

**Regional Spotlight:**  
**SOUTHWEST Planning Region**

## Money in the Piggy Bank

*The pork industry has seen healthy growth in southwestern and south central Minnesota over the past decade.*

Much like Charlotte's web did for Wilbur, the H1N1 flu virus put the swine industry in the spotlight last spring, although not in a positive way. In response, agricultural officials were quick to emphasize that "swine flu" wasn't the proper name for the virus.

"This really isn't swine flu. It's H1N1 virus," said U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. "That's very, very important ... because there are a lot of hard-working families whose livelihood depends on us conveying this message of safety.

"It is important to convey the message that consuming pork or pork products will not cause and cannot cause the illnesses that we're dealing with," Vilsack continued. "Obviously, we're concerned about people's safety. But we're also concerned about the impact on the economy on these farm families."<sup>1</sup>

Vilsack's words resonated in southwestern and south central Minnesota, where many of

those hard-working families involved in hog and pig farming are located. According to the University of Minnesota, the state "ranks second in the value of hogs its farmers sell for processing into meat products such as bacon, chops, ribs and roasts. Minnesota continues to rank third in hog numbers. Minnesota pork producers marketed 15 million hogs last year."<sup>2</sup>

The Minnesota Department of Agriculture, in a report this year on the industry, said the state ranks third nationally in pork exports, based on 2007 sales of nearly \$300 million. Exports accounted for about 14 percent of Minnesota's total pork production in 2007, compared with 7 percent a decade earlier, according to the report.

Through the third

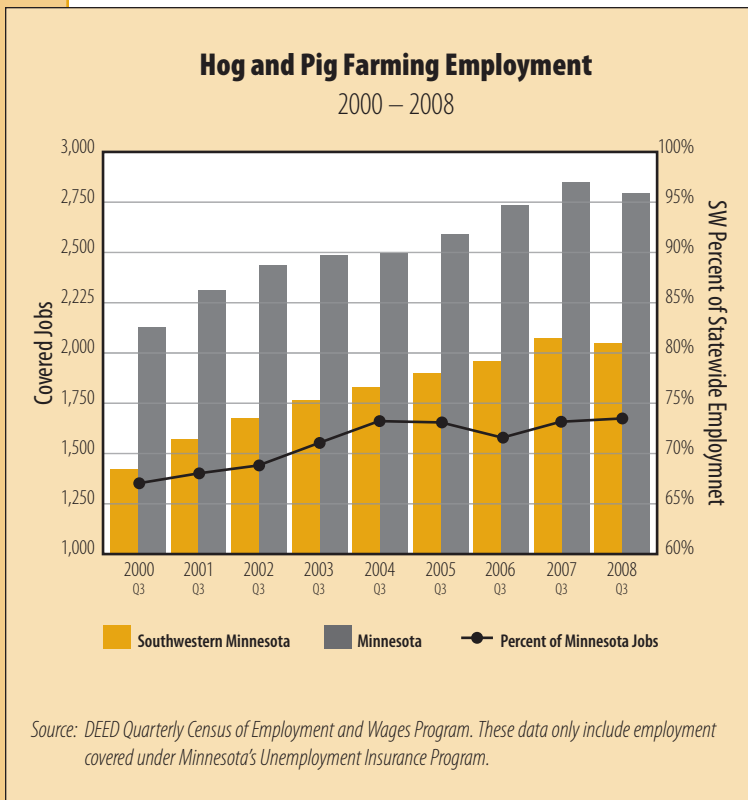
quarter of 2008, the 23-county Southwest Planning Region was home to nearly three-fourths of the state's covered employment<sup>3</sup> in hog and pig farming, as well as two-thirds of the state's hog and pig farms. The industry has seen strong employment growth during the decade, with jobs expanding 44 percent from the third quarter of 2000 to the third quarter of 2008, primarily in southwestern Minnesota (see Figure 1).

### Growing Hog Wild

In the third quarter of 2000,



FIGURE 1



there were more than 1,400 covered jobs at 126 hog and pig farming establishments in southwestern Minnesota, which was 66.8 percent of total statewide industry employment. By the third quarter of 2008, there were 2,035 jobs at 144 hog and pig farming establishments in the region, accounting for 73.2 percent of statewide employment.

Three economic development regions exist within the Southwest Planning Region. With 18,892 covered jobs in the third quarter of 2008, Region 6W (Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac Qui Parle, Swift and Yellow Medicine counties) is the

smallest; followed by Region 8 (Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood and Rock counties) with 54,127 jobs and Region 9 (Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, Le Sueur, Martin, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca and Watonwan counties) with 104,935 jobs.

Region 9 has two-thirds of the region's hog and pig farming employment (1,377 jobs) after adding 355 net new jobs from the third quarter of 2000 to the third quarter of 2008. Region 8 gained nearly 200 net jobs in hog and pig farming, a 57.1 percent increase. And although it has the fewest hog farms and jobs, Region 6W had the fastest employment growth. From 2000 to 2008, hog and pig farming jobs jumped 158 percent in the region, from 45 to 116 jobs (see Table 1).

The total impact of hog and pig production on the regional economy is much larger because these figures do not include self-employed farmers who have no employees. Nor do

these figures highlight the close connection of the industry to the local production of beans, corn and grain for feedstock. On the other end of the production cycle, animal slaughtering and processing industries also employ about 3,000 people in the region. Altogether, agribusiness-related industries account for more than 21,000 jobs in southwestern Minnesota.

### Occupations in Demand

Hog and pig farming operations have added more than 600 jobs this decade, even though the recession has slowed overall hiring in the region. DEED's Job Vacancy Survey shows that the agricultural sector consistently has some of the highest job vacancy rates in the region. During the fourth quarter of 2008, the 21 agricultural equipment operator openings and 56 farm and ranch animal worker openings represented vacancy rates of more than 30 percent, compared with the



overall 1.7 percent job vacancy rate in the region.

But these are not the only jobs available. According to the National Pork Board, a wide variety of jobs are available in hog and pig farming — in areas that most people probably wouldn't think about. To increase the interest of job seekers, the National Pork Board developed a careers Web site at [www.pork.org/Careers/Default.aspx](http://www.pork.org/Careers/Default.aspx) that includes an interactive organizational chart, a career pathway guide and a video of people employed in the industry.

## Bringing Home the Bacon

Many of the people featured in the video work for Christensen Farms, the largest family-owned swine producer in the world, which is headquartered in Brown County in Region 9. As one of the nation's top three producers, the company raises 3 million pigs a year — enough fresh pork to feed more than 12 million people annually.

Like other hog and pig farming operations, Christensen Farms has jobs ranging from the field to the office, and everywhere in

TABLE 1

Hog and Pig Farming Covered Employment 2000 to 2008							
	Number of Jobs					Job Change	
	Q3 2000	Q3 2002	Q3 2004	Q3 2006	Q3 2008	2000-2008	2000-2008
Region 6W	45	56	83	98	116	71	157.8%
Region 8	345	442	471	531	542	197	57.1%
Region 9	1,022	1,160	1,262	1,315	1,377	355	34.7%
Southwest Minnesota	1,412	1,658	1,816	1,945	2,035	623	44.1%
State of Minnesota	2,115	2,421	2,486	2,726	2,780	665	31.4%

Region 6W: Big Stone, Chippewa, Lac Qui Parle, Swift and Yellow Medicine counties  
 Region 8: Cottonwood, Jackson, Lincoln, Lyon, Murray, Nobles, Pipestone, Redwood and Rock counties  
 Region 9: Blue Earth, Brown, Faribault, Le Sueur, Martin, Nicollet, Sibley, Waseca and Watonwan counties

Source: DEED Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) Program

between, including agronomy, business development, construction, feed mill, financial services, human resources, information technology, logistics and transportation, production and research.<sup>4</sup>

The hog and pig farming industry has created strong job and career opportunities in the Southwest Planning Region, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture projects industry growth to continue through at least the next decade. 



### ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Remarks by U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack during a media briefing on April 28, 2009, on the H1N1 flu outbreak. Retrieved from [www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr\\_1240965057737.shtm](http://www.dhs.gov/ynews/releases/pr_1240965057737.shtm).

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from [www.extension.umn.edu/SwineProduction/about.html](http://www.extension.umn.edu/SwineProduction/about.html).

<sup>3</sup> Covered employment refers to all jobs covered by the Minnesota Unemployment Insurance Program. This represents about 97 percent of employment statewide but does not include family farmers, who are not covered by UI.

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from [www.christensenfarms.com/](http://www.christensenfarms.com/).