



Cornhusker Economics

Workforce Development in a Post-COVID World: A Grassroots Approach

Market Report	Year Ago	4 Wks Ago	5-15-20
Livestock and Products,			
Weekly Average			
Nebraska Slaughter Steers, 35-65% Choice, Live Weight.	*	*	*
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame, 550-600 lb.	178.09	159.46	167.52
Nebraska Feeder Steers, Med. & Large Frame 750-800 lb.	*	113.82	134.92
Choice Boxed Beef, 600-750 lb. Carcass.	220.23	NA	459.04
Western Corn Belt Base Hog Price Carcass, Negotiated	81.30	NA	*
Pork Carcass Cutout, 185 lb. Carcass 51-52% Lean.	85.26	NA	111.36
Slaughter Lambs, woolled and shorn, 135-165 lb. National.	157.75	162.25	162.25
National Carcass Lamb Cutout FOB.	384.92	429.98	408.91
Crops,			
Daily Spot Prices			
Wheat, No. 1, H.W.			
Imperial, bu.	4.03	4.52	3.96
Corn, No. 2, Yellow			
Columbus, bu.	3.71	2.84	2.85
Soybeans, No. 1, Yellow			
Columbus, bu.	7.32	7.64	7.84
Grain Sorghum, No.2, Yellow			
Dorchester, cwt.	5.83	5.61	6.18
Oats, No. 2, Heavy			
Minneapolis, Mn, bu.	3.29	3.25	3.54
Feed			
Alfalfa, Large Square Bales, Good to Premium, RFV 160-185 Northeast Nebraska, ton.	*	*	*
Alfalfa, Large Rounds, Good Platte Valley, ton.	112.50	90.00	90.00
Grass Hay, Large Rounds, Good Nebraska, ton.	90.00	85.00	80.00
Dried Distillers Grains, 10% Moisture Nebraska Average.	121.00	211.67	154.00
Wet Distillers Grains, 65-70% Moisture Nebraska Average.	47.25	57.29	47.86
* No Market			

As the world slowly emerges from COVID 19 both the virus and the lingering effects on the economy will be in the spotlight. There is a real urgency to get businesses up and running and employees working again. Some businesses may be able to “flip a switch” and get up to speed while others may need to ramp up more slowly and will only be able to “turn up the dial.” In both situations, there are implications for the local workforce and for the community.

In the recent past, intermediaries or various service providers were often available to provide workforce assistance. These groups come in a variety of forms. Some prepare job seekers for labor market entry and advancement through targeted training (Ganzglass, Foster, & Newcomer, 2014; Lowe, Goldstein, & Donegan, 2011). Others establish close working relationships with employers, educational institutions, and workers in an effort to influence local hiring decisions (Fitzgerald, 2004; Osterman, 2007). These groups may still be available in the post-COVID environment, but their capacity may be diminished. The size and scope of this new reality is just too big to presume that institutional support will function as it did in the past. Rather than waiting for their assistance, a crucial question is, *what actions can a community take that will support the local workforce now and also lay the groundwork for an improved economic future?*

This is where a community self-help approach may offer value to get the process started as well

as fine tune the community trajectory. Communities have the power to go beyond “what was” and design a future that “could be.” This may be an opportune time to rethink local realities and create a new path with more options for skill development and ultimately business growth and diversity.

The Process: Three Basic Steps

From a community perspective, the idea may seem daunting. Where does one start? But a closer look at workforce development reveals three foundational components. The steps are distinct, locally driven and also purposefully interconnected. They include: 1) bring together key community partners to inventory current assets and opportunities and develop a local workforce plan that incorporates realistic strategic actions; 2) integral to the plan, create and incorporate methods to expand career exploration and development that resonate with both the current local adult and future youth workforce participants; and 3) once these are outlined, leverage both public and private financial support to help activate the plan.

The purpose of the process would be to offer smaller and possibly overlooked communities, specifically minority and rural communities, some ideas to re-energize their business economy and corresponding workforce in a way that opens up future opportunities in a post-COVID 19 world. The grassroots or bottom up foundational three-step approach can be drafted immediately — it should be a pathway designed by the community for the community. Having a plan of action that emerges from local aspirations and assets creates a roadmap for a desired future, given new opportunities and possible constraints post COVID. As resources become more available, the community will be ready to take advantage of them to strengthen their plan and move forward with their actions at a more accelerated rate.

Connected to Research, Practical Application and Personal Passion

These ideas are the culmination of a final project developed by three graduate students enrolled in a workforce development online course linked to a community development certificate program at the University of Nebraska. The timing of the course, late spring 2020, overlapped with the COVID-19 pandemic. Merging the course content with the realities of the current economy generated discussions with a

sense of urgency and purpose. The three components lifted up by the students as areas of interest were woven together to offer a basic grassroots community approach to workforce development. Although primarily designed for small rural or minority urban locations, the components and process are the workforce building blocks for a wide variety of situations.

The first component, bring community partners together, offers a way to identify local assets and opportunities in a changing environment. Communities will need to engage in hard conversations on the types of actions that should be undertaken in both the short and long term. Having the right partners around the table with a focus on both the immediate and the future will take keen group leadership skills as noted by the student author. Second, and fundamental to any workforce development plan, is a renewed look at career exploration and development. The student author of this segment chose to look at a specific workforce sector, sports, as a way to think about hidden and diverse employment opportunities that youth may not realize are available. Although the example highlights the sports sector, many employment areas fall victim to this same dilemma. We only think about employment opportunities in the professions that we see. We cannot comprehend the support or back-office jobs that enable them. In addition, the author lifts up some of the barriers and obstacles that are present as they pursue sports as a pathway to career development. Third, and critically important, are ways to leverage both public and private community financial support to put a plan into action. Here the student author connected with a workforce success story in rural Arkansas and investigated how the funding streams came together and included both the reasoning behind the support and the process and players that were needed to make it happen. A more detailed discussion of each of these components can be found in the final project. <https://agecon.unl.edu/workforce-development-post-covid-world-grassroots-approach-2020>

Moving Forward

Communities have never been here before - no one knows exactly what economic recovery will look

like in the months ahead. But we do have past workforce history, resources, observations and insights to draw upon as we position ourselves for the future. For this particular workforce project, the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta's, *Investing in America's Workforce* three book publication series (2018) provided key data and varying professional insights. In addition, the students framed each component based on their past individual and community experiences. Blending outside resources with personal insights may be the norm as we consciously or unconsciously try to make the best possible decisions in this shifting economic landscape.

The intent of this project was to create a basic grassroots workforce process, especially for niche locations like smaller rural communities or urban neighborhoods, in a post-COVID environment. It is hoped that this process and unique economic timing sparks community workforce discussions that go beyond the present realities of "what was" to a future of increased business growth and diversity of "what could be."

References

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