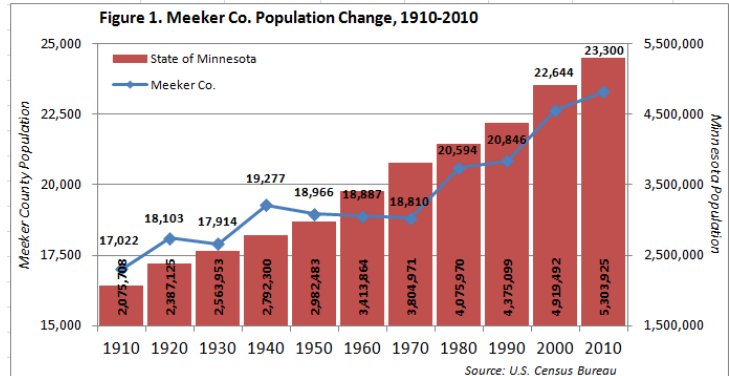


Meeker County Demographic & Economic Profile

Population Trends

Meeker County was home to 23,300 people in 2010, making it the 43rd largest county (out of 87) in the state of Minnesota. Over the last decade, Meeker County's population expanded by 656 people, a 2.9 percent increase, making it the 38th fastest growing county in the state from 2000 to 2010. In comparison, the state of Minnesota gained 385,000 additional people in the last ten years, a 7.8 percent statewide increase.

The recent population gain fits in with a longer term trend in Meeker County. From 1910 to 1960, Meeker County added a total of 1,865 people, an 11.0 percent increase. Then over the last 50 years, Meeker County gained just over 4,400 people, a 23.4 percent increase. Meeker County welcomed about 1,800 new residents from 1970 to 1980 and again from 1990 to 2000. The last decade showed the third largest increase in the last 50 years. In sum, total population was up by just under 6,300 people over the last century, from 17,022 in 1910 to 23,300 people in 2010. (See Figure 1.)



Meeker County is located in the center of Minnesota, surrounded by several larger metropolitan and micropolitan areas. The city of St. Cloud and Stearns County are located to the north, Wright County is located to the east, Willmar and Kandiyohi County form the western border, and Hutchinson and McLeod County are to the southeast. The rest of the southern border is formed by Renville County, which is the only surrounding county that saw a population decline from 2000 to 2010. The rest of Central Minnesota was seeing big population increases.

Meeker County is home to 9 cities, ranging in size from 45 people to just over 6,725 people. (See Table 1.) Litchfield is easily the largest city in the county, with 6,726 people in 2010, after gaining 164 people from 2000. That makes it the 121st largest city in the state of Minnesota, similar in size to metro cities like Victoria, New Prague, Shorewood, Albertville, Waite Park, Belle Plaine, as well as outstate cities like Baxter and International Falls. In context, though, Litchfield was the 5th largest city in the 18-county Southwest Initiative Foundation region, behind Willmar (19,610 people), Hutchinson (14,178 people), Marshall (13,680 people), and Worthington (12,764).

Dassel is the next largest city in the county, with 1,469 people - after adding 236 people in the last decade, a 19.1 percent increase. The city of Watkins closed in on 1,000 people after gaining 82 people from 2000 to 2010, with 962 people. Grove City had 635 people and Eden Valley had 553 people, after both added residents in the last decade. The other four cities in the county had fewer than 500 people, including Cosmos (473 people), Darwin (350 people), Kingston (161 people), and Cedar Mills (45 people). Combined, the cities in Meeker County are home to 11,374 people, accounting for about half (48.8%) of the total population, but added 560 people over the last 10 years, a 5.2 percent gain.

City Name	2010 Population	2000 Population	2000-2010	2000-2010
Litchfield city	6,726	6,562	+164	+2.5%
Dassel township	1,526	1,361	+165	+12.1%
Dassel city	1,469	1,233	+236	+19.1%
Kingston township	1,256	1,266	-10	-0.8%
Collinwood township	1,113	1,037	+76	+7.3%
Forest Prairie township	972	869	+103	+11.9%
Watkins city	962	880	+82	+9.3%
Ellsworth township	848	854	-6	-0.7%
Litchfield township	832	808	+24	+3.0%
Darwin township	681	713	-32	-4.5%
Greenleaf township	676	726	-50	-6.9%
Forest City township	653	666	-13	-2.0%
Grove City city	635	608	+27	+4.4%
Union Grove township	633	625	+8	+1.3%
Manannah township	604	610	-6	-1.0%
Eden Valley city	553	500	+53	+10.6%
Cosmos city	473	582	-109	-18.7%
Cedar Mills township	460	499	-39	-7.8%
Swede Grove township	400	414	-14	-3.4%
Acton township	375	381	-6	-1.6%
Harvey township	374	445	-71	-16.0%
Darwin city	350	276	+74	+26.8%
Danielson township	295	327	-32	-9.8%
Cosmos township	228	229	-1	-0.4%
Kingston city	161	120	+41	+34.2%
Cedar Mills city	45	53	-8	-15.1%
Meeker County	23,300	22,644	+656	+2.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The other half of Meeker County's population lives in the 17 townships, led by Dassel township (1,526 people), Kingston township (1,256 people), Collinwood township (1,113 people), Forest Prairie township (972 people),

Ellsworth township (848 people), and Litchfield township (832 people). Five townships – Darwin township (681 people), Greenleaf township (676 people), Forest City township (653 people), Union Grove township (633 people), and Manannah township (604 people) – had between 600 and 700 people, though all but one lost population over the last decade. The other 6 townships had fewer than 500 people, including 2 that had fewer than 300 people. In sum, townships gained 96 people from 2000 to 2010, a 0.8 percent increase.

Demographic Characteristics

Surprisingly, Meeker County's population is both younger *and* older than the state. Just over one-fourth (25.4%) of the county's population was under 18 years of age, as compared to just under one-fourth (24.2%) statewide. In contrast, nearly one in every six people (16.5%) in the county was 65 years and over, compared to 12.9 percent statewide. That leaves a much smaller percentage of Meeker County's population in the middle age groups, including just 38.2 percent of people from 25 to 54 years of age, which was 3.5 percent lower than the state (41.7%). About one in every nine people (11.0%) in the county was 15 to 24 years of age, as compared to 13.6 percent in the state. (See Table 2.)

Age Group	Number	Percent	Minnesota
0 to 4 years	1,624	7.0%	6.7%
5 to 14 years	3,286	14.1%	13.5%
15 to 24 years	2,563	11.0%	13.6%
25 to 34 years	2,543	10.9%	13.5%
35 to 44 years	2,709	11.6%	12.9%
45 to 54 years	3,645	15.6%	15.3%
55 to 64 years	3,095	13.3%	11.9%
65 years & over	3,835	16.5%	12.9%
Total Population	23,300	100.0%	100.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Most of the age groups in Meeker County were seeing population gains in the last decade, including the youngest and oldest age groups. The number of senior citizens rose by 136 people, a 3.7 percent increase, while the number of children under 5 years of age climbed by 164 people, an 11.2 percent gain. In contrast, the school-aged and young adult population, from 5 to 14 and 15 to 24 years of age, both declined over the last decade. Similar to the gain in the youngest children, Meeker County did see a small increase in the number of people in the 25- to 34-year-old age group. The number of 35- to 44-year-olds dropped by -22.5 percent, a loss of 788 people. In 2010, though, the median age in Meeker County was 41.2 years, which was 4 years older than the state's median age (37.4 years). Meeker County's median age rose about 3 years from 2000 to 2010, while Minnesota's median age increased exactly 2 years during the decade. Meeker County also saw a 17.4 percent gain in the number of 45- to 54-year-olds, and a 47.6 percent jump in the number of 55- to 64-year-olds. Those two age groups form the Baby Boom generation (See Table 3.)

Age Group	2000 Population	2010 Population	2000-2010 Change
0 to 4 years	1,460	1,624	+11.2%
5 to 14 years	3,435	3,286	-4.3%
15 to 24 years	2,880	2,563	-11.0%
25 to 34 years	2,471	2,543	+2.9%
35 to 44 years	3,497	2,709	-22.5%
45 to 54 years	3,105	3,645	+17.4%
55 to 64 years	2,097	3,095	+47.6%
65 years & over	3,699	3,835	+3.7%
Total Population	22,644	23,300	+2.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

In fact, one of the largest age groups in the county is the Baby Boom generation, with 6,740 people. In sum, almost three in every ten people (28.9%) in Meeker County was between 45 and 64 years of age, which was higher than the concentration of Baby Boomers in the state (27.1%). However, unlike many other parts of the state, Meeker County was actually gaining Baby Boomers, at least according to analysis using the *Simplified Cohort Approach*. Born between 1946 and 1964, Baby Boomers were between the ages of 35 and 54 during the 2000 Census. At that time, there were 6,602 Baby Boomers (people between the ages of 35 and 54 years of age) in Meeker County, comprising 29.2 percent of the total population (denoted by the green and blue cells in Table 3). In 2010, Baby Boomers had advanced to the 45- to 64-year-old age group (again denoted by green and blue), and now included 6,740 people, following the net gain of 138 Baby Boomers, a 2.1 percent increase. In Minnesota, the number of Baby Boomers fell -3.5 percent, now comprising about 1.44 million people, with many of them appearing to be moving south. Nationally, the number of Baby Boomers declined by -1.6 percent.

Again using the simplified cohort approach, due to the lack of a postsecondary institution, Meeker County lost large numbers of people from the 5- to 14-year-old age groups in 2000 to the 15- to 24-year-old age group in 2010; and in that same age group in 2000 to the 25- to 34-year-old age group in 2010. However, the county did gain almost 240 people in the 35- to 44-year-old age group in 2010 as compared to the 25- to 34-year-old age group in 2000, a continuation of a "Rural Rebound" trend identified by University of Minnesota researcher Ben Winchester.¹

¹ Brain gain in rural Minnesota. <http://www.extension.umn.edu/community/brain-gain/>

In spite of the slow growth in the number of people aged 65 years and over in Meeker County from 2000 to 2010, population projections from the Minnesota State Demographic Center expect that trend to change in the future. As life expectancies continue to increase and the Baby Boom generation moves through the population pyramid, the percentage of people aged 65 years and over living in Meeker County is projected to reach 24.7 percent by the year 2035 – a 60.5 percent increase in that age group from 2015. As many as 6,790 Meeker County residents could be in the oldest age groups by 2035, making it the fastest growing age group in the next 20 years. (See Table 4.)

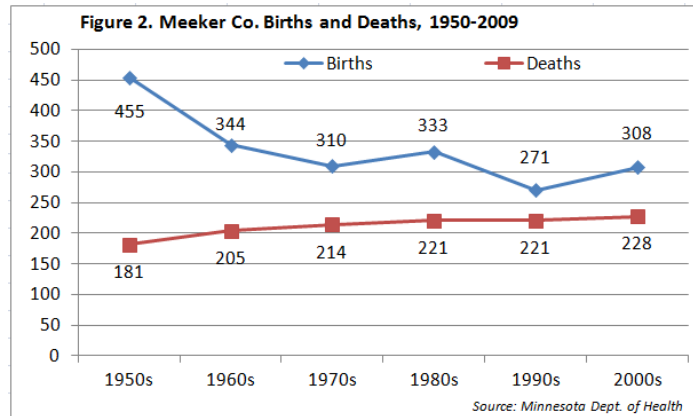
Though the numbers in the State Demographic Center’s projections do not exactly match the 2015 Census results, the trends going forward are still helpful for analysis. According to the Minnesota State Demographic Center, the total number of people in Meeker County is expected to grow 8.2 percent from 2015 to 2035, as compared to a projected 15.6 percent gain in the state’s population. Meeker County is expected to add students and young adults, but see a significant decline in the number 25- to 44-year-olds, and consequently, the number of school-aged children. (See Table 4.)

Table 4. Meeker Co. Population Projections, 2015-2035				
Age Group	2015	2025	2035	2015-2035
0 to 14 years	5,080	4,980	4,750	-6.5%
15 to 24 years	2,550	2,820	2,780	+9.0%
25 to 34 years	3,130	2,720	2,770	-11.5%
35 to 44 years	3,240	3,630	3,200	-1.2%
45 to 54 years	3,580	3,460	3,810	+6.4%
55 to 64 years	3,610	3,590	3,410	-5.5%
65 years & over	4,230	5,690	6,790	+60.5%
Total Population	25,420	26,890	27,510	+8.2%

Source: Minnesota State Demographic Center

Population Change

As in the majority of counties in Minnesota, the number of births in Meeker County was declining over time, from a high of 455 births per year in the 1950s (which would include the Baby Boom generation) to a low of 271 births per year in the 1990s, according to data from the Minnesota Department of Health. The number of births per year in the county has declined by nearly one-third (-32.3%) over the last 60 years. Meanwhile, the number of deaths in Meeker County has slowly risen over time, peaking in the last decade. Again according to the Minnesota Department of Health, the number of deaths in Meeker County climbed from 181 in the 1950s, to between 214 and 221 deaths per year from the 1970s to the 1990s, then rose to 228 deaths per year in the 2000s. The comparison of those two statistics – birth rate and death rate – has allowed Meeker County to maintain a positive natural rate of increase – having more births and deaths – over the last 60 years. However, in the 1950s, Meeker County averaged almost 275 more births than deaths each year, as compared to just 50 more births than deaths per year in the 1990s and 80 more in the 2000s. (See Figure 2.)



In addition to births and deaths, another important component of population change is net migration, which is the comparison of people moving in versus people moving out. According to data from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), 5,068 people moved into Meeker County from a different county or a different state in the last five years. The IRS data also showed that 5,208 people moved out of Meeker County during that same time period, for net out-migration of 142 people. (See Table 5.) About 80 percent of the people who moved into Meeker County between 2005 and 2010 moved from a different county in Minnesota, while the other 20 percent moved from a different state.

Table 5. Meeker Co. Migration Data			
	Inflows	Outflows	Net Migration
2009-2010	969	1,001	-32
2008-2009	941	1,100	-159
2007-2008	1,003	1,009	-6
2006-2007	981	1,052	-71
2005-2006	1,174	1,046	+128
2005-2010	5,068	5,208	-140

Source: IRS SOI Tax Stats, Migration Data

According to data from the 2006 to 2010 American Community Survey, about one-fourth (25.9%) of householders moved into their present housing unit in the last five years, while another quarter (22.2%) moved in from 2000 to 2004 and another quarter (26.0%) moved between 1990 and 1999. The remaining one-fourth of householders moved in prior to 1990, including 6.8 percent who moved into their current house in 1969 or earlier.

Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin

While Meeker County's population is still primarily white, it is also slowly becoming more diverse. Meeker County gained 681 white people from 2000 to 2010, a 3.1 percent increase, with white people comprising 98.0 percent of the county's total population. Meeker County saw rapid growth in the number of Black or African American residents, nearly doubling from 69 people in 2000 to 134 people in 2010, a 94.2 percent increase. The number of American Indian residents in Meeker County also increased 28.9 percent over the last decade, but still made up only 0.4 percent of the county's population.

Asian and Native Hawaiian residents also comprised less than half a percent of the county's population, but saw an -11.6 percent decline over the last decade, similar to the -10.6 percent decline in people of Some Other Race. After welcoming a rapid 57.5 percent increase over the last decade, about 3.3 percent of Meeker County's population is of Hispanic or Latino origin. (See Table 6.)

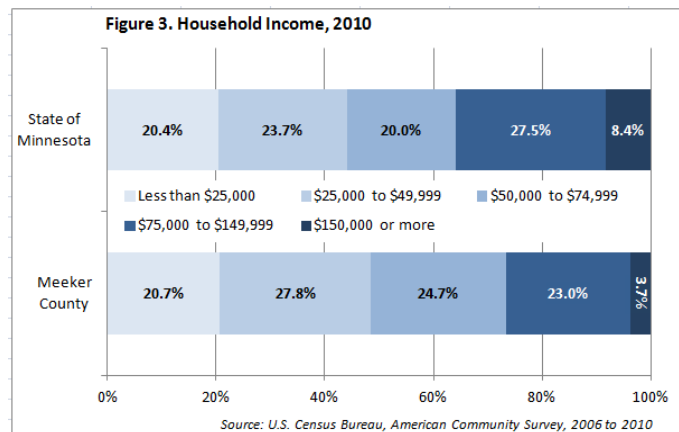
Table 6. Race (one or more race) and Origin, 2010	Meeker Co.		Change, 2000-2010	Minnesota
	Number	Percent		Percent
Total Population:	23,300	100.0%	2.9%	100.0%
White	22,828	98.0%	+3.1%	87.4%
Black or African American	134	0.6%	+94.2%	6.2%
American Indian & Alaska Native	98	0.4%	+28.9%	1.9%
Asian & Native Hawaiian	107	0.5%	-11.6%	4.8%
Some other race	312	1.3%	-10.6%	2.3%
Hispanic or Latino origin	767	3.3%	+57.5%	4.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

Income and Poverty Statistics

At \$51,173 in 2010, Meeker County had the 23rd highest median household income in the state, according to data from the Census Bureau's American Community Survey. That was slightly lower (89.4%) than the state's median household income, which was \$57,243 in 2010.

About 20.7 percent of households in Meeker County were earning less than \$25,000 in 2010, and another 27.8 percent earned between \$25,000 and \$50,000. Combined then, about half (48.5%) of the households in Meeker County earned less than \$50,000 per year, as compared to 44 percent in Minnesota. Another 24.7 percent of households earned between \$50,000 and \$75,000, which was higher than the state (20.0%). From there, Meeker County had a lower percentage (23.0%) of households earning \$75,000 to \$150,000; and a much lower percentage of households (3.7%) that earned \$150,000 or more. (See Figure 3.)



Due to the older population, Meeker County had a slightly higher percentage of households receiving Social Security income (28.7%) than the state (25.3%). However, Meeker County also had a slightly lower percentage of households receiving retirement income (14.1%) than the state (15.2%). Meeker County's mean social security income (\$16,223) was slightly higher than the state's (\$15,973); but the county's mean retirement income (\$17,706) was slightly lower than the state's (\$20,770).

And despite the lower incomes, Meeker County had a lower poverty rate (8.9%) than the state of Minnesota as a whole (11.5%) in 2010, according to data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates (SAIPE) program. Similar to the state and nation, Meeker County saw increases in poverty from 2000 to 2010, climbing from 6.9 percent in 2000. While the state rate jumped 4.6 percent during the decade, Meeker County's rate moved up just 2.0 percent. For children under the age of 18, poverty increased from 8.4 percent in 2000 to 12.4 percent in 2010 in Meeker County, as compared to a jump from 8.7 percent in 2000 to 15.0 percent in 2010 in the state of Minnesota. Meeker County had an equal percentage of households (5.9%) receiving food stamp/SNAP benefits in the last 12 months as the state (5.9%).

Home Sales and Mortgage Status

Like incomes, median home sales prices were also lower in Meeker County than the state, at \$127,898 in 2010, in comparison to \$169,900 statewide. Though it was lower than the state, it was the 36th highest sales price of the 87 counties in the state. Median home sales prices fell less than half a percent (-0.4%) in Meeker County from 2009 to 2010, according to data from the Minnesota State Demographic Center. In contrast, sales prices declined -2.9 percent statewide from 2009 to 2010, after falling -8.6 percent from 2008 to 2009.

In contrast, the number of home sales increased 3.2 percent in Meeker County from 2009 to 2010, compared to a -1.0 percent decline in the state, on top of a -17.7 percent statewide decline from 2008 to 2009. According to the Minnesota State Demographic Center, there were 96 home sales reported in Meeker County through the first three quarters of 2010, compared to 93 home sales for the same time period the prior year.

As the housing market stabilized, the number of foreclosures in Meeker County fell slightly in the last year, from 114 in 2010 to 94 in 2011, according to data from HousingLink. The 94 foreclosures in 2011 was the 35th highest number of any county in the state, which was in line with Kandiyohi County (98 foreclosures in 2011), but much lower than the housing struggles in McLeod County (178 foreclosures in 2011). Meeker County had the 24th highest foreclosure rate in the state, which was better than McLeod (13th) but worse than Kandiyohi County (43rd).

Of the 7,668 owner-occupied housing units in Meeker County, just over two-thirds (67.3%) had mortgages (or contracts to purchase or similar debt), as compared to 71.1 percent of housing units in Minnesota, according to data from the American Community Survey. The other 32.7 percent of owner-occupied housing units in Meeker County did not have a mortgage. Selected monthly owner costs for housing units with a mortgage topped 30 percent of household income for 36 percent of households in Meeker County, while nearly one-third (33.9%) of households were at that level statewide. For renters, almost half (49.9%) spent over 30 percent of their income on housing costs.

Educational Access and Attainment

There are four public school districts located in Meeker County – ACGC (Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City) with 790 students; Eden Valley-Watkins with 937 students; Litchfield with 1,689 students; and Dassel-Cokato with 2,252 students – along with small parts of other school districts that are headquartered in surrounding counties. According to data from the Minnesota Department of Education, enrollments have been steadily declining in the county, ticking down from 5,875 students in the 2005-2006 school year to 5,820 students in the 2008-2009 school year, before falling to 5,668 students in the 2011-2012 school year. The trend shows enrollment declines in most of the middle school and high school classes, but small gains in some of the younger grades. In fact, unlike most counties in the state, Meeker County had more incoming kindergarteners (431 students) than its outgoing 12th grade class (405 students). (See Table 7.)

	2005/ 2006	2008/ 2009	2011/ 2012	2005- 2011
PreKindergarten (PK)	73	102	105	+43.8%
Kindergarten (KG)	418	441	431	+3.1%
1 st Grade	428	422	418	-2.3%
2 nd Grade	420	435	435	+3.6%
3 rd Grade	414	406	425	+2.7%
4 th Grade	428	451	417	-2.6%
5 th Grade	430	435	409	-4.9%
6 th Grade	418	444	417	-0.2%
7 th Grade	441	447	467	+5.9%
8 th Grade	499	450	428	-14.2%
9 th Grade	418	422	438	+4.8%
10 th Grade	505	443	443	-12.3%
11 th Grade	451	502	430	-4.7%
12 th Grade	532	420	405	-23.9%
Total Enrollment	5,875	5,820	5,668	-3.5%

Source: Minnesota Dept. of Education

Like the overall population, Meeker County schools were relatively non-diverse, with minority students comprising just 5.7 percent of students. There were 321 minority students in Meeker County in 2011-2012, which was up slightly from the 2005-2006 school year (5.0% of students were minorities). The youngest grades had the highest number of minority students, but all but two grade levels had at least 20 minority students in 2011-2012. Graduation rates were very high in the school districts in the county, with Litchfield at 98.6 percent in 2007, followed by ACGC at 98.4 percent, Dassel-Cokato at 96.6 percent, and Eden Valley-Watkins at 92.1 percent.

Despite the high graduation rates, Meeker County has lower educational attainment than the state. Beyond high school, just half (49.5%) of Meeker County adults aged 25 years and over had attended college or earned a postsecondary degree, as compared to nearly two-thirds (63.5%) statewide. The county has a higher percentage of people who have associate's degrees (10.7%) than the state (9.7%); but a lower percentage of people with bachelor's degrees or higher. Just 12 percent of adults had bachelor's degrees; and only 3.7 percent had advanced degrees, as compared to 21.3 and 10.1 percent in the state. (See Table 8.)

	Meeker Co.		Minnesota
	Number	Percent	
Total:	15,704	100.0%	100.0%
Less than 9th grade	816	5.2%	3.6%
9th to 12th grade, no diploma	953	6.1%	5.1%
High school graduate, GED	6,166	39.3%	27.8%
Some college, no degree	3,623	23.1%	22.4%
Associate's degree	1,680	10.7%	9.7%
Bachelor's degree	1,879	12.0%	21.3%
Graduate or professional degree	587	3.7%	10.1%

Source: American Community Survey, 2006 to 2010

Consequently, the other half (50.5%) of the adults in Meeker County had no education past high school, including one in nine (11.3%) who did not have a high school diploma. That was much higher than the 36.5 percent of adults in Minnesota who had a high school diploma or less, though some of the gap is due to the county's older population, who did not have access to the same educational opportunities.

Data from the American Community Survey show that Meeker County lags the state in higher education attainment at every age group, though the gaps are smaller for the younger age groups. In fact, about 17.1 percent of Meeker County's 18- to 24-year-olds had a college degree, which was in line with the state (17.4%). This included 12.7 percent who had associate's degrees and 4.4 percent who had bachelor's degrees or higher in Meeker County, which was the inverse of the state, where 6.3 had associate's degrees and 11.1 percent of young adults had bachelor's degrees or higher. In addition, one-third (30.1%) of young people in Meeker County had attended some college, which was also in range of the state's young adults (40.0%). (See Table 9.)

About one-fourth of Meeker County residents in both the 25- to 34- and 35- to 44-year-old age groups had attended some college, but had not earned a degree yet, which was higher than the rest of the state, where about 23 percent had some college experience. In addition, a much higher percentage of Meeker County's 25- to 44-year-olds had associate's degrees than the state, but a much lower percentage had bachelor's degrees or higher. Meeker County's 35- to 44-year-olds had the highest educational attainment of any age group in the county, including over one-fifth (21.6%) of these middle-aged adults who had bachelor's degrees or higher. While that was high for the county, it was still about 15 percent lower than the statewide percentage.

Likewise, about one-fourth of the Baby Boomers in Meeker County, aged 45 to 64 years, have attended college without earning a degree (25.5%), which was higher than the state (23.9%), and also had a slightly higher percentage of people with an associate's degree (10.5% in Meeker County vs. 10.0% in Minnesota). About 15 percent of Meeker County's Baby Boomers had a bachelor's degree or higher, which was again 15 percent lower than the state. In contrast, more Meeker County residents had a high school diploma or less in comparison to the state (49.2% vs. 35.1%).

Finally, Meeker County not only had a higher percentage of adults aged 65 years and over (21.8% of the adult population vs. 16.6%), they also had a lower amount of educational attainment, with nearly three-fourths of residents (72.3%) stopping their education in high school. In comparison, about 57.5 percent of senior citizens in the state had a high school diploma or less. Only 12.4 percent of Meeker County's senior citizens had a college degree, which was about half of the percentage statewide. (See Table 9.)

Table 9. Educational Attainment by Age Group, 2006 to 2010	Meeker Co.		Minnesota Percent
	Number	Percent	
18 to 24 years:	1,698	9.8%	12.8%
Less than 12 th grade, no diploma	186	11.0%	13.6%
High school graduate, GED	712	41.9%	28.4%
Some college, no degree	511	30.1%	40.7%
Associate's degree	215	12.7%	6.3%
Bachelor's degree or higher	74	4.4%	11.1%
25 to 34 years:	2,542	14.6%	17.5%
Less than 12 th grade, no diploma	166	6.5%	7.4%
High school graduate, GED	821	32.3%	20.8%
Some college, no degree	602	23.7%	22.5%
Associate's degree	425	16.7%	12.4%
Bachelor's degree or higher	528	20.8%	36.9%
35 to 44 years:	2,772	15.9%	18.0%
Less than 12 th grade, no diploma	114	4.1%	6.2%
High school graduate, GED	846	30.5%	21.8%
Some college, no degree	756	27.3%	23.2%
Associate's degree	456	16.5%	11.7%
Bachelor's degree or higher	600	21.6%	37.1%
45 to 64 years:	6,601	37.9%	35.0%
Less than 12 th grade, no diploma	462	7.0%	5.8%
High school graduate, GED	2,787	42.2%	29.3%
Some college, no degree	1,684	25.5%	23.9%
Associate's degree	696	10.5%	10.0%
Bachelor's degree or higher	972	14.7%	31.1%
65 years and over:	3,789	21.8%	16.6%
Less than 12 th grade, no diploma	1,027	27.1%	18.8%
High school graduate, GED	1,712	45.2%	38.7%
Some college, no degree	581	15.3%	18.4%
Associate's degree	103	2.7%	3.9%
Bachelor's degree or higher	366	9.7%	20.2%

Source: American Community Survey, 2006 to 2010

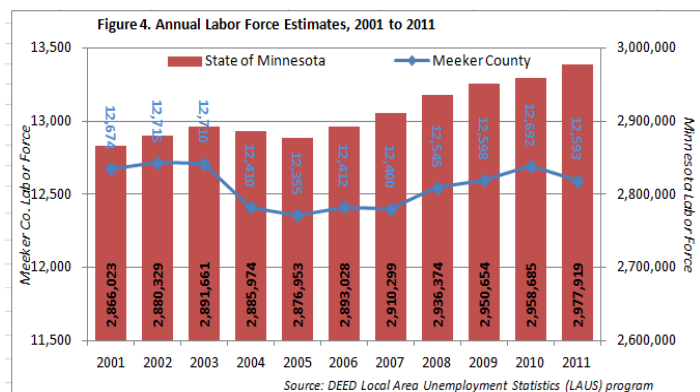
Labor Force Size and Availability

In comparison with Minnesota, which has consistently had among the highest labor force participation rates in the nation, labor force participation rates were slightly lower in Meeker County. In 2010, 69.3 percent of adults were in the labor force, as compared to 71.0 percent statewide. About three-fourths of males were in the labor force in Meeker County (75.9%) and the state (75.6%). Where Meeker County lags the state is in its female labor force participation rate (63.6%), which was 3 percent lower than the state's rate (66.6%), which was also among the highest in the nation. (See Table 10.)

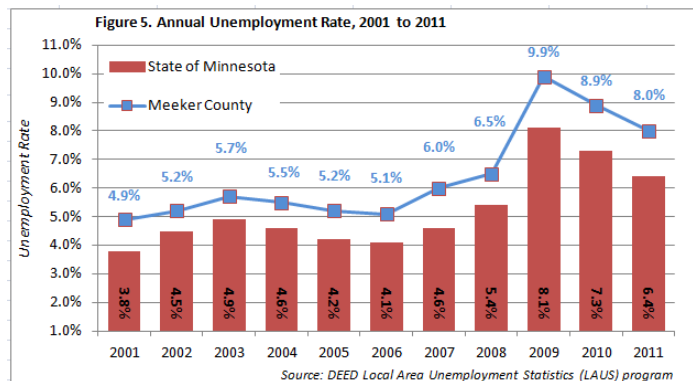
Table 10. Labor Force Participation Rates	Meeker Co.		Minnesota
	Number	Percent	Percent
Total	18,039	100.0%	100.0%
In labor force	12,505	69.3%	71.0%
Not in labor force	5,534	30.7%	29.0%
Male	9,106	50.5%	49.2%
In labor force	6,823	74.9%	75.6%
Not in labor force	2,283	25.1%	24.4%
Female	8,933	49.5%	50.8%
In labor force	5,682	63.6%	66.6%
Not in labor force	3,251	36.4%	33.4%

Source: American Community Survey, 2006 to 2010

Unlike the county's population, the size of Meeker County's labor force was declining during the decade. Meeker County ended 2011 with an average of 12,593 available workers, which was 81 fewer workers than it had in 2001. According to DEED's Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) program, the county's labor force shrunk as small as 12,355 workers in 2007, before climbing back to 12,692 workers in 2010. In comparison, the state's labor force expanded more steadily – up 112,000 workers – over the decade. (See Figure 4.)



While the labor force was shrinking, the number of unemployed workers was growing. From 2001 to 2009, the number of unemployed workers in Meeker County doubled, from 622 unemployed workers to 1,249 workers. That number has declined in each of the last two years, falling to 1,011 unemployed workers in 2011. However, that caused Meeker County's unemployment rate to climb above the state rate, peaking at 9.9 percent in 2009, before inching back down to 8.0 percent in 2011. That was 1.6 percent above the state rate, which was a bigger gap than prior to the recession in 2007. From 2001 to 2006, Meeker County's unemployment rate was typically about 1.0 percent above the state rate, then jumped 1.8 percent above the state rate in 2009. (See Figure 5.)



Commute and Labor Sheds

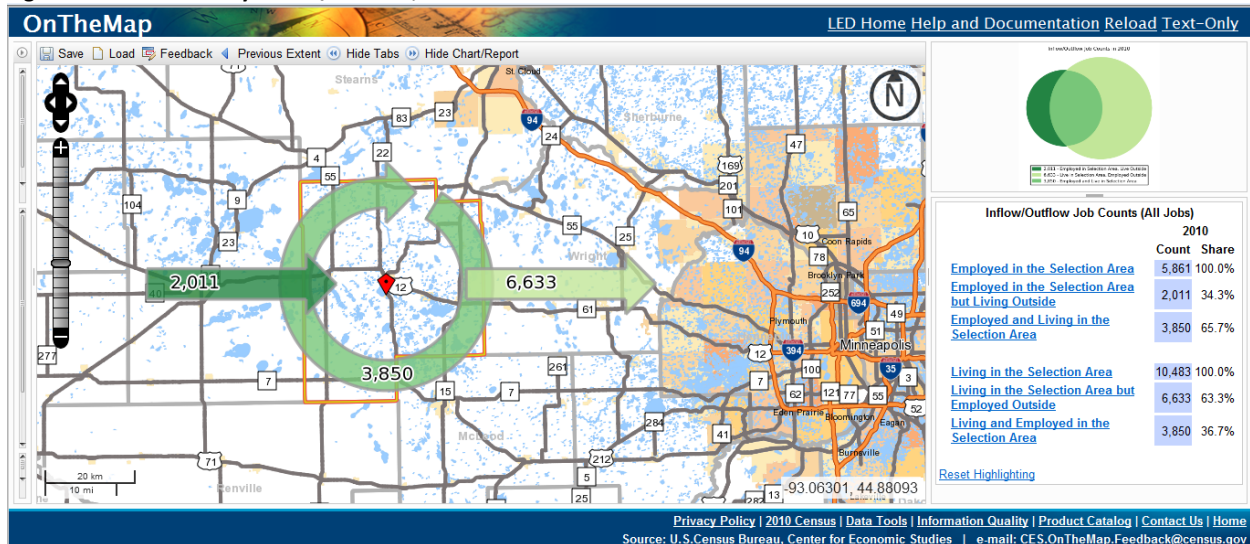
According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Worker Origin-Destination database and OnTheMap Tool, about 3,850 workers both lived and worked in Meeker County. That provided about two-thirds (65.7%) of the workers for employers in the county. Businesses in Meeker County also draw in workers from surrounding counties like Stearns, Kandiyohi, Wright, and McLeod County. About 2,000 (34.3%) of the county's workers commute in for jobs. (See Table 11.)

Table 11. Meeker County Commute Shed and Labor Shed Report, 2010					
Commute Shed: Where Workers who Live in Meeker Co. are Employed	2010		Labor Shed: Where Workers Live who are Employed in Meeker Co.	2010	
	Count	Share		Count	Share
Total, All Jobs	10,483	100%	Total, All Jobs	5,861	100%
Meeker County, MN	3,850	36.7%	Meeker County, MN	3,850	65.7%
McLeod County, MN	1,124	10.7%	Stearns County, MN	571	9.7%
Stearns County, MN	1,036	9.9%	Kandiyohi County, MN	333	5.7%
Hennepin County, MN	963	9.2%	Wright County, MN	300	5.1%
Wright County, MN	765	7.3%	McLeod County, MN	295	5.0%
Kandiyohi County, MN	715	6.8%	Hennepin County, MN	69	1.2%
Ramsey County, MN	515	4.9%	Renville County, MN	53	0.9%
Dakota County, MN	133	1.3%	Sherburne County, MN	41	0.7%
Anoka County, MN	126	1.2%	Benton County, MN	24	0.4%
Renville County, MN	101	1.0%	Chisago County, MN	20	0.3%
All Other Locations	1,155	11.0%	All Other Locations	305	5.2%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, OnTheMap6 Worker-Origin Destination Database

In contrast, over 6,600 Meeker County residents were commuting outside the county for work. Over 1,000 residents were traveling to jobs in both McLeod County (1,124 workers) and Stearns County (1,036), and just under 1,000 residents were commuting to Hennepin County. Wright County (765 workers) and Kandiyohi County (715 workers) were also major destinations for Meeker County workers, followed by smaller amounts of workers commuting into other Twin Cities counties like Ramsey, Dakota, and Anoka County. That gave Meeker County a net labor export – having net outflows with its surrounding counties. In sum, about 6,633 workers were commuting out of the county, 2,011 workers were driving into the county, and 3,850 workers were staying put. (See Figure 6.)

Figure 6. Meeker County Inflow/Outflow, 2010



Industry Employment Statistics

Through 2010, Meeker County was home to 595 business establishments providing 6,466 covered jobs, with a total annual payroll of \$199.2 million and average annual wages of \$30,784, according to data from DEED's Quarterly Census of Employment & Wages (QCEW) program. All establishments covered under the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Program are required to report wage and employment statistics quarterly to DEED. Federal government establishments are also covered by the QCEW program.

Just over 80 percent of Meeker County's covered employment is in the private sector (81.0%), with 5,238 jobs at 541 private business establishments. The remaining 20 percent of covered employment is in the public sector, including 1,227 jobs at 54 government organizations.

In addition to covered employment, Meeker County also had 1,608 nonemployer establishments in 2009 as well as 1,146 farms in 2007, according to the U.S. Census Bureau and the Census of Agriculture. These operations are not covered by DEED's QCEW program, but are still vital components of Meeker County's economy, contributing hundreds of millions of dollars to the county. In fact, Meeker County ranked 27th in the state in the total value of agricultural products sold in 2007, with just over \$204 million in sales.

Like much of the rest of the state and nation, Meeker County's economy suffered job declines over the last three years during the Great Recession and slow recovery. The county endured a net loss of 45 business establishments and 405 covered jobs from 2007 to 2010. Unfortunately, that -5.9 percent decrease in covered employment was more severe than the -4.8 percent drop experienced statewide from 2007 to 2010. Both the public sector (-59 jobs, a -4.6 percent decline) and the private sector (-347 jobs, a -6.2 percent decline) saw significant job cuts during the recession, with total employment falling from 6,871 covered jobs in 2007. (See Table 12.)

Industry	2010 Annual Data					2007 – 2010			
	Number of Firms	Number of Jobs	Percent of County Jobs	Total Industry Payroll	Avg. Annual Wages	Change in Firms	Numeric Change in Jobs	Percent Change in Jobs	Change in Wages
Total, All Industries	595	6,466	100.0%	\$199,191,250	\$30,784	-45	-405	-5.9%	+0.2%
<i>Total, All Government</i>	54	1,227	19.0%	\$44,636,785	\$36,400	-3	-59	-4.6%	+10.9%
<i>Total, Private Sector</i>	541	5,238	81.0%	\$154,554,465	\$29,484	-42	-347	-6.2%	-2.4%
Agriculture, Forestry, Fish & Hunt	28	196	3.0%	\$4,724,051	\$32,084	+2	+1	+0.5%	+44.5%
Mining	3	15	0.2%	\$432,856	\$37,648	0	0	0.0%	+17.7%
Construction	96	279	4.3%	\$9,920,124	\$35,048	-8	-119	-29.9%	-13.0%
Manufacturing	57	1,266	19.6%	\$52,986,844	\$41,808	-1	-110	-8.0%	+9.8%
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	144	1,370	21.2%	\$39,336,163	\$28,704	-13	+83	+6.4%	ND
<i>Wholesale Trade</i>	32	339	5.2%	\$13,389,282	\$39,468	-7	-11	-3.1%	+9.5%
<i>Retail Trade</i>	67	701	10.8%	\$14,760,764	\$21,060	-6	+99	+16.4%	+2.3%
Information	6	33	0.5%	\$650,171	\$19,812	-2	-13	-28.3%	-17.4%
Finance & Insurance	35	176	2.7%	\$7,437,322	\$42,328	-3	-18	-9.3%	+9.4%
Real Estate & Rental & Leasing	14	51	0.8%	\$1,148,381	\$22,412	-2	-1	-1.9%	+10.5%
Professional & Business Services	56	329	5.1%	\$13,255,252	\$40,290	-4	-182	-35.6%	-24.6%
<i>Professional & Technical Services</i>	34	238	3.7%	\$10,560,807	\$44,356	-1	-142	-37.4%	-26.3%
Education & Health Services	56	1,669	25.8%	\$43,679,169	\$26,171	-1	-39	-2.3%	+3.4%
<i>Educational Services (gov't only)</i>	16	523	8.1%	\$18,260,923	\$35,100	0	-2	-0.4%	+6.1%
<i>Health Care & Social Assistance (2009 annual data)</i>	35	1,107	17.1%	\$27,414,174	\$24,764	-1	-14	-1.2%	+10.0%
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	8	34	0.5%	\$285,545	\$8,528	-2	+2	+6.3%	-15.5%
Accommodation & Food Services	33	379	5.9%	\$3,519,715	\$9,256	-4	-75	-16.5%	+8.5%
Other Services	35	246	3.8%	\$5,083,208	\$20,644	-5	+48	+24.2%	+4.5%
Public Administration	24	427	6.6%	\$15,375,921	\$36,036	-2	+8	+1.9%	+5.2%

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

The largest employing industry in Meeker County was education and health services, with 56 establishments providing 1,669 jobs, accounting for 25.8 percent of total employment. Though private sector data was not discloseable for 2010, QCEW data from 2009 show that the largest sector was health care and social assistance in Meeker County, with 35 firms and 1,107 covered jobs. Within health care, the largest employing sector in Meeker County was nursing and residential care facilities, which had 659 jobs at 12 establishments after gaining almost 50 jobs since 2007. The next largest sector was the hospital, which had 199 jobs in 2010; followed by ambulatory health care services – which includes offices of physicians, dentists, outpatient care centers, and other health care providers – with 183 jobs at 16 firms in 2009; and social assistance, which had 141 jobs at 8 agencies in 2010. Not surprisingly, the vast majority of those jobs are located in the city of Litchfield, which had all of the hospital jobs, over 95 percent of the ambulatory health care services jobs, and just over 50 percent of the nursing and residential care facilities jobs. Educational services had 523 jobs at 16 public elementary and secondary schools, including 278 jobs in the city of Litchfield, 127 jobs in Eden Valley, and 45 jobs in Dassel.

Trade, transportation, and utilities was the next largest industry, with 1,370 jobs at 144 establishments, accounting for 21.2 percent of total employment in the county. Retail trade is the largest sector in the county, with 701 jobs at 67 stores. As consumers cut back during the recession, many stores responded by cutting back on employment, as retailers eliminated jobs by -7.9 percent statewide from 2007 to 2010. In Meeker County, however, retailers added 99 jobs, a welcome 16.4 percent gain. The largest retail sub-sector in the county is general merchandise stores, which had over 230 jobs in 2010; followed by gasoline stations (14 firms and 128 jobs); food and beverage stores (9 firms and 121 jobs); building material and garden supply stores; motor vehicle and parts dealers; miscellaneous store retailers; and nonstore retailers. Again, the majority (68.5%) of the county's jobs were located in the city of Litchfield, which had 36 establishments and 480 jobs in 2010. Eden Valley and Dassel both had just over 50 retail trade jobs. After losing 11 jobs during the recession, wholesale trade had 32 firms and 339 jobs, but was still one of the highest paying sectors in Meeker County.

Manufacturing is the third largest employing industry in Meeker County, providing 1,266 covered jobs at 57 establishments, comprising 19.6 percent of total employment. That was much more concentrated than in the state as a whole, where manufacturing makes up about 11.4 percent of total employment. Unfortunately, manufacturing cut 110 jobs from 2007 to 2010, an -8.0 percent decline,, though that was much less severe than the -14.5 percent decline suffered in manufacturing statewide. The largest manufacturing sectors in Meeker

County are machinery manufacturing (16 firms and 410 jobs); fabricated metal product manufacturing (13 firms and 234 jobs); food manufacturing (6 firms and 191 jobs); wood product manufacturing, and chemical manufacturing. The city of Litchfield (20 firms and 435 jobs) had about one-third (34.4%) of the county's manufacturing jobs, and Dassel (6 firms and 228 jobs) had about one-fifth (18.0%) of the jobs.

Public administration is the next largest industry, with 427 jobs at 24 establishments, and gained 8 jobs during the recession. Just under 85 percent of the county's public administration jobs are located in Litchfield, with 359 jobs at 13 establishments. The largest subsector is executive, legislative, and other general government support (10 establishments and 366 jobs); followed by administration of economic programs and environmental programs; as well as justice, public order, and safety activities.

Unlike retail trade, accommodation and food services lost jobs in Meeker County during the recession, losing 75 jobs from 2007 to 2010, a -16.5 percent decline, as compared to a -5.1 percent decline statewide. There were 33 firms providing 379 jobs in 2010, comprising 5.9 percent of total employment in Meeker County.

Other important industries in Meeker County include professional and business services, which had 329 jobs at 56 firms; construction with 96 small businesses and 279 jobs after losing 119 jobs in the last three years; other services – which includes auto repair and maintenance and personal care and services – with 35 small businesses and 246 jobs; agriculture, forestry, fishing, and hunting, with 28 firms and 196 jobs, or 3.0 percent of total employment; and finance and insurance, with 176 jobs at 35 businesses. Smaller sectors in the county include transportation and warehousing; real estate, rental, and leasing; information; arts, entertainment, and recreation; and mining.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's County Business Patterns data, the vast majority of businesses in Meeker County are small businesses, including 56.8 percent that have 1 to 4 employees and another 18.7 percent that have between 5 and 9 employees. About 13.6 percent of the businesses have between 10 and 19 employees, and another 9.5 percent have 20 to 99 employees, leaving only 1.4 percent having 100 or more employees. In fact, according to the U.S. Small Business Administration's definition of a small business, which sets the cutoff at 500 employees, all of the businesses in Meeker County would be considered "small." (See Table 13.)

Total establishments	588	100.0%
1-4 employees	334	56.8%
5-9 employees	110	18.7%
10-19 employees	80	13.6%
20-49 employees	43	7.3%
50-99 employees	13	2.2%
100-249 employees	8	1.4%
250-499 employees	0	0.0%
500 employees or more	0	0.0%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau County Business Patterns

Self-Employment

As detailed above, the vast majority of businesses in Meeker County were small businesses. Before growing, the basic building block of many small businesses is a self-employed business. Meeker County was home to 1,608 self-employed businesses or "nonemployers" in 2009, 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)." In Meeker County, nonemployers generated sales receipts of \$49.5 million in 2009, an average of about \$30,756 in sales receipts per nonemployer. (See Table 14.)

Industry Description	2009			2007			Change 2007-2009		2002		Change 2002-2009	
	Number of Firms	Receipts (\$1,000s)	Avg. Sales	Number of Firms	Receipts (\$1,000s)				Number of Firms	Receipts (\$1,000s)		
Total for all sectors	1,608	\$49,456	\$30,756	1,816	\$60,685	-208	-11.5%		1,589	\$51,166	+19	+1.2%
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting	32	\$1,026	\$32,063	41	\$2,815	-9	-22.0%		32	\$705	0	0.0%
Utilities	D	D	D	3	\$206	D	D		D	D	D	D
Construction	259	\$8,317	\$32,112	316	\$11,093	-57	-18.0%		277	\$11,725	-18	-6.5%
Manufacturing	41	\$1,497	\$36,512	50	\$2,755	-9	-18.0%		55	\$2,777	-14	-25.5%
Wholesale trade	20	\$712	\$35,600	32	\$1,620	-12	-37.5%		34	\$2,257	-14	-41.2%
Retail trade	204	\$8,583	\$42,074	238	\$7,730	-34	-14.3%		221	\$7,897	-17	-7.7%
Transportation & warehousing	121	\$10,345	\$85,496	154	\$13,231	-33	-21.4%		101	\$8,725	+20	+19.8%
Information	6	\$76	\$12,667	21	\$278	-15	-71.4%		D	D	D	D
Finance & insurance	43	\$2,498	\$58,093	50	\$2,916	-7	-14.0%		51	\$1,177	-8	-15.7%
Real estate, rental & leasing	87	\$3,463	\$39,805	115	\$4,274	-28	-24.3%		98	\$4,040	-11	-11.2%
Professional, scientific & technical svcs.	137	\$2,138	\$15,606	131	\$2,499	+6	+4.6%		123	\$1,871	+14	+11.4%
Admin. support & waste mgmt. svcs.	138	\$2,036	\$14,754	149	\$2,271	-11	-7.4%		118	\$1,907	+20	+16.9%



Department of Employment and Economic Development

Educational services	31	\$430	\$13,871	28	\$253	+3	+10.7%	14	\$204	+17	121.4%
Health care & social assistance	142	\$2,456	\$17,296	139	\$2,587	+3	+2.2%	122	\$1,979	+20	+16.4%
Arts, entertainment, & recreation	69	\$448	\$6,493	61	\$596	+8	+13.1%	51	\$392	+18	+35.3%
Accommodation & food services	13	\$156	\$12,000	11	\$205	+2	+18.2%	13	\$264	0	0.0%
Other services	264	\$5,126	\$19,417	277	\$5,356	-13	-4.7%	274	\$5,200	-10	-3.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau Nonemployer Statistics program

Prior to the recession, Meeker County had seen fast growth in nonemployers, rising from 1,589 nonemployers in 2002 to 1,816 nonemployers in 2007, a rapid 14.3 percent increase. However, with the onset of the recession in 2007, the county lost 208 nonemployers from 2007 to 2009, an -11.5 percent decline. In comparison, nonemployers fell by -6.3 percent statewide during that time frame.

The industries with the largest amount of self-employment in Meeker County were other services, which includes personal care services (hair, nail, and skin care) and automotive repair and maintenance; construction, which includes specialty trade contractors like building finishing contractors, carpenters, and plumbers; retail trade – including motor vehicle and parts dealers as well as nonstore retailers (like Avon or Mary Kay); health care and social assistance, which includes doctors, dentists, and chiropractors, but primarily child day care services; and transportation and warehousing – including truck transportation, both local and long-distance trucking.

Other important industries for self-employment include administrative support and waste management services, which includes janitorial services and groundskeeping and landscaping; professional, scientific and technical services, which includes accounting, consulting, and computer services; real estate, rental and leasing; arts, entertainment, and recreation; finance and insurance; manufacturing; agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting; and educational services.

Agriculture Statistics

Another important industry for Meeker County is agriculture, with 1,146 farms producing just over \$204 million in the market value of products sold in 2007, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. At that level, Meeker County ranked 27th in the state of Minnesota for the total value of agricultural products sold, including 40th in the value of crops and 17th in the value of livestock, poultry, and their products. Meeker County was ranked highest in a couple categories, including 4th in the state for livestock inventory of turkeys, 4th in inventory of layers, and 6th in the number of pullets for laying flock replacement, as well as 32nd in the number of cattle and calves and 46th in the count of hogs and pigs. On the crop side, Meeker County ranks 14th highest in the state in corn for silage, and 29th for both corn for grain and soybeans for beans.

Of the 1,146 farms in Meeker County, 507 of them reported farming as their primary occupation (44.2%). The average age of the principal operator on these farms was 54.8 years in 2007, extending a steady increase over time. The average net cash income per farm was \$33,907 in 2007, while just one-quarter (23.5%) of the farming operations in the county reported sales of more than \$100,000 in 2007. According to the 2007 U.S. Census of Agriculture, the national trend in agriculture shows that farms are either getting smaller and producing niche products, or getting bigger and producing commodities.

Employers and Job Postings

According to ReferenceUSA, the largest employers in Meeker County were spread across the largest industries, including health care operations like Meeker Memorial Hospital in Litchfield, Lakeside Health Center in Dassel, Emmanuel Home Therapy in Litchfield, Ecumen-Litchfield, and Meeker County Community Homes in Litchfield; education institutions like ACGC (Atwater-Cosmos-Grove City), Eden Valley-Watkins, and Litchfield Public Schools; manufacturers like Towmaster Inc., Minnesota Rubber & Plastics, First District Association, Custom Products, and Bobcat Co., all located in Litchfield. Other large employers include BI Performance Services in Eden Valley and Hicks Bus Line & Trucking in Litchfield.

Other large manufacturers in Meeker County include American Time & Signal in Dassel, Anderson Chemical Company in Litchfield, Crest Healthcare Supply in Dassel, Spectralytics in Dassel, and Uni-Hydro in Cosmos. Large retailers and food service operations in Meeker County include the WalMart Supercenter in Litchfield, Econofoods in Litchfield, Mies Outland in Watkins, and McDonalds in Litchfield. Smaller health care and social assistance employers include Divine Home Care in Litchfield, Hilltop Care Center in Watkins, Lakeview Ranch in Dassel, and Meeker County Social Services in Litchfield.



At the end of April, there were 32 jobs listed on MinnesotaWorks.net – the state’s online job posting database – by employers in Meeker County. Twenty were located in the city of Litchfield, 4 were listed in Dassel, 3 were in Watkins, 2 were in Eden Valley, and 2 more were posted in Cosmos. Fourteen of the job postings were in health care, ranging from CNAs to RNs, followed by 7 postings for manufacturing workers, 3 for customer service representatives, and the rest for varied office positions like accounts payable and financial assistants.

Extending the search to include Stearns, Kandiyohi, McLeod, and Wright Counties returns more than 500 job postings, meaning that Meeker County workers will likely continue looking outside their home county for job opportunities.

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