rebound in the next few years, considering the projected population increase, but it’s uncertain how long it could take to recover to pre-pandemic labor force levels. The severity of the most recent declines are not likely the start of a long-term trend, but rather a one-time loss in labor force due to a variety of pandemic related factors.



LABOR FORCE PROJECTIONS

In step with the region’s projected population growth, applying current labor force participation rates to population projections by age group, as shown in Figure 4, would lead to marginal growth of the workforce in Region 6E over the next decade. Region 6E is projected to gain another 1,312 workers over the next decade, which would lead to the second fastest decade of growth dating back to 1990 (Table 5).

	2025 Labor Force Projection	2035 Labor Force Projection	2025-2035 Change	
			Numeric	Percent
16 to 19 years	3,615	3,387	-229	-6.3%
20 to 24 years	6,335	6,301	-34	-0.5%
25 to 44 years	24,446	25,789	+1,343	+5.5%
45 to 54 years	11,993	13,453	+1,460	+12.2%
55 to 64 years	11,313	10,212	-1,101	-9.7%
65 to 74 years	4,742	4,419	-322	-6.8%
75 years & over	702	897	+195	+27.8%
Total Labor Force	63,145	64,457	+1,312	+2.1%

Source: calculated from Minnesota State Demographic Center population projections and 2019-2023 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS

With 66.5% of people aged 16 years and over in the labor force, Region 6E had a lower labor force participation rate than the state. Interestingly, the region had higher labor force participation rates than the state in 4 of the 7 age groups, but the overall rate was lower because a higher share of Region 6E’s labor force was in an older age group (Table 6).

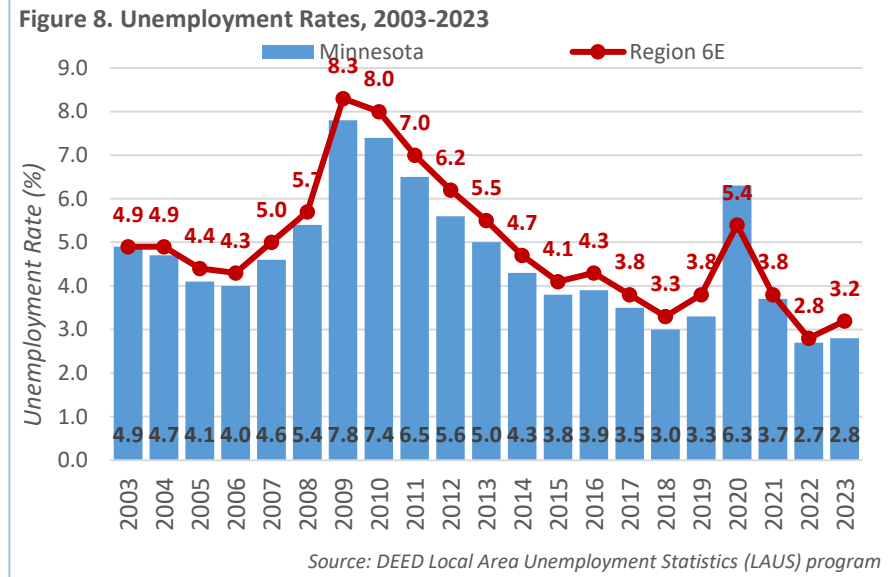
In contrast, the region had lower participation rates than the state in all race groups except Black or African Americans; yet the region had lower unemployment rate disparities all racial groups. In sum, unemployment rates were highest for young people and workers of races other than White, workers with a disability and for workers without a high school diploma.

	Region 6E			Minnesota		Percent of Total Labor Force	
	In Labor Force	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate	Labor Force Partic. Rate	Unemp. Rate	Region 6E	Minnesota
Total Labor Force	62,405	66.5%	3.2%	68.5%	3.9%		
16 to 19 years	3,480	59.7%	5.3%	52.7%	9.9%	5.6%	5.1%
20 to 24 years	5,793	89.6%	5.8%	83.4%	6.5%	9.3%	9.5%
25 to 44 years	24,087	87.3%	3.3%	88.7%	3.5%	38.6%	43.1%
45 to 54 years	11,738	87.6%	2.7%	87.8%	2.9%	18.8%	18.9%
55 to 64 years	12,282	73.9%	1.5%	72.8%	3.0%	19.7%	17.5%
65 to 74 years	4,375	32.2%	3.7%	27.8%	3.4%	7.0%	5.1%
75 years & over	635	6.1%	0.9%	6.6%	3.1%	1.0%	0.8%
Employment Characteristics by Race & Hispanic Origin							
White alone	55,470	65.7%	2.6%	67.5%	3.4%	88.9%	80.0%
Black or African American	1,256	77.7%	11.2%	71.0%	8.4%	2.0%	6.2%
American Indian & Alaska Native	184	49.2%	7.6%	57.7%	11.4%	0.3%	0.7%
Asian or Other Pac. Islanders	488	64.1%	0.8%	74.6%	3.5%	0.8%	5.3%
Some Other Race	2,431	73.1%	10.7%	75.9%	5.6%	3.9%	2.7%
Two or More Races	2,544	74.1%	5.8%	74.2%	6.1%	4.1%	5.1%
Hispanic or Latino	5,106	71.6%	7.3%	77.1%	5.9%	8.2%	5.9%
Employment Characteristics by Veteran Status, 18 to 64 years							
Veterans, 18 to 64 years	1,798	80.4%	3.4%	81.2%	4.1%	3.2%	3.2%
Employment Characteristics by Disability							
With Any Disability, 20 to 64 years	4,084	56.8%	7.0%	55.3%	9.5%	7.6%	6.1%
Employment Characteristics by Educational Attainment							
Population, 25 to 64 years	48,690	84.0%	2.8%	84.4%	3.4%	78.2%	79.9%
Less than H.S. Diploma	2,920	71.9%	3.2%	66.6%	4.6%	6.0%	4.7%
H.S. Diploma or Equivalent	12,969	80.1%	1.7%	77.3%	2.5%	26.6%	19.4%
Some College or Assoc. Degree	21,304	85.3%	1.9%	85.1%	3.6%	43.8%	33.3%
Bachelor's Degree or Higher	11,509	90.4%	1.7%	90.3%	2.1%	23.6%	42.6%

Source: 2019-2023 American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

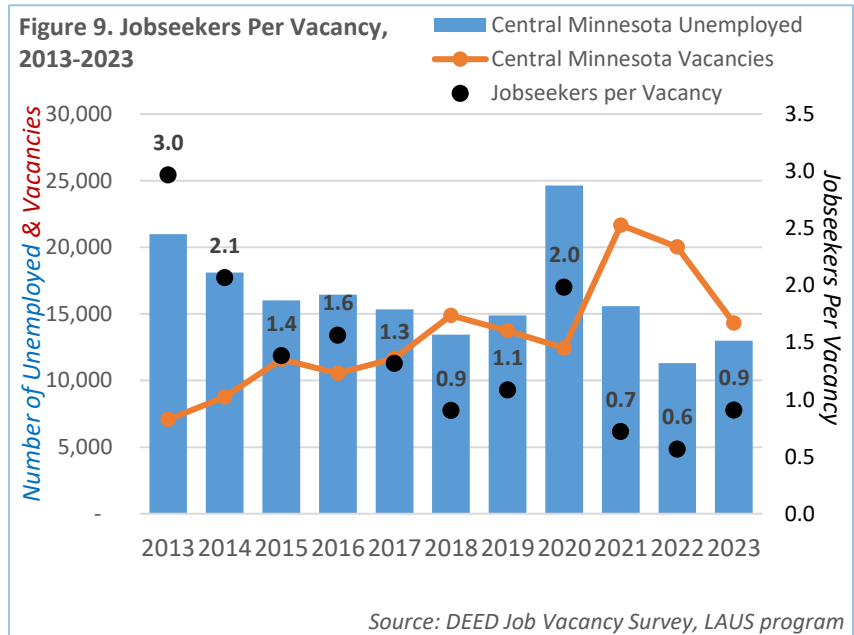
Though slightly higher, Region 6E’s unemployment rate has closely tracked the state rate over time, typically hovering within half a percent of Minnesota’s rate. According to DEED’s [Local Area Unemployment Statistics](#), the region’s unemployment rate rose as high as 8.3% in 2009. Since then, the state and region’s economies have recovered and unemployment rates have generally remained low, with the exception of the pandemic recession spike to 5.4% in 2020 (Figure 8).



JOBSEEKERS PER VACANCY

As the number of available workers has declined, the region’s labor market has tightened. One clear demonstration of this is the ratio of unemployed jobseekers per vacancy, which remained below 1 in 2023.

According to 2023 Job Vacancy Survey results, there were 14,320 openings reported by employers, compared to 12,977 unemployed jobseekers in the region. The ratio climbed as high as 11.2-to-1 during the Great Recession in 2009, but has dropped steadily since then, except for the uptick in 2020 (Figure 9).



COMMUTE SHED AND LABOR SHED

According to commuting data from the [Census Bureau](#), Region 6E is a net labor exporter, having more workers than available jobs. In sum, 35,917 workers both lived and worked in Region 6E in 2022, while 17,017 workers drove into the region from surrounding counties for work, compared to 23,869 workers who lived in the region but drove to surrounding counties for work.

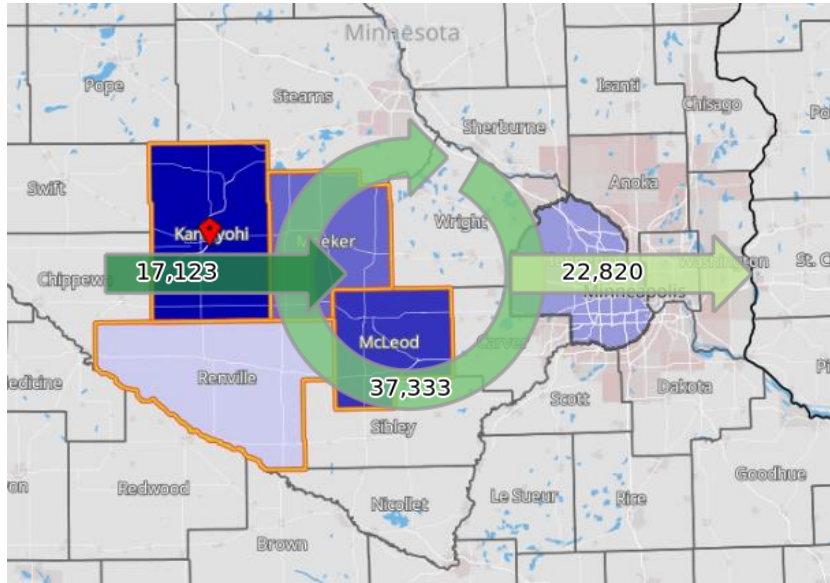
	2022	
	Count	Share
Employed in the Selection Area	52,934	100.0%
Employed in the Selection Area but Living Outside	17,017	32.1%
Employed and Living in the Selection Area	35,917	67.9%
Living in the Selection Area		
Living in the Selection Area	59,786	100.0%
Living in the Selection Area but Employed Outside	23,869	39.9%
Living and Employed in the Selection Area	35,917	60.1%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap

Bordering both the St. Cloud MSA and Twin Cities MSA, workers in Region 6E can access two much larger labor markets (Table 7 and Figure 10).

Home to Willmar, Kandiyohi County is the largest county and the largest employment center in the region and was the biggest draw for workers. On a smaller scale, Hutchinson in McLeod County, Litchfield in Meeker County, and Olivia in Renville County were also employment centers drawing workers. Employers in the region both lose and draw workers from nearby counties with the largest net outflow going to metropolitan areas including the Twin Cities and St. Cloud (Figure 10).

Figure 10. Region 6E Labor and Commute Shed, 2022

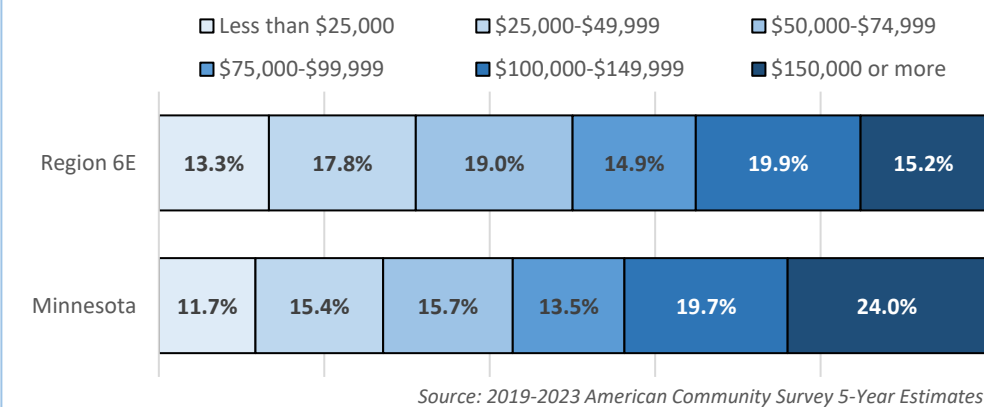


INCOMES, WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS

HOUSEHOLD INCOMES

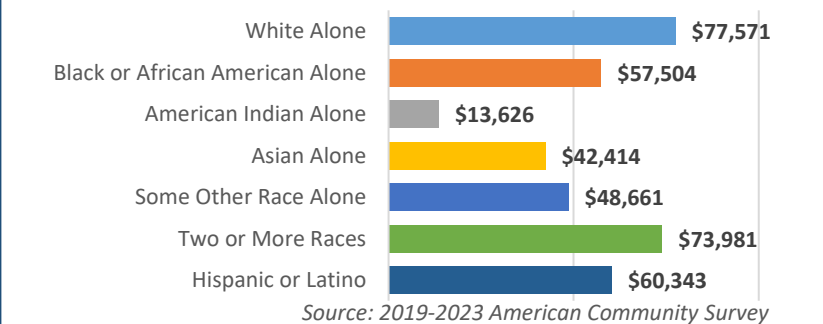
At \$75,393, household incomes were lower in Region 6E than the state, where the median income in 2023 was \$87,559. Just over 31% of the households in the region had incomes below \$50,000 in 2023, compared to 27% statewide. Similarly, only 15% of households in Region 6E earned over \$150,000 per year, compared to 24% of households statewide (Figure 11).

Figure 11. Household Incomes, 2023



Median household incomes varied by race or origin in the region, with whites reporting the highest level. American Indian households reported the lowest incomes in Region 6E, with a median income that was about \$62,000 lower than the overall median, however the estimated households in that category numbered just 221, so the estimate has a large margin of error (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Region 6E Median Household Income by Race, 2023



COST OF LIVING

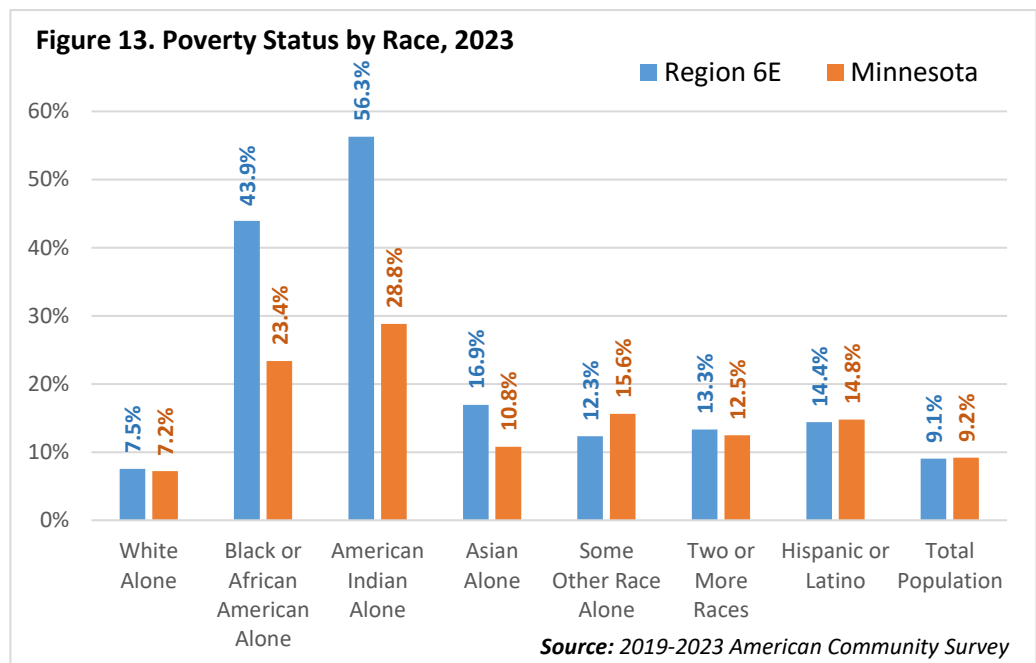
According to DEED’s [Cost of Living tool](#), the basic needs budget for a typical Minnesota family (which consists of 2 adults and 1 child, with 1 full-time and 1 part-time worker) was \$67,320 in 2023. The cost of living for a similar family in Region 6E was \$57,192 – which was the fifth lowest of the 13 EDRs in the state. The highest monthly costs were for transportation, food, and housing; but the cost of the region’s housing, child care, and taxes were significantly lower than the state. In order to meet the basic cost of living for the region, the workers in the family scenario described would need to earn \$18.33 per hour over the course of 60 hours per work week (Table 8).

DEED’s Cost of Living tool provides different estimates for household compositions including single people, partnered couples, and up to 4 children. For a single person living alone and working full-time, the estimated yearly cost in Region 6E would be \$29,292, which would require an hourly wage of \$14.08 to meet the basic needs standard of living (Table 8). That was the sixth lowest in the state.

Family Composition	Number of Workers	Yearly Cost of Living	Hourly Wage Required	Monthly Costs						
				Child Care	Food	Health Care	Housing	Transportation	Other	Taxes
Region 6E										
Single, 0 children	1 FT	\$29,292	\$14.08	\$0	\$410	\$161	\$699	\$601	\$265	\$305
Single, 1 child	1 FT	\$46,416	\$22.32	\$685	\$604	\$415	\$879	\$606	\$355	\$324
2 parents, 1 child	1 FT, 1 PT	\$57,192	\$18.33	\$342	\$935	\$576	\$879	\$1,054	\$434	\$546
2 parents, 2 children	2 FT	\$77,976	\$18.74	\$994	\$1,217	\$585	\$1,248	\$1,097	\$590	\$767
State of Minnesota										
Single, 0 children	1 FT	\$34,704	\$16.68	\$0	\$419	\$160	\$1,021	\$572	\$345	\$375
2 parents, 1 child	1 FT, 1 PT	\$67,320	\$21.58	\$544	\$955	\$574	\$1,285	\$977	\$536	\$739

Source: DEED Cost of Living tool

Overall, Region 6E’s poverty rate was 9.1%, which was just below the statewide rate of 9.2%. Like incomes, poverty levels varied widely by race and origin. The highest poverty levels hovered around 50% for American Indians and over 40% of Black or African American residents were living below the poverty rate in 2023, compared to 7.5% for White residents. More than 14% of Hispanic or Latino residents and people of some other race were living below the poverty rate, which was also similar to statewide rates. Asians were more likely to be in poverty in the region compared to the state (Figure 13).



Source: 2019-2023 American Community Survey

WAGES AND OCCUPATIONS

According to DEED’s [Occupational Employment Statistics](#) program, the median hourly wage for all occupations in Region 6E was \$22.72 in the first quarter of 2024, which was the fourth lowest wage level of the 13 EDRs in the state. Region 6E’s median wage was \$2.50 below the state’s median hourly wage, equaling 90% of the statewide wage rate, and \$5.06 below the median hourly wage in the 7-County Twin Cities metro area, which would amount to \$10,524 per year for a full-time worker. Region 6E had lower wages than the surrounding Region 8 at \$22.81, Region 4 (\$23.04), Region 7W (\$23.85) but higher than Region 6W (\$22.61).

Nearly 13% of the jobs in Region 6E were Production occupations, which was almost twice as concentrated as in the state as a whole. Likewise, the highest location quotient was for Farming occupations, at 5.7. Region 6E also had a higher share of workers in Healthcare Support, Transportation & Material Moving, Installation & Repair, Construction, and Community & Social Service occupations (Table 10).

	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment
EDR 1 - Northwest	\$23.51	35,370
EDR 2 - Headwaters	\$22.68	32,230
EDR 3 - Arrowhead	\$23.41	138,010
EDR 4 - West Central	\$23.04	89,340
EDR 5 - North Central	\$21.89	62,970
EDR 6E - Southwest Central	\$22.72	50,190
EDR 6W - Upper MN Valley	\$22.61	16,230
EDR 7E - East Central	\$23.18	48,440
EDR 7W - Central	\$23.85	175,560
EDR 8 - Southwest	\$22.81	52,080
EDR 9 - South Central	\$23.24	100,990
EDR 10 - Southeast	\$24.26	240,340
EDR 11 - 7-County Twin Cities	\$27.78	1,743,500
State of Minnesota	\$25.22	2,881,100

Source: DEED Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics

Occupational Group	Region 6E				State of Minnesota		
	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Regional Employment	Share of Total Employment	Location Quotient	Median Hourly Wage	Estimated Statewide Employment	Share of Total Employment
Total, All Occupations	\$22.72	50,190	100.0%	1.0	\$25.22	2,881,100	100.0%
Management	\$46.75	2,600	5.2%	0.7	\$57.75	201,710	7.0%
Business & Financial Operations	\$33.43	1,780	3.5%	0.5	\$39.26	202,700	7.0%
Computer & Mathematical	\$38.50	490	1.0%	0.3	\$50.83	98,240	3.4%
Architecture & Engineering	\$39.59	970	1.9%	1.0	\$42.97	58,320	2.0%
Life, Physical & Social Science	\$34.10	270	0.5%	0.5	\$39.93	29,220	1.0%
Community & Social Service	\$29.26	1,090	2.2%	1.1	\$27.92	57,930	2.0%
Legal	\$31.58	150	0.3%	0.5	\$51.15	19,040	0.7%
Education, Training & Library	\$24.31	2,870	5.7%	1.0	\$28.22	163,340	5.7%
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	\$21.21	360	0.7%	0.6	\$29.01	36,160	1.3%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	\$39.40	2,900	5.8%	0.9	\$43.01	184,410	6.4%
Healthcare Support	\$17.70	4,210	8.4%	1.4	\$18.07	169,580	5.9%
Protective Service	\$26.87	680	1.4%	0.9	\$28.87	45,860	1.6%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	\$14.42	4,130	8.2%	1.0	\$15.07	232,190	8.1%
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	\$18.19	1,490	3.0%	1.1	\$18.83	79,660	2.8%
Personal Care & Service	\$16.94	730	1.5%	0.7	\$17.60	59,420	2.1%
Sales & Related	\$17.33	4,270	8.5%	1.0	\$18.82	242,440	8.4%
Office & Administrative Support	\$21.76	5,480	10.9%	0.9	\$23.86	352,250	12.2%
Farming, Fishing & Forestry	\$21.63	350	0.7%	5.7	\$22.13	3,520	0.1%
Construction & Extraction	\$28.25	2,040	4.1%	1.1	\$32.44	110,960	3.9%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	\$26.38	2,250	4.5%	1.2	\$29.54	104,530	3.6%
Production	\$23.38	6,300	12.6%	1.8	\$23.05	203,810	7.1%
Transportation & Material Moving	\$21.88	4,810	9.6%	1.2	\$22.86	225,820	7.8%

Source: DEED Occupational Employment Statistics, Qtr. 1 2023

Not surprisingly, the lowest-paying jobs are concentrated in Food Prep & Serving, Personal Care & Service, Sales & Related, and Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maintenance, which tend to have lower experience and educational requirements. In contrast, the highest paying jobs are found in Management, Legal, Architecture & Engineering, Computer & Mathematical, Healthcare Practitioners, Business & Financial Operations, and Life, Physical, & Social Science occupations, which typically need higher levels of education or experience, including many that require postsecondary training.

JOB VACANCY SURVEY

Employers in Central Minnesota reported 14,320 job vacancies in 2023, which was substantially less than 2022 but continues to be historically high due to the tight labor market. The median hourly wage offer was \$19.13 across all occupations but ranged from a low of \$14.55 per hour for Personal Care and Service workers, to roughly \$32 per hour for Computer and Mathematical occupations.

Overall, 31% of the openings were part-time, only 33% required any postsecondary education, and 36% 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.

Of all openings in Central Minnesota in 2023, roughly a quarter had a median wage offer below \$16.43, which is the wage needed for a single person without children to meet a basic needs cost of living standard in Central Minnesota. The most common openings with wages below the basic needs cost of living wage are often held by high school students, part-time workers, or held as second jobs; such as Fast Food Workers, Personal Care Aides, Food Prep Workers and Waiters/Waitresses.

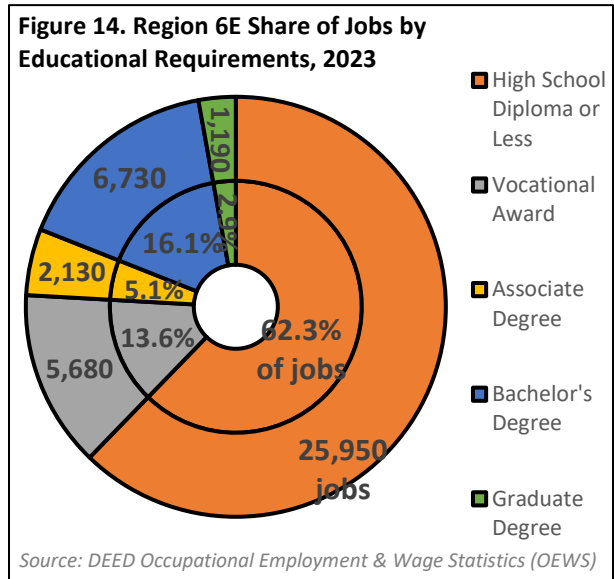
Central Minnesota	Number of Total Vacancies	Median Hourly Wage Offer	Percent Part-Time	Percent Temp or Seasonal	Requiring Postsecondary Education	Requiring 1 or More Years of Work Exp.	Requiring Certificate or License	Job Vacancy Rate
Total, All Occupations	14,320	\$19.13	31%	6%	33%	36%	48%	5.2%
Management	281	\$28.24	3%	1%	91%	97%	80%	1.9%
Business & Financial Operations	220	\$26.20	11%	15%	63%	70%	28%	2.1%
Computer & Mathematical	132	\$32.07	3%	1%	34%	92%	10%	4.4%
Architecture & Engineering	230	\$30.57	3%	1%	56%	74%	52%	6.4%
Life, Physical & Social Sciences	60	\$31.02	2%	2%	60%	52%	70%	3.5%
Community & Social Service	417	\$25.91	24%	3%	83%	89%	91%	7.9%
Legal	40	\$31.72	0%	2%	100%	100%	100%	4.2%
Education, Training & Library	597	\$19.04	30%	22%	71%	14%	78%	3.3%
Arts, Design, Entertainment & Media	187	\$17.70	85%	67%	43%	21%	46%	7.9%
Healthcare Practitioners & Technical	1,967	\$28.25	33%	1%	86%	40%	97%	11.6%
Healthcare Support	1,097	\$17.11	57%	1%	45%	16%	81%	6.8%
Protective Service	272	\$24.39	36%	9%	42%	53%	85%	6.3%
Food Preparation & Serving Related	2,319	\$14.84	48%	3%	1%	16%	6%	9.9%
Building, Grounds Cleaning & Maint.	318	\$16.27	39%	7%	0%	15%	17%	3.9%
Personal Care & Service	433	\$14.55	25%	7%	16%	13%	41%	8.2%
Sales & Related	1,632	\$17.55	29%	3%	5%	22%	15%	6.5%
Office & Administrative Support	747	\$17.98	15%	4%	11%	47%	17%	2.5%
Construction & Extraction	297	\$23.74	0%	1%	27%	69%	70%	1.9%
Installation, Maintenance & Repair	589	\$24.92	4%	1%	33%	51%	56%	5.2%
Production	993	\$20.14	9%	7%	18%	46%	5%	3.5%
Transportation & Material Moving	1,275	\$19.17	43%	11%	4%	41%	78%	5.1%

Source: DEED Job Vacancy Survey, 2023

EDUCATIONAL REQUIREMENTS

Similar to Job Vacancy Survey results, data from DEED’s Occupational Employment & Wage Statistics program shows that only about 37% of jobs in the region require postsecondary education for entry. The other 70% can be started with a high school diploma or less and possibly some amount of on-the-job training (Figure 14).

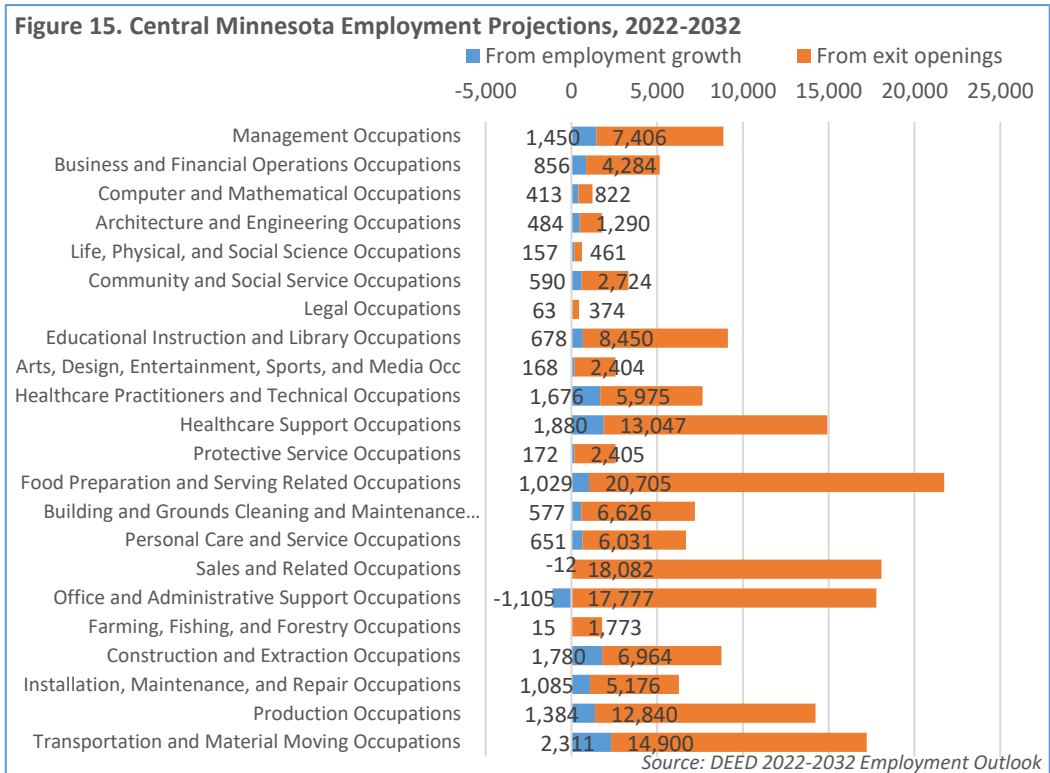
Certain careers – such as Dentists, Lawyers, and Teachers – require a college education, while other jobs – including Cost Estimators, Sales Representatives, and Correctional Officers – do not. College is an excellent way to move up career ladders and open windows of opportunity to licensed fields that 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 \$54,000 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 5.2% from 2022 to 2032, a gain of 16,302 new jobs. The revised faster growth projection makes the region the fastest growing region out of the 6 planning areas.

In addition, the region is also expected to need 160,516 replacement openings to fill jobs left vacant by retirements and other career changers. Healthcare Support, Architecture and Engineering and Computer and Mathematical 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).



OCCUPATIONS IN DEMAND

According to DEED's [Occupations in Demand](#) tool, there are roughly 300 occupations showing relatively high demand in the Central Minnesota 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
Retail Salespersons \$35,817/yr	Heavy & Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers \$60,953/yr	Registered Nurses \$97,279/yr	General & Operations Managers \$82,833/yr
Home Health & Personal Care Aides \$35,952/yr	Nursing Assistants \$40,289/yr	Radiologic Technologists and Technicians \$79,926/yr	Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education \$65,116/yr
Fast Food and Counter Workers \$30,548/yr	Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses \$58,035/yr	Police and Sheriff's Patrol Officers \$78,056/yr	Secondary School Teachers, Exc. Special and CTE \$66,539/yr
Cashiers \$31,985/yr	Automotive Service Technicians and Mechanics \$49,872/yr	Industrial Engineering Technologists and Technicians \$64,316/yr	Medical and Health Services Managers \$108,690/yr
Stockers and Order Fillers \$38,723/yr	Machinists \$61,397/yr	Calibration Technologists and Technicians \$51,876/yr	Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education \$38,309/yr
Janitors and Cleaners \$37,511/yr	Emergency Medical Technicians \$43,830/yr	Dental Hygienists \$95,926/yr	Accountants and Auditors \$73,436/yr
Waiters and Waitresses \$24,272/yr	Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Auditing Clerks \$49,071/yr	Detectives and Criminal Investigators \$77,932/yr	Child, Family, and School Social Workers \$65,914/yr
Childcare Workers \$32,303/yr	Electricians \$79,223/yr	Surgical Technologists \$66,288/yr	Industrial Engineers \$97,918/yr
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers \$47,389/yr	Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors \$54,808/yr	Human Resources Assistants, Except Payroll and Timekeeping \$49,531/yr	Project Management Specialists \$85,453/yr
Customer Service Representatives \$44,527/yr	Medical Assistants \$48,462/yr	Veterinary Technologists and Technicians \$46,438/yr	Special Education Teachers, Secondary School \$69,045/yr

Source: DEED Occupations in Demand

ECONOMY

INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT

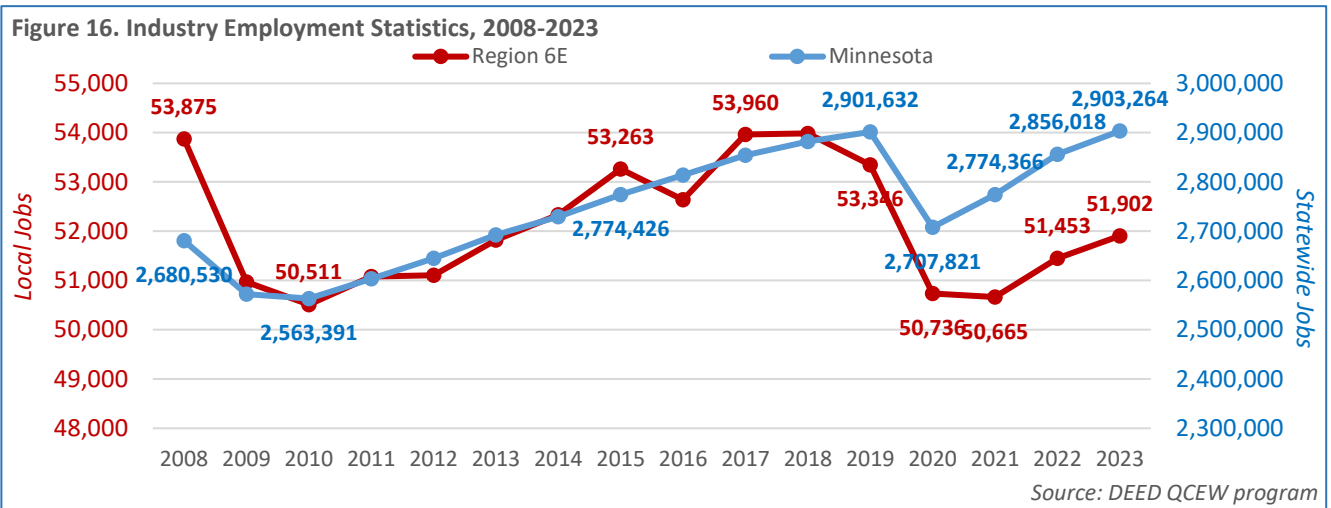
According to DEED's [Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages \(QCEW\) program](#), Region 6E was home to 3,752 business establishments providing 51,902 covered jobs through 2023, with a total payroll of just over \$2.7 billion. That was about 1.8% of total employment in the state of Minnesota, making it the ninth largest of the 13 EDRs in the state. Average annual wages were \$52,146 in the region, which was about \$19,000 lower than the state's average annual wage, and the eighth highest of the 13 EDRs (Table 13).

Home to Willmar, Kandiyohi County is the largest employment center in the region with 22,780 jobs at 1,467 firms in 2023, followed by McLeod County with 15,695 jobs at 1,021 firms. Every county except Meeker lost jobs since 2019, though each of the four counties regained jobs from 2022 to 2023 when most counties and regions were recovering from the pandemic recession (Table 13).

Geography	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll	Average Annual Wage	2022-2023		2019-2023	
					Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Region 6E	3,752	51,902	\$2,706,470,232	\$52,146	+449	+0.9%	-1,444	-2.7%
Kandiyohi Co.	1,467	22,780	\$1,144,120,911	\$50,225	+108	+0.5%	-1,279	-5.3%
McLeod Co.	1,021	15,695	\$861,152,379	\$54,868	+24	+0.2%	-296	-1.9%
Meeker Co.	670	7,963	\$410,602,895	\$51,564	+263	+3.4%	+460	+6.1%
Renville Co.	594	5,463	\$290,594,047	\$53,193	+54	+1.0%	-329	-5.7%
State of Minnesota	207,647	2,903,264	\$207,665,582,979	\$71,528	+47,246	+1.7%	+1,632	+0.1%

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

Region 6E has seen employment ups and downs over the past 15 years. The region entered the Great Recession later than the state, experiencing job growth through 2008, then suffering severe declines in 2009 and 2010. From there, Region 6E had seen a steady but slower recovery than the rest of the state before ultimately shedding over 2,500 jobs in 2020 during the pandemic recession. Held back by slow job growth, the region remains down from 2019 employment levels (Figure 16).



The largest industry in Region 6E shifted from Health Care to Manufacturing during the pandemic recession, now accounting for more than one in five jobs. However, the Manufacturing sector actually shed jobs since the most recent peak of 11,683 jobs in 2018. The largest type of Manufacturing in the region was Food Manufacturing with 2,681 jobs, followed by Machinery Manufacturing with 1,878 jobs. Fabricated Metal Product Manufacturing was also a significant subsector accounting for 1,340 jobs through 2023. Overall, Manufacturing provided 10,522 jobs with an average annual wage of \$67,925 in the region and a total payroll of \$714.7 million. The region is much more strongly concentrated in Manufacturing than the state, where only 11.3% of jobs are in Manufacturing.

With 9,945 jobs at 415 firms, Health Care & Social Assistance is the second largest employing industry in Region 6E, but still accounts for 19.2% of total jobs in the region. That is about 2 percentage points higher than the state’s concentration. Region 6E has lost 9 jobs in Health Care & Social Assistance over the last year, and it’s still off by more than 960 since 2019, a decline of 8.9%. At \$47,212, average annual wages were roughly

\$5,000 less than the average wage across the total of all industries. The largest subsector was Nursing & Residential Care with 3,097 jobs, followed by Ambulatory Healthcare Services (2,596 jobs), Social Assistance (2,194 jobs), and Hospitals (2,066 jobs). The first three of these subsectors shed jobs since 2019, with the largest decline (-14%) at Nursing & Residential Care Facilities.

Retail Trade was the third largest industry, with 5,859 jobs at 430 establishments. The related Accommodation & Food Services industry provides 3,936 jobs at 228 firms. Retail Trade has been losing employment since 2016 while Accommodation & Food Services had been growing. Substantial losses occurred in the Accommodation & Food Service sector in 2020 but it has been slowly recovering and is almost back to normal (Table 14).

Table 14. Region 6E Industry Employment Statistics, 2023

NAICS Industry Title	2023 Annual Data				2022-2023		2019-2023	
	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Total Payroll (\$1,000s)	Avg. Annual Wage	Change in Jobs	Percent Change	Change in Jobs	Percent Change
Total, All Industries	3,752	51,902	\$2,706,470	\$52,146	+449	+0.9%	-1,444	-2.7%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & Hunt	241	2,299	\$117,860	\$51,266	-59	-2.5%	+34	+1.5%
Mining	9	59	\$3,865	\$65,515	-5	-7.8%	+28	+90.3%
Construction	476	2,622	\$178,619	\$68,123	+72	+2.8%	+118	+4.7%
Manufacturing	233	10,522	\$714,703	\$67,925	+158	+1.5%	-250	-2.3%
Utilities	15	244	\$24,717	\$101,300	-2	-0.8%	-23	-8.6%
Wholesale Trade	152	2,042	\$160,899	\$78,795	-31	-1.5%	-4	-0.2%
Retail Trade	430	5,859	\$194,919	\$33,268	-13	-0.2%	-243	-4.0%
Transportation & Warehousing	234	1,814	\$95,966	\$52,903	-2	-0.1%	-30	-1.6%
Information	57	511	\$24,191	\$47,340	-34	-6.2%	-89	-14.8%
Finance & Insurance	210	1,174	\$82,886	\$70,602	+35	+3.1%	-13	-1.1%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	85	202	\$7,292	\$36,101	+19	+10.4%	+12	+6.3%
Professional & Technical Services	201	1,229	\$79,458	\$64,653	+69	+5.9%	+178	+16.9%
Management of Companies	15	239	\$25,249	\$105,643	-13	-5.2%	-36	-13.1%
Admin. Support & Waste Mgmt. Svcs.	159	1,368	\$71,341	\$52,150	+25	+1.9%	+15	+1.1%
Educational Services	66	3,515	\$171,816	\$48,881	+51	+1.5%	-67	-1.9%
Health Care & Social Assistance	415	9,945	\$469,524	\$47,212	-9	-0.1%	-968	-8.9%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	58	445	\$9,004	\$20,234	+30	+7.2%	-26	-5.5%
Accommodation & Food Services	228	3,936	\$89,810	\$22,818	+117	+3.1%	-58	-1.5%
Other Services	348	1,322	\$43,107	\$32,607	+21	+1.6%	-36	-2.7%
Public Administration	122	2,549	\$141,243	\$55,411	+16	+0.6%	+11	+0.4%

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. By 2022, 25% percent of workers in the region were 55 years or older, compared to 22% statewide and

Table 15. Workforce Demographics by Age Group and Gender, Total of All Industries

Central Minnesota	Percentage of Workers		Percent of Workers, Minnesota		Median Hourly Wage		Median Hours Worked Per Qtr.	
	2022	2012	2022	2012	2022	2012	2022	2012
Total, all ages	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	\$21.69	\$14.34	420	422
19 years & under	7.9%	8.0%	6.6%	6.3%	\$14.94	\$8.00	124	115
20 to 24 years	9.0%	10.9%	9.2%	11.3%	\$19.00	\$10.57	336	282
25 to 44 years	40.5%	38.0%	43.6%	42.3%	\$23.98	\$15.70	462	467
45 to 54 years	17.7%	22.0%	18.4%	21.9%	\$25.73	\$17.44	480	480
55 to 64 years	17.9%	16.4%	16.7%	14.7%	\$24.28	\$17.25	480	479
65 years & over	7.0%	4.8%	5.4%	3.5%	\$19.14	\$12.91	232	193
Male	50.2%	48.4%	49.1%	49.1%	\$24.43	\$16.29	480	480
Female	49.8%	51.6%	50.9%	50.9%	\$20.28	\$13.05	366	361

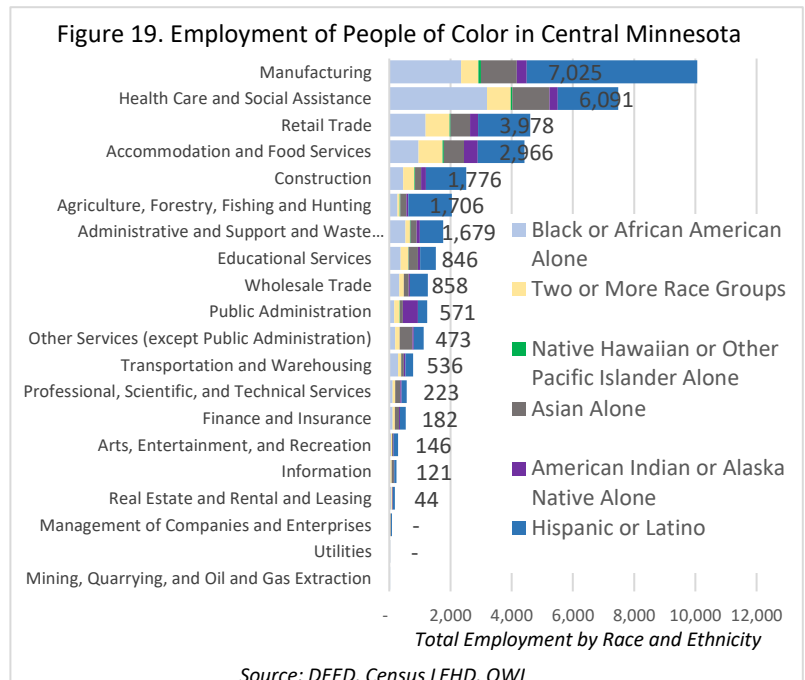
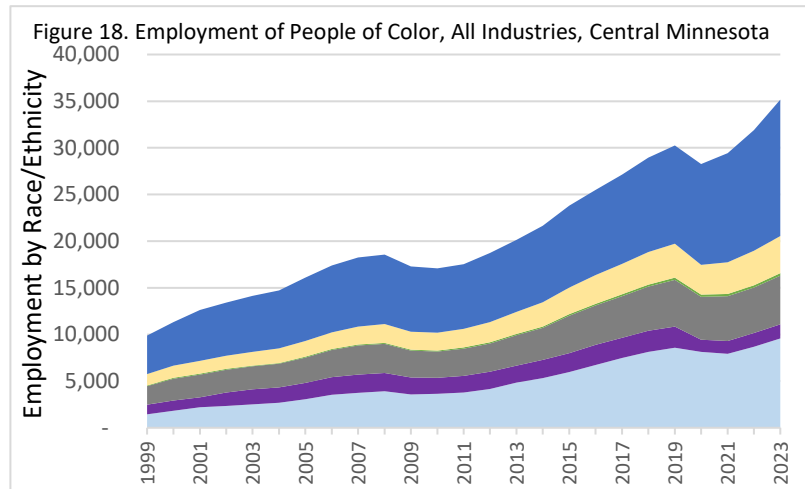
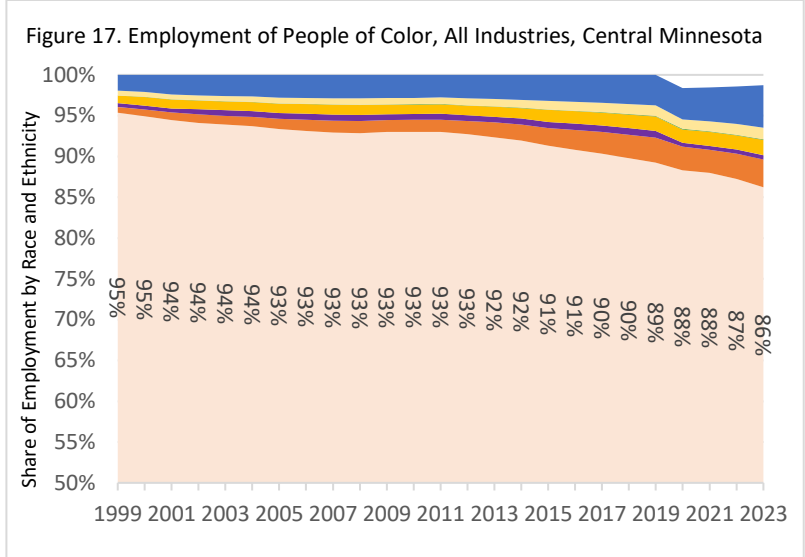
Source: DEED Quarterly Employment Demographics

just 21% in the region one decade earlier. In contrast, the percentage of teenaged workers was falling, and while wages were going up for younger workers, their wage growth lagged that for workers from 20-44 years (Table 15). Wages were highest for workers between 45 and 64 years of age, and males worked substantially more hours than females. Interestingly, from 2012 to 2022 jobs held by workers 45 to 54 years saw the largest decline in the share of jobs they hold, dropping from 22.0% in 2012 to 17.7% in 2022.

In 2023, people of color account for 9.5% of the total labor force in Central Minnesota, compared to the state overall where they amount to 19.7% of the labor force. According to data from the Quarterly Workforce Indicators program, people of color held 35,162 jobs in Central Minnesota, compared to 255,251 jobs held by white workers. The number of jobs held by workers of color has nearly tripled since 2003, when they held 13,420 jobs in the region, a 162% increase (Figure 17).

People of color held an additional 21,041 jobs since 2003 compared to a gain of 2,831 net new jobs held by White workers. Hispanic or Latino workers hold the largest number of jobs of the racial and ethnic minority groups with 14,609 jobs in 2023. The next largest number of jobs held by a race other than white was Black or African American, holding 9,571 jobs in 2023. The number of jobs held by Blacks has increased by 7,052 since 2003, amounting to a 280% increase. Likewise, the region has seen employment jumps for other races as well (Figure 18).

The Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing, & Hunting sector and Manufacturing sector have the highest share of non-White employment at 28% and 20%, respectively. Accommodation & Food Services and Health Care and Social Assistance also have 15% of jobs held by non-White workers. The largest numbers of non-White workers are employed in Manufacturing (10,066 jobs) and Health Care & Social Assistance (7,482 jobs). The least diverse industries include Utilities and Mining, where less than 1% of jobs are held by workers of a race or ethnicity other than white (Figure 19).



Source: DEED, Census LEHD, QWI

INDUSTRY PROJECTIONS

As noted earlier, Central Minnesota is projected to grow 5.2% from 2022 to 2032, a gain of 16,302 new jobs, which would make it the fastest growing region in the state. The largest growing industry is expected to be Health Care and Social Assistance, which may account for one-quarter of total projected growth in the region by 2032.

The fastest growth (10.9%) in the region is expected to be in the Construction industry, continuing a decades long trend of rapid growth, Professional and Technical Service is also expected to grow twice as fast as the overall region (Table 16).

Industry	Estimated Employment 2022	Projected Employment 2032	Percent Change 2022-2032	Numeric Change 2022-2032
Total, All Industries	315,929	332,231	+5.2%	+16,302
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & hunt	5,295	5,457	+3.1%	+162
Mining	354	352	-0.6%	-2
Utilities	1,986	1,998	+0.6%	+12
Construction	20,532	22,780	+10.9%	+2,248
Manufacturing	41,539	44,543	+7.2%	+3,004
Wholesale Trade	11,219	12,105	+7.9%	+886
Retail Trade	35,711	35,808	+0.3%	+97
Transportation & Warehousing	9,287	10,143	+9.2%	+856
Information	3,002	3,214	+7.1%	+212
Finance & Insurance	8,346	8,644	+3.6%	+298
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	1,796	1,884	+4.9%	+88
Professional & Technical Services	7,080	7,833	+10.6%	+753
Management of Companies	1,960	2,146	+9.5%	+186
Admin. Support & Waste Mgmt.	10,369	11,004	+6.1%	+635
Educational Services	24,622	24,913	+1.2%	+291
Health Care & Social Assistance	45,668	49,836	+9.1%	+4,168
Arts, Entertainment & Recreation	4,858	5,168	+6.4%	+310
Accommodation & Food Services	21,188	22,474	+6.1%	+1,286
Other Services	10,880	11,311	+4.0%	+431
Public Administration	20,424	21,077	+3.2%	+653

Source: DEED 2022-2032 Employment Outlook

NONEMPLOYER ESTABLISHMENTS

Region 6E was also home to 8,150 self-employed businesses or “nonemployers” in 2022, 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 6E saw a steady decline in nonemployers over the past decade, responding to economic changes. In sum, the region lost 147 nonemployers from 2012 to 2022, a 1.8% decrease. In sum, these nonemployers generated sales receipts of roughly \$461 million in 2022 (Table 17).

	2022		2012-2022	
	Number of Firms	Receipts (\$1,000s)	Change in Firms	Percent Change
Region 6E	8,150	\$460,875	-147	-1.8%
Kandiyohi Co.	3,168	\$206,692	+78	+2.5%
McLeod Co.	2,418	\$141,221	+3	+0.1%
Meeker Co.	1,587	\$88,029	-151	-8.7%
Renville Co.	1,026	\$66,387	-28	-2.7%
Minnesota	429,672	\$22,727,564	+41,117	+10.6%

Source: U.S. Census, Nonemployer Statistics program

CENSUS OF AGRICULTURE

Like other parts of Greater Minnesota, agriculture is also a key industry in Region 6E, including 3,975 farms producing just over \$2.3 billion in the market value of products sold in 2022 according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Like the state, the number of farms in the region declined over the past 5 years, but Region 6E still accounts for 6% of the farms in the state. Region 6E is home to two of the top 10 farm counties in the state: Renville (#4) and Kandiyohi (#8) are both farm juggernauts (Table 18).

	Number of Farms	Market Value of Products Sold	State Rank
Region 6E	3,975	\$2,310,052,000	5
Kandiyohi Co.	1,252	\$715,674,000	8
McLeod Co.	801	\$286,425,000	47
Meeker Co.	991	\$497,668,000	21
Renville Co.	931	\$810,285,000	4
Minnesota	68,822	\$18,395,390,000	

Source: 2022 Census of Agriculture

Upon request, this information can be made available in alternate formats for people with disabilities by contacting Luke Greiner at 320-223-6692 or at luke.greiner@state.mn.us