Business leaders in southern Greater Minnesota are confident they will overcome the obstacles that threaten economic growth.
Thank you to our partners!

Ardent Mills  BREMER BANK  Crystal Valley

Special thank you to the staff at the Minnesota State Southern Agricultural Center of Excellence and Nathan Hanel for their work organizing this survey and report.

Focus Group Hosts:

Faribault Area Chamber of Commerce - Faribault, MN
Development Corporation of Austin - Austin, MN
Fairmont Economic Development - Fairmont, MN
Marshall Economic Development Authority - Marshall, MN
Greater Mankato Growth - Mankato, MN

Facilitated by: Tom Mason
Mason Public Affairs/Custom Publishing
The Inaugural State of Agriculture

Despite concerns about the chronic and growing shortage of a qualified workforce—among other economic challenges—the members of southern Greater Minnesota business communities remain optimistic about their prospective vitality, according to the State of Agriculture, a public opinion survey conducted over late summer and fall.

We at GreenSeam, along with our partners, set out this summer to get a statistically relevant glimpse of how these leaders view the economic prospects of their economies.

To do that, we started in June with a series of five focus groups, followed by an internet survey of business leaders in southern Greater Minnesota, which elicited interviews with 153 respondents. This document will reveal what we discovered. We include a complete review of our questionnaire and edited transcripts of each focus group.

The results were fascinating: While citing community pressures about affordable housing, available child care, health care and an unpredictable farm economy, a majority of respondents said they were either “very optimistic” (16.4 percent) or “somewhat optimistic” (52.7 percent) about the economic prospects of their local communities over the next five years. A full 62.3 percent of respondents said the region is headed in the right direction; only 23.3 percent said it was headed in the wrong direction.

Respondents were slightly less sanguine about the state of agriculture in their communities. In all, 4.8 percent said it was “excellent,” 16.4 percent said it was “very good,” and 28.8 percent said it was “good.”

Only 14.9 percent of respondents expect their businesses to decline in 2020, according to the survey. On the other hand, 41.8 percent anticipate growth, and 36.8 percent expect “no real change.” A whopping 82.6 percent of respondents expect their businesses to grow over the next five years.

Workforce issues present a paradoxical challenge to area employers. While they are anxious about the effects of the chronic and ongoing worker shortage, they also show concern whether their local economies present sufficient opportunities to keep their young people home. A resounding 85.6 percent of respondents declared that the shortage of workers will have a significant impact on their businesses and community. At the same time, 85.5 percent of respondents are either “very concerned” or “somewhat concerned” that many of Greater Minnesota’s young and talented residents are leaving their communities because of the lack of opportunity.

In other findings, respondents cited additional factors that were having an impact on their businesses:

- The shortage of affordable housing—significant impact, 19.4 percent; some impact, 52.4 percent.
- The shortage of available health care—significant impact, 25 percent; some impact, 48.4 percent.
- The shortage of child care facilities—significant impact, 28.2 percent, some impact, 46 percent.
- The shortage of high-speed internet—significant impact, 23.4 percent; some impact, 35.5 percent.
2019 State of Agriculture Survey Report

Response Counts

TOTAL: 153

1. Generally speaking, do you think that things in Greater Minnesota as a whole are going in the right direction, or have they gotten off on the wrong direction?

- Right direction: 60.3% (88 responses)
- Wrong direction: 19.2% (28 responses)
- Don't know: 20.5% (30 responses)

Totals: 146
2. How would you describe your personal attitude about the economic prospects of your community in the next five years?

- **Very optimistic**: 16.4% (24 responses)
- **Somewhat optimistic**: 52.7% (77 responses)
- **Somewhat pessimistic**: 23.3% (34 responses)
- **Very pessimistic**: 6.2% (9 responses)
- **Don’t know**: 1.4% (2 responses)

**Totals**: 146
3. Please use a few words to describe why you feel that way.

4. Generally speaking, do you think that the state of agriculture in our region as a whole is going in the right direction, or has it gone in the wrong direction?

- Right direction: 62.3% (91 responses)
- Wrong direction: 23.3% (34 responses)
- Don't know: 14.4% (21 responses)

Totals: 146
5. Describe the condition of your local economy as it relates to agriculture; how would you describe the “state of agriculture” in your community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Good</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fair</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Totals: 146*
6. Thinking about the upcoming year, in 2020, do you anticipate growth, decline, or no real change to your business?

- **42% Growth**
- **15% Decline**
- **37% No real change**
- **7% Don't know**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>41.8%</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No real change</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 134
7. What percentage of growth do you see your business experiencing this year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 10%</td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5% -10%</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1%-4%</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 134
8. Thinking about the next five years, what percentage of growth do you see your business experiencing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 10%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%-10%</td>
<td>36.8%</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1%-4%</td>
<td>29.3%</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 133
9. Which ONE or TWO of the following issues threaten your business’ ability to grow profitably? - SELECT UP TO TWO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regulations</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care costs</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child care shortage</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing shortage</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and logistics</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of skilled workers</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of any workers</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Generally speaking, how concerned are you that many of Greater Minnesota’s young and talented residents are leaving their communities because of the lack of opportunity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very concerned</td>
<td>41.4%</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat concerned</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too concerned</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not concerned at all</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>2.3%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 133
11. Let's say you were to advise a local high school student. How would you characterize the outlook for future prospects of remaining in your community, raise a family, and find a stable career with competitive wages and benefits?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The future is bright with opportunities</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The future has some possibilities, but probably not for everyone</td>
<td>51.2%</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The future doesn't look hopeful</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would encourage them to look elsewhere</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I honestly don't know</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals:</strong></td>
<td><strong>125</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12. How useful do you feel it is for communities to work together to promote their opportunities and to address some of the challenges that face Greater Minnesota?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very useful</td>
<td>74.4%</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat useful</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too useful</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not useful at all</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Totals: 125*
13. Minnesota statewide is facing an unprecedented shortage of available workers. An economic research firm in St. Paul predicts that the number of unfilled jobs in Minnesota will soar from 60,000 today, to perhaps 240,000 within four years. What’s your sense of how this will affect your business and community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It will have little or no affect</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will inflict significant harm to our local employers, but they’ll cope</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It will inflict significant long-term (5+ years) harm to our local employers</td>
<td>25.6%</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is already having a significant impact on our local economy today</td>
<td>36.0%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 125
14. Does your business offer student internships or student tours to help young people learn more about career opportunities in your business?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, we aggressively pursue internships and student tours</td>
<td>34.4%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We’re starting to get involved</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We don’t do it, but we think we should</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, I do not believe it is worth our time</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 125
15. Do you think an increased number of immigrant workers would help alleviate the talent shortage in your business?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely, they provide an option to grow my business</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possibly, but this would require change management for my business</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'd consider it, but I need more information</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not likely, not really interested</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 125
16. What do you feel are the most important skills needed in today’s workforce? - SELECT YOUR TOP TWO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication Skills</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy skills in agriculture</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical skills</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematical application skills</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible work ethic</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills deep in agricultural knowledge</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative problem solving skills</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
17. What do you feel the most important needed skills will be in 5 years? - SELECT YOUR TOP TWO

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy skills in agriculture</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical skills</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematical application skills</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsible work ethic</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills deep in agricultural knowledge</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creative problem solving skills</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
18. Do you pay for post-secondary education for your employees?

- **Yes, we fully reimburse college tuition expenses**
  - Percent: 6.5%
  - Responses: 8

- **Yes, we provide partial tuition reimbursements**
  - Percent: 22.6%
  - Responses: 28

- **No, but we’re considering it**
  - Percent: 14.5%
  - Responses: 18

- **No, we’re not likely to do it**
  - Percent: 56.5%
  - Responses: 70

**Totals: 124**
19. Would you say the shortage of affordable housing has an influence on your business and other employers in your community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant impact</td>
<td>19.4%</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some impact</td>
<td>52.4%</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much impact</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No impact</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Totals: 124**
20. Would you say the shortage of available health care has an influence on your business and other employers in your community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant impact</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some impact</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much impact</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No impact</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Totals: 124**
21. Would you say the shortage of high speed internet has an influence on your business and other employers in your community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant impact</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some impact</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much impact</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No impact</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 124
22. Would you say the shortage of child care facilities has an influence on your business and other employers in your community?

- Significant impact: 28.2% (35 responses)
- Some impact: 46.0% (57 responses)
- Not much impact: 17.7% (22 responses)
- No impact: 8.1% (10 responses)

**Totals:** 124
23. Would you say the shortage of qualified workers has an influence on your business and other employers in your community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Significant impact</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some impact</td>
<td>47.6%</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not much impact</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No impact</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 124
24. When it comes to careers in or related to agriculture, are you encouraging your family and friends to take food, agriculture and natural resources classes and courses in K-12 and college? Which of the following comes closest to how you feel?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absolutely - I see an unlimited amount of potential</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes, they should have an understanding of the industry</td>
<td>39.5%</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would be helpful, but not necessary</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don’t see a value with this</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No, it is a challenging sector and I would steer them away</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>4.0%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Totals: 124*
25. When you think about the effects of government regulations on your business, which regulations are the MOST burdensome?

![Pie chart showing the percentage of respondents' choices for the most burdensome regulations.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local regulations</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State regulations</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal regulations</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 124
26. Are there any additional challenges or opportunities you feel need to be addressed that were not included here? Please identify and explain any other challenges or opportunities that come to mind.

27. Gender:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>61.0%</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34.1%</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 123
28. Year you were born: (YYYY)

29. What is your zip code?
30. Which of the following describes your line of work or entrepreneurial industry (choose the one closest)?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tr>
<td>Farming</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food processing</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Professional services</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 123
31. How many years has your business been in operation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 years</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>7-10 years</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-15 years</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 years or more</td>
<td>81.3%</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 123
32. How many people does your business employ in Minnesota?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 10</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-25</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>26-50</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-100</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>101-150</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>151-250</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 250</td>
<td>18.7%</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>2.4%</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 123
33. What are your annual business revenues?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under $1 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than $1 million to $5 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>More than $5 million to $10 million</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $10 million to $20 million</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $20 million</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don't know</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to answer</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Totals: 123
What’s your overall sense of the economy as it relates to agriculture?

- Cautiously optimistic. This year, with the wet conditions, there are a lot of areas that didn’t get their crops planted on time. From a crop-planting standpoint, we’re going to have a tough year. But you have to be optimistic.

- If you’re a farmer and you’re not optimistic, you might as well get up and walk out the door.

- To me, and I’ve said this to a lot of people, we’re sitting on a time bomb. The reality has to come out. Go to any small town, and everything is in bad shape. When is the public going to understand that if the crop isn’t there, the pork isn’t there. For years, America sat with cheap food. Both parties said, “Keep the public on cheap food. We’ll give the farmers some money, just enough so they can stay running. We don’t want to make any money, we just want to keep them going. We’ll be optimistic, next year will be better.” Those days are gone.

You say you have to be optimistic, but you’ve argued there is no reason to be optimistic.

- We’re not talking about it because small town America is in real tough shape. Just drive around and look. I hate bankers and would hate to be in finance today. I hear, “Oh well, it’s the farmers’ fault.” I’d like to see any company, any employee, take a five, 10 percent loss in wages.

So, what’s the solution? How do you defuse that time bomb? Is it government action? Is it markets? What would you suggest?

- All of the above. Look at China. Where’s that pork coming from? As I’ve said to people for the last number of years, they’re no longer worried about America. It’s who comes in and says, “I’ll pay you more.” That’s where the pork’s going to go. When is the American consumer going to realize that they want a pork chop and it’s $14?

With 25 years in banking under your belt, how do you respond to that?

- We are in a very mature industry, and it’s the volatility that we’ve seen that has created some good opportunities and some very bad opportunities. But from a standpoint of farmers and ag businesses, yeah we all pretty much walk around with our glass half full, we always have. We’re always looking at that next year. Currently, we’ve been in four years of a down cycle, and the down cycle has forced a consolidation of production and agriculture. I’m cautiously optimistic.

- We have a weird situation going on with production right now, but we also have some very good opportunities as far as interest rates, economics and people.
wanting to be involved in agriculture. I think our production is changing. We’re talking about controlled environment agriculture, water quality. We always have to have some type of black swan that is going to change things, and I think that we are doing that this year.

Do you see that pendulum coming back?

• When you look over the past 20 years in agriculture, we don’t have family farms anymore because everybody has to be bigger and better. When we lost the family farms, we lost all of our small towns. No more hardware stores in the small towns. It seems like we’re corporate America, and I don’t think that’s a good thing.

• I’m from New Prague, and we don’t have an FFA chapter in our high school anymore. There are very few FFA chapters in any high school. When you go and talk to the individuals they say, “Well, the numbers aren’t there. If the numbers aren’t there we’re not going to support this. We’re not going to spend the money because we have to learn math and science.” And we forget about everything else. Heaven forbid if our test scores are low. So, we forgot about all these people. We tell them they have to go to college. Everybody doesn’t have to go to college to survive in life. What’s wrong with going to a vocational school or some type of school like that and picking up a trade and being in a trade? The unions and the workforce are crying for people, they can’t find people to work. Nobody wants to work.

• I think the bigger problem too is we’re coming into our second generation of people being on welfare. Mom and Dad went on welfare, their kids are on welfare, and that’s all they know. They don’t have to work because Uncle Sam is going to give them a check. Sooner or later we’re not going to have the money to pay the taxes to support these people who don’t want to work. Sooner or later we have to get back to an ethic where everybody has to work in America to make things work.

Let’s try to unpack that. On one hand, ag is diminishing as an economic force; on the other hand, there are companies in Greater Minnesota begging for employees. Does that mean that in Greater Minnesota and other rural areas businesses are less dependent on agriculture?

• Animals aren’t going to give you fabric. Agriculture is essential; that’s what builds America.

One senator used to say, “When agriculture hums, all of Minnesota hums.” Does that still apply?

• That’s the economic engine for a lot of what drives rural communities. I realize population is reduced. And I agree that the family farm as I knew it has changed. The progressive family farmers are using new, innovative ways and approaches, but there’s a lack of qualified people or even people willing to do the necessary job functions that apply to farming and producing pork, milk or whatever. But it also applies to retail agriculture that serves farms. They’re struggling to find people because of the seasonality of the work hours and that work-life balance. It’s a new generation of workers who don’t
understand or don’t see that work as a necessary part of life.

**How might an educator respond to that?**

- From a labor standpoint, the disconnect that I see is the occupations where you can earn a living wage require a significant amount of hours that many people aren’t willing to commit to. The occupations that give them the hours they’re willing to accept don’t pay them a living wage.

**Are there still ample opportunities for young people to stay and live in Greater Minnesota if they choose to?**

- I think they’re fewer. [NAME] talked about how we lost family farms in the last 20 years. Farm numbers have dwindled since the Homestead Act expired. That’s a statistical fact. Now we’ve had different economic events that have accelerated that. The biggest transformation that I see going on in agriculture right now is in the dairy industry. Nobody can deny that. The family farm as we know it, from a dairy standpoint, is extremely endangered. It’s going to become only hogs and turkeys.

- The businesses in those categories see tremendous opportunities because they thrive on other peoples’ failures. That’s not unique to agriculture. When there’s a $400 acre profit swing between the top and the bottom, the guys at the top are making a crazy amount of money because they’re doing a lot of things well. The ones on the bottom are wondering what the hell they are going to do.

**What’s the solution? Where does it come from?**

- The question becomes how do we in ag business and production agriculture respond to what the consumers are asking for? That’s part of the reason why the dairy industry is in the state that it is, because nobody drinks a gallon of milk a week anymore. Things have changed.

- Here’s an embarrassing example. Last week I attended the National Farm Business Management Conference in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. Milk was not an option with our sponsored meals. We’re in Sheboygan, Wisconsin at the National Farm Business Management Conference. How screwed up is that?

- If you go out to family farms, whether they’re small or larger family farms, they’re putting all their money into their animals, and their infrastructures are falling apart. They have heaters in there that are 15, 20, 30 years old. They only have, say, 3 feet of gas line attached to them, so if something happens and it falls, it causes a fire. The buildings are self-destructing now. All these buildings are 50, 60, 70, 80 years old, and they’re packing more animals into these same buildings.

**Are these cash flow issues?**

- Where would you rather put your money? Into your animal that feeds you or into the building?

- We’re living off depreciations because the margins don’t allow you to replace it.

- We’re losing a million acres a year in the U.S. alone of agriculture production due to the expansion of cities and homes. There are more people in this world every year, and everybody has to eat. We have a lot of farmers who are retiring and want to have the highest dollar, so they’re not giving young people who don’t have a big cash flow an opportunity. They just go to whoever pays the most. Are things tight? Yeah.

**They’re always tight.**

- The farms that are increasing in size are your smaller operations, where you have an off-farm job, as well. Then you have your large farms that are increasing in size, and what we call the middle or the ground farms that are losing. But I think there’s a lot of innovation, a lot of ideas to figure out how to
diversify. One crop failure like we’re having this year and the world is concerned.

- Somebody was telling me it takes what, 50 years for a farmer to pay off his farm?

- It’s tough to find individuals. If you can go work an 8am-5pm shift for a corporation, and you don’t have to work day in and day out to make a living, what are you going to do? How do you keep these young individuals? If you want to go out and buy a farm you better have at the minimum $5,000 for an acre of land. Not many young individuals can go to the bank and say, “I want to buy a farm.” You can’t do it, can you? Unless you have another source of income that can subsidize what you want to do.

- I think about how many young farmers are contracting with a large integrator saying, “Okay, I’ll produce x number of pigs a year, I’ve got the guarantee cash flow income.” That provides another revenue stream for the farm so he can participate in the crop production part of the farming.

- Innovating is not a new thing. I was at a conference in Kansas City, and I’m sitting across the aisle from a person whose quest is to save agriculture and the family farms. We spent a lot of time talking about how you get to deal with decisions made in farming operations every day. The point is, those who adapt and innovate, they will keep their production cost low, and they will manage their financial piece more adequately. Progress will continue.

- In southeast Minnesota, there are four people for every job opening. So physically, there are not enough job seekers for the jobs that we have available. I think it’s forcing a lot of our employers to be creative about how they’re fulfilling their needs as an industry. The innovation that’s happening is forcing people out of their comfort zone. We haven’t had to come to these solutions for a very long time. But, it’s bringing new solutions to the table and allowing ourselves to do the production that we need to do without the people.

- General managers of large cooperatives are finding ways to create drivers to do the tender duties in the spring. Some of them were hauling grain in the fall. They’re looking at how to create a work environment that keeps these people employed year round so they have a pool of people to draw from to meet those requirements. They’re thinking non-traditionally about how they use their truck fleets, and they’re doing some different things. They’re innovating and they’re adapting and they are the ones who are thriving.

Does lack of cash flow inhibit people from being able to innovate?

- Oh, absolutely.

- I’m 78 years of age. I got a phone call from a national boiler insurance company, and it was the vice president begging me to come back and do boiler inspections. He said, “Hey [NAME], what if we sent a young guy with you? What if we do this? What if we do that? You tell us when you want to work because nobody wants to work.” My answer was, “I can’t climb a ladder anymore.” You’re on a ladder to inspect boilers. You’re up 20 feet. You’re crawling around.

- When I graduated, my mother was asked, “And what college is [NAME] going to next year?” Mother said, “He’s going to St. Paul Vocational, he’s going to become a plumber.” To which she was told, in the spring of 1959, “I’m sorry he isn’t smart enough to go to college.”

- For the first time in a long time, we have an increase in population in rural areas. There’s a reason for that. How do we
keep that going? How do we have that progress and have southern Minnesota be part of that epicenter for agriculture? That’s really the question. We can’t control economics, we can’t control the consumer, but we can control our own destination here in southern Minnesota. I think that’s where we want to go with this because we do have some very productive land, we have some very good resources, we have very good ag businesses, and we have excellent farmers. So, how do we get to that next level? We all want to get to that next level. The status quo is just not there.

There is a company in St. Paul that forecasts there will be something like 260,000 unfilled jobs within four years, which they say might have the economic impact of a recession. How do you attract people to southern Minnesota in order to fill those jobs?

- Southeast Minnesota is projected to see a 13 percent increase in population before 2040. My concern is, how are we educating the people coming into our territory to fill the skills gap? We may have the bodies, but we need to be creative with how we’re placing these people into those industries and make sure they have the proper training or the knowledge basis.

- A lot of our large employers are working with South Central College and the resources available through the state of Minnesota to train those workers. But, it really is, “Okay, we may have the people but then how are we educating them into these forces?”

- We have to be positive about our region. Don Ness, who was the mayor of Duluth in the ‘80s, said, “We can’t attract people and tell people to come here and start a business until we have our own house straight,” and I think that’s a part of agriculture. In the papers today, you read that agriculture is really hurting from a production level, but yet you’ll still see people investing. You still see value added. You could pick on soy beans right now, but we’re getting $1.50 a bushel more here than in North Dakota thanks to our processing in southern Minnesota. We have so much value added production that there is a market here for a lot of things that other places don’t have. We have pork processing, and without the meat industry, this region wouldn’t be as prosperous as it is or it wouldn’t be a reinvestment in some of the things that we have. I think we have to change our culture and our conversation a little bit to go, “Yeah, it’s not great, we are consolidating, there are a lot of struggles.” But I don’t think we’ll attract these workers if the newspaper every morning wakes us up and says, “Agriculture is not an industry to get into. Stay away.”

- I don’t care what industry you’re in, the prosperous demographic is not bragging. They’re not the ones calling the media to say, “Look at all the money I’m making” because that draws a lot of undue attention. It’s the people who are struggling that are saying, “Please help me.” Back to this job thing, if we go from 60,000 unfilled jobs to 260,000 unfilled jobs, is it because these jobs don’t pay enough? Is it because we don’t have enough workers?

- We also know that there are people who don’t work and live. There’s part of our employment gap.

- It’s basic economics. You raise the minimum wage, the cost of living goes up, and we’re back in the same damn place we started. That’s not rocket science.

- [NAME] bought some kind of hog facility and started it two years ago in Windom. He’s gone from 0 employees to 500 employees in two years. What’s the magic sauce? What is he seeing that others don’t? Is he the big guy who has the
resources to do that?

• But I think it’s targeted pork, right?

• They are still 300 plus short though. They need to run more shifts to be profitable.

• Are they? I gathered the demand from China is helping.

• They’re still not having the level of success that they need to.

• Our grandson attended the Ag Food and Science Academy in the North Metro. They wanted to create an environment where metro/urban students have an opportunity to experience and learn about food science. Great, we have new people who traditionally wouldn’t even have looked at ag as a career path. If they’re given that option or that awareness, they may have a bigger interest.

I have two questions before we run out of time. How important is publicizing the sometimes unreported good news of Greater Minnesota? And if so, who does it?

• We feel it’s really important to educate and make sure conservation is at the forefront. Also, we want people to be aware of all the opportunities. Three years ago, we hired a half-time position to strictly educate and promote our efforts. Historically, we’ve been doing outstanding conservationist work, and that continues. We have a forestry award; we’re trying to recognize farmers.

• We’re meeting to work on ways to promote good land stewardship and conservation, but these companies are at the table because they want to know how they can have their growers grow in a sustainable and conservation-minded way. This way, they can tell their consumers, “Hey, that pork that you’re eating was raised by an environmentally-conscious farmer.” A lot of these companies are going to start offering incentives. Some of them are just outright saying, “If you’re going to supply food or pigs to us, we demand this and that be done.”

• That’s probably why our employment rate is so low too. Businesses can’t afford employees because the margins are so tight. They can’t afford the trainee, the internship, that type of thing. If they can’t hire someone who can hit the ground running and make some money for them right away, they’re not hiring. That’s part of it. It’s that skillset that’s missing from everybody.
Let’s start with a simple question: What’s the biggest agriculture economic issue that you face in this community?

- I think we have to figure out how to work together more regionally to solve some of these challenges that every community faces regarding talent and supply chain. Everybody gets in their own silo, and it’s a challenge to get out sometimes.

- I think the biggest opportunity is getting outside of silos, more collaboration, and then seeing our region help our farmers be more profitable. I’m in the regulatory world, and I think a big challenge is that the EPA nails people because they put a decimal in the wrong spot in a really complex regulatory report. So, I think we should look at how to make that world a little friendlier for the small business owner who’s trying to make a go of it.

- I guess one of the greatest opportunities I see from an ag perspective is our resources. When I think of rural Minnesota, I think of western Minnesota and a lack of other opportunities. So, I look at Austin, I look at southern Minnesota, our rail, our highway system, our distribution opportunities coming from here, and there are great opportunities staring us in the face. The greatest challenge from an agricultural perspective is regulatory oversight. I would concur with you there. And the flip side is the political environment we’re facing right now with outside pressures we can’t control.

- I think we have resources with our soils and our people, who are very unique in work ethic. But one challenge is that jobs are plentiful. So, it’s hard keeping students in college long enough to graduate when they can take a job instead. One student took a job and did not graduate and probably won’t. I asked, “Are you coming back? We’d love to have you here to finish your degree.” “No, I got a job as a manager. I have a nice truck, benefits, and a $40,000 income. I’m happy.” So, we have some challenges, but we can overcome them.

- I travel around quite a bit, but I’ve seen a lot of changing landscape over the years with our ethanol industry, energy industry, and all the solar stuff happening out there. So, we’ve got a lot of different resources and income coming into the area. We also have some more value add that could happen with some of our methane opportunities to create an industry that would be quite huge in our area. Installing windmills and ethanol plants in the last 30 years has changed our environment out there, including income levels for the farms. That’s a big value add. Energy is still a big subject in this country, and I think we need to look at the energy resources we can develop in our area to be more self-sustaining and not depend on foreign
crude oil.

- As we continue to grow and expand our company, we’ll continue to look for more talent to fill some of those roles. Having said that, the challenge now is finding the right type of candidate or talented student to come in and take those roles in southern Minnesota and want to work in that type of ag plant environment.

- I hear more and more about the value add opportunities. Several people have brought that up. Producing something other than corn, soybeans and hogs, or variations of those things, seems like the trend. I think the flip side is the challenge of assisting people who are switching gears from what they’ve been doing for generations.

- It’s definitely the commodity market. Actually, pork is the shining light right now. But, due to unfortunate circumstances in other countries and some of the trade stuff, we can’t influence that. But there is a lot of opportunity. The world is growing more people. People do need to eat, and we have some of the best soils in the world. So, I think there’s a lot of opportunity for how we grow. It’s just the integration and changing dynamics of a family farm that frustrates some people, and we can’t always change those things. How do you attract young people to ag when you pick up the newspaper and the only thing you think about is crop production? How do you get people to think that there are other good opportunities in ag?

An organization in the Twin Cities predicts that in just four years there will be about a quarter of a million unfilled jobs all across Minnesota. How do you think that will affect the local economy?

- There’s going to be a lot more jobs out there, and we need to come up with a strategy to figure that out. I know we’ve also talked a lot about automation, that’s going to help. But still, we’re going to need people to help fill these jobs. How are we going to get enough people on the plant side to help fill all these positions? How do we get more people to come and work for us? Right now, I feel we’re just taking people from a different company and then moving them to our company. We’re poaching people basically. And then they poach our people. So, it’s not really helping us.

As Baby Boomers are retiring, there just aren’t enough young people to fill their jobs. What’s the perspective of our educator here? Are you seeing fewer people wanting to come and get qualified for a career?

- I think so. In the medical field, there’s a pretty structured pathway. And you need the curriculum and the certifications to align. Employers will say, “We can’t hire you unless you have that RN designation.” We don’t really find that very often in agriculture. Of course employers want people they can train them themselves, to a certain degree, but that does give us some headaches.

How about your work with companies that seek help on internal training?

- We have an internship program on the books. We don’t have that fully developed yet, but that would be one example. And hopefully they would hire those people.

- We’re seeing high schools feeling pressure from the industry. Finally, the programs are being brought back. Mankato just hired its first ag teacher in over 25 years. Crystal hired its second one. St. Peter has two or three teachers, and they’re full. There are a lot of holes out there, but I think people are starting to put enough pressure on education systems because students don’t even know the basic principles of ag.
Are parents, counselors and teachers starting to understand the value of a tech education, or do they still mostly focus on the four-year college track?

- I know at some of our plant locations we’re encouraging plant professionals to go back to school and get something like a maintenance tech degree—doesn’t have to be a four-year degree. We will provide more of an apprenticeship where they can work part-time and then go to school at the local community college. Then once they get their degree, they can advance into higher level positions. This is a way for us to at least get people a little bit more interested and help alleviate some of those financial factors when it comes to going to school and getting a two-year degree. So, that’s helped, but there are still more positions we need to fill, and it does take time to get that ball rolling and get that employee to get his or her degree as well.

As a banker, where do you see Austin’s economy, say, five years down the road?

- I think Austin is very unique because of our reliance on an incredible employer. When we think about Austin as a community, our reliance on ag is huge. Geographically, we have a tremendous amount of corn and soy production. Much of what we’re doing today is driven from an agricultural scope and perspective. But as you look around the community, we have one large employer that a lot of other companies are supporting. When we think of [COMPANY], they’re absolutely in agriculture. Those supporting entities may not be. We may have electrical, we may have other things that people wouldn’t necessarily think about as an ag scope, but they are absolutely feeding the giant that is agriculture related. So, much of it derives from that. Will it look different five years down the road? Will it be more diverse in our community for a broader spectrum of agriculture? That depends on a lot of different factors. What else can we bring here to this community other than soy, corn, and hogs? Can we get some dairy? What role does hemp play in the future of this? You don’t develop this stuff over night. You don’t get the business plan put in place immediately, and you don’t attract the capital in a heartbeat. So, five years from now, do we have the grassroots effort to expand? I don’t know. It would be great to think we could.

Others? How optimistic are you for how Austin will look in five years?

- [COMPANY] is an exceptionally stable company. Unemployment in Austin for many decades has been low. And with this discussion, obviously that’s not going to change unless [COMPANY] went somewhere or shut down. And that doesn’t seem likely. We also have the [COMPANY] Foundation, which owns 47 percent, 48 percent of the company. And that, too, is not going anywhere. So, they’re a continued investment.

- I have people who are retirement age, and I have people in their twenties. And they look very different. The people in their twenties, they’re just starting a family. Some of them have side businesses. The people who are near retirement might be fine with the 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. position, but the people in their twenties or thirties, they’re wanting to do other things. What’s running through my mind is trying to figure out that unique balance of what to offer these people to retain them so they’re not looking at other companies. I don’t know if anyone has the magic answer to what that is. I mean, the people who we’re hiring now, they’re just coming out of school and look different than people who have been in the workforce for a long time.

What about immigration? Some employers are showing great creativity by working with
immigrant communities.

- I think you’re talking about [COMPANY] over in Albert Lea. They have a large Karen population. When I was with [COMPANY], I managed to get a few of their folks into the plant. They are a wonderful group of people, and I really enjoyed working with them. We have great resources in our community to help integrate those new populations. We’re very much a welcoming community and have been designated as such, and those efforts continue. But I hear from a number of members that they are actually looking to see what they can do to enhance automation because there are just not enough people. But there are still so many jobs that really have to be done by a human. It’s about how to make that balance. Automation’s great, but you still need to have those trained operators who know how to run the machines. There continues to be a lot of challenges. And attracting people into certain businesses also has to do with housing issues and lack of child care.

Where do the laws of supply and demand fit into this? If there’s a greater demand for housing, why isn’t there supply?

- Because other areas are growing rapidly. You look at some of our other communities, Rochester for instance, where there’s a bigger draw. If I’m an investor looking to put up rental housing or looking to put up apartment complexes, I know that I can draw from a mass of people versus taking that investment and putting it here into Austin as somewhat of an unknown. Now, on the flip side of that, we haven’t seen hotels go up for quite some time. We have one that’s going up, one that’s in discussions and another one that’s being talked about. Will that lead to more development of rental properties here in this community? Maybe that will be a trickle down effect that will attract more investment into apartments or housing.

Since you brought it up, how do you see Rochester’s role as a destination community affecting Austin?

- Rochester does have some of the same housing issues that we have. It’s a scale. They have a lot more available, but its 100,000 population makes a big difference as well. One challenge in Minnesota is we have extra regulations. It costs 20 percent more to build in Minnesota than it does in Wisconsin or Iowa. It really impacts people. And the housing side of it, certainly in the commercial situation, it’s the same. Is Minnesota perceived as a tax friendly state? I would say perhaps not. We have a
great quality of life, but we also have very high taxes.

Where does child care fit into this picture?

• Many people from our team have been in discussion about child care and the need for it and what we can do.

• Part of that challenge goes back to the legislation that impacted child care, and we lost 70 in-home providers in our community. I’m not sure what the exact number is, but I heard it’s as many as 150 openings that we need for child care.

• I think for a newborn, you’re looking at a waiting list of nine months to a year.

• But also, I think every community’s trying to reinvent the wheel. In Mankato, they’re realizing they’re dealing with the same issues. They’re going back to Albert Lea and saying, “Hey, why don’t we work with Mankato and collaborate rather than think of them as the competition?” I think there can be a lot more collaboration between Austin and Albert Lea. We’re all trying to solve the same thing, and it’s core to our region. Rather than trying to compete with each other, we can solve things together, see what works for you, duplicate that and draw people to our region rather than fighting over people going back and forth amongst our communities.

• I have someone from the city who talks about their day care costing $17,000 a year. Now whether the child’s there or not, they still have to pay for that day care. You have to have a pretty high income to afford that. In Austin, we have a lot of people who are getting health care from the Department of Health, and they’re still working full time. There’s a big differential in wages. And it’s frustrating when you look at that part of it. How do we get the wages to afford the day cares, to afford what we need to have happen out here too?

How do we?

• That’s just it. You can’t run until you first figure out how to walk. We’re not getting there apparently, and it’s been historical. You start looking at Austin, Willmar, any meat-packing town that has a high rate of people, and they are actually receiving subsidized living. So, there has to be a change in that part of it too. And then again, we get to the minimum wage law and all of a sudden, the industry says, “Well, we can’t do that either because that’s going to kill our industry.” Where do you have a breaking point so that the industry now has to provide free day care? And then there’s health care. Until that gets solved, we’re pretty much in an economic standstill. The issue we have here in Austin and Mower County and other small areas in southern Minnesota is the aging of our folks. They’re already paying on more and more health care. If you look at facilities for Alzheimer’s, skilled care, they’re going up in Austin. They probably have more expansion in those facilities than we’ve had with day care facilities. That’s wrong. We need to take care of our young people because that’s what’s going to bring them to Austin.

• A lot of business owners are up in their retirement age and don’t have very good plans. So, we’re seeing those businesses close because they’re not finding an opportunity. I know a couple of young people are looking for manufacturing industries to buy or to help, but it’s hard to find out who really has a plan before it’s too late and they’re shutting the doors. And farmers are the same way.

• It’s a horrible transition.

Is that the same thing in this community with smaller manufacturers or businesses that don’t have a transition plan? Or is it just
agriculture farmers who don’t have plans?

• It’s both.

• You need somebody who’s capable or motivated to plan as well.

What’s the role of local manufacturers to Austin’s future economic well being?

• Say there are 12,000 jobs in Austin. Three thousand of them are at [COMPANY] and [COMPANY]. Then you have the ring of companies that support them. So, [COMPANY] probably has, oh my, 80 employees.

• That’s about right.

• [COMPANY] has 15 to 20 employees. [COMPANY] has 100 truck drivers. But there’s really very little outside of the major employers.

Is it because of reliance on and integration with those major employers?

• That’s probably the biggest factor. But I don’t know. It would be hard statistically to prove. I think also there’s concern about the union in Austin or in Minnesota in general. To compete with the starting wage today of $15 to $17 an hour for even most skilled positions causes employers to hope they can find a community that they can pay a little less than that.

• Albert Lea just lost a manufacturer that was a decent size, right? What was the reason for that?

• That was a corporate decision. They bought that facility, I don’t know how many years ago, and they consolidated services in another location. So, that didn’t really have much to do with that location.

• But they chose to consolidate somewhere else versus consolidating in Albert Lea.

• And I’m not sure what the rationale was behind that. I wasn’t involved in that in any way or really familiar with them.

• But it was definitely an ag company. It was the only twine company we had in Minnesota. It was manufacturing for a lot of years and then it’s gone. And that’s another 50 jobs or whatever it was.

• They were high-paying jobs too. It was pretty unskilled labor but still high-paying. At the workforce center, one lady said it’s been difficult to hire somebody who’s a little more unskilled and was making $18 or $20 an hour and then have them realize they’re not going to come close to that in another entry-level position in manufacturing. It was kind of a shock to them.

• [COMPANY] sells million dollar boring tunneling machines around the world. They have a corporate headquarters that’s pretty much under the radar. You go across the border into Iowa and you have [COMPANY], and the very reason it’s in Iowa is because Iowa’s faster at getting permits, and they cost less.

• They have 43 high-paying jobs. They source 70 percent of their ag products from Minnesota. But they pay their real estate taxes to the south.

What’s the potential role for policymakers in all of the challenges we’re discussing? Where are policymakers in all of this?

• I think rural Minnesota’s under-represented. I mean, we have Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Duluth driving a lot of the policy versus Greater Minnesota.

• I think our legislative people do a pretty decent job. Over the years, we’ve had manufacturing, small manufacturing in Austin, pop out to Iowa because of the Minnesota tax law on corporations and
businesses. We had [COMPANY] and [COMPANY] go to Wisconsin. Fortune 500 companies or Fortune 100 companies are gone. They were in a little shed out here just north of town working on bows and arrows and that type of thing. So, because we don’t look at that as a real potential business, we allow it to walk away. Minnesota’s been good at creating economic zones that are supposed to give them tax breaks and that type of thing. But I don’t think we promote it very much. And maybe there are some people out there doing it, but there’s a lot of competition. I think Austin lost a trucking thing to Clear Lake, Iowa.

• It was a distribution center.

• It was huge. That was how many jobs?

• Over 200.

• Two hundred jobs. That’s a big economic impact for an area that now looks down to Iowa again. So, I think our biggest competition is south of us, east of us, and west of us. We’ve got to wake up. And Minnesota’s got to get with it or else we’re going to just be veteran communities, and the industries are going to be someplace else.

Do government regulations inhibit Austin’s ability to grow?

• I think there’s a pattern of feeling like you’re going through hoops to get things approved. And the standards are probably higher than our neighbors. Certainly, in the south and west of us. But I don’t think Minnesota sees itself competing on low regulations and big incentives. I think academically, there’s a case to be made that’s not a bad bet, either. High incentive state economies don’t seem parallel with growth. For better or worse, I think Minnesota says, “That’s not going to be the way we do it. We’re going to invest in education and infrastructure.”

One final question: Given all the challenges we’ve talked about, what’s your level of optimism about Austin?

• I think we have a lot of things going for us, and personally, I’m taking advantage of the atmosphere regardless. I’m going to grow.

• I’m relatively optimistic. Intellectual capital is here, the ambition is here, the resources are here. It’s a good place. Challenges? Yes. Opportunities? More.

• As an objective observer, you have critical mass here, which makes it easier to build on than other places. I’m really concerned about smaller communities around here that don’t have that to build on. They don’t have infrastructure, they don’t have logistics.
There is an organization in St. Paul that predicts there will be as many as a quarter of a million unfilled jobs in Minnesota within four years. How do you react to that? What do we do?

- One way is through technology and another is becoming more efficient at your job. If you ever stop putting the people in your workforce first, your attrition rates will be through the roof, and you’ll have trouble just keeping base level employment there.

- I have customers who tell me they need our equipment and our software, but they don’t need as many people in the fall and spring. We do a lot of work with fertilized herbicide ingredient handling, and by utilizing technology, they can get through the fall and spring. In the past, they had retired farmers and others who would step up for a short time in those seasons, but that supply has disappeared.

In that context, how important is an educated workforce?

- In our industry, the pork industry, it’s very labor intensive. We have a state-of-the-art, automated plant, and up until probably 30, 60 days ago, it wasn’t uncommon we were short seven to 10 percent of our workforce needs. So, it’s improved because of some internal things we’ve done, like reassessing competitive wage rates and other incentives to attract employees, alleviating some of the transportation needs, things like that.

Does it constrain your ability to meet demand?

- Yes and no. We can get the product out, but what form you get it out in terms of value add is where the limitation has been. So, you might have to sell something in a less processed form at a lower value if you don’t have enough workforce. If you have enough workforce, like where we’re at now, then you can continue with those higher value added products.

Are there unfilled positions in your company right now?

- We only have one that we’re really recruiting for. We’ve struggled. We have gotten lucky in the last four months, and we’ve hired two positions that are really difficult for us to hire: PLC programmers. It’s not that there aren’t educated people out there, because we do get really intelligent people. It’s just not the skillset we’re looking for. And it’s not that they weren’t people from around here. The last two people we hired were fairly local. They’re within 40 minutes of Fairmont. We found them through a recruiter. They had someone contact them and weed them out of their current roles. So, we’re taking
people from other people. And of course, we have to have something above what someone else has for someone to move.

• We’ve teamed up with some of the local community colleges, so we’ve actually started an apprenticeship program for electronics, a PLC program, and you talk about automation to help combat the needs of the workforce. Now, you need a workforce that can help program the automation. So, that’s just driving a different level skillset. We had four people graduate this fall from our apprenticeship program. They’re still getting their hours of education working full time for us, but we don’t have the next crop of four coming in. So, we’re having open houses with the high schools. And it’s a free education, we pay for it. But it’s still hard to get the kids to understand it. We’re trying to pull all levers to get some understanding for PLC programming and for welders because they are the two technical positions that we need.

Let’s ask the educator: What kinds of students are coming through your program? Is there an adequate pipeline between your educational institutions and people who need skilled workers?

• The problem is people from the Twin Cities come down here to go to school, but they want to go back. Southern Minnesota, the region, the population, we still have a lot of people. There’s one student right now, she’s from Brewster, she was in our Ag Today Student Club, and she wants to stay in Mankato. But it’s still taking them away from the other towns in southern Minnesota. And that’s what the Twin Cities is doing. They just keep taking them back. So, it’s about the education, opportunities, internships, and apprenticeships. The other part is we have 1,500 international students who have to go back. They could help for one year or three years, depending on the STEM program, but they can’t stay. A lot of them would like to.

• That’s not easy to support either, if you’re trying to hire someone with an H-1B visa. That’s a commitment by the company.

Are state educational institutions innovative and agile enough to address the needs of the rest of the people in this room?

• I don’t think so. Not at the four-year level. At the two-year level school, I think they’re a little bit more agile. With the four-year, it takes a long time to get a program developed. It’s more difficult. We have an extended education program where we can go work with a company and get grants from DEED. But four-year degrees are a little bit more difficult. I’ve been working on a minor called Agribusiness and Food Innovation for basically two years, and it starts fall 2019.

Manufacturers get frustrated because they think school counselors and teachers and parents are obsessed with the four-year school track. They don’t really advocate for the kinds of lucrative opportunities that can arise from a two-year degree or even less, a certificate. Do you agree?

• I’ve been searching through high school graduations in the newspaper to see where everybody’s going, and it does seem like kids are going to two-year schools. We are looking at doing some type of tuition reimbursement if we can get people to come back and work.

• I think part of the problem is we’re not all educated enough ourselves on what is available at a two-year school. I was one of those parents that said, “You’re going to a four-year school.” That has been what I’ve said to my children all through elementary and high school, not even
thinking until I started working more with [COMPANY] about the different skillsets you learn at a technical school that are extremely valuable to a company. You’re not pigeon-holed like I thought.

• We had a student from Mankato who was told by his counselor, “If you’re going to go to that two-year program, I’m not going to waste any more time on you.”

• We just hired a technician, and he’s not going to school, we are going to train him. We needed a technician, and he’s an all-star. Now, we’re going to have a partnership with a high school.

• I think [COMPANY] currently does that with the school district.

• What if schools have their morning classes like English and math, your basic classes, and then the afternoon would be available for vocational-type classes?

• Spirit Lake will do a J-term. Then they allow the kids to go out and do internships and then do reports on them.

In terms of workforce issues, shortages, and skills, how does that affect your vision to build a community?

• Well, I’ve been working on the Fairmont Area Life Campaign, and we’ve been partnering with all the schools in the county and the chamber. We’ve been putting information together on how you can earn a good living here. We’ve gone as far as telling students what opportunities are available, and we’re helping them find out if there’s on-the-job training or if there are apprenticeships available. We’ve met with all the school counselors in all the schools in the county. They’re all very supportive of it. So, I think that this is kind of starting to fall into place already.

• There’s a business that is starting to recruit folks from Puerto Rico. And the reason that they’re doing that is because they don’t need a visa or anything. They’re already United States citizens. So, when they come here, a number of businesses are already looking at hiring them.

Do you have heartburn about what the economics of this local economy might look like in say, five years?

• A little bit. The whole thing gives me heartburn because I started in economic development in 1987. The unemployment rate was up around 13 percent. Interest rates were up in that area as well, and we were recruiting jobs for people. Today, we have to recruit people for jobs. And I think we need to get in that mindset. We have a great state with a lot of attributes that should be able to attract more people. But we need to put in the effort, like taking businesses into the local community colleges and showing them what exists.

• There must be critical mass for people to move from one job to the next. Or they’re going to stay in Mankato and in the Twin Cities. We have to start recruiting people like we recruited businesses. We have more Fortune 500 companies per capita in Minnesota than any other state. We have just about everything you would want in this state from recreation to metropolitan living to rural living. We speak to a lot of different people. We need to start selling our state to people to bring them here.

Are you hindered by the fact that media frequently portray the ag economy through hardship stories about farming?

• The base and the backbone of our state is production agriculture. We need to tell people how many businesses are
involved in agriculture directly. People don’t think they are, but they are.

• We need the people in the value added industries to take the product further. But in production agriculture, we also need them producing the product. We need people who will show up to work every day, realize that pigs eat on Saturday and Sunday too, so you have to work at least every other or every third weekend. And the pig has to eat every day, so you can’t employ someone who just decides not to show up for work for a few days.

How much of the current employee problem is the unavailability of “unskilled” workers?

• We don’t deal with a lot of it because we use visas, we use foreign labor. They show up every day. They want to work. They’re not afraid to work hard. They’re not afraid to get dirty. They’re great family people. We’ve learned a lot from all of them. But are we going to be able to keep that visa? Is that country going to get pulled off the list? There are all those unknowns that make it real difficult. I’d love to be able to hire more American workers, but the ones we’ve had in the past are the ones who suddenly don’t show up for work.

How much of an impediment is available housing to your ability to recruit?

• Huge.

• It’s just not here.

• It’s very cost-ineffective. We don’t have the population base to attract a developer in to build a 96-unit apartment building for us. It’s hard for us to recruit developers to put in new streets, water, and sewer for a subdivision. We lack some of the capacity in our builders. If we had the demand for 25 homes in Fairmont, I don’t think you could build 25 homes because we don’t have the carpenters, the drywallers, the electricians. We had four houses built in Fairmont that were modular homes. They were very nice homes, but they were doing that because of the capacity of our builders. So, it’s everything from the cost of building to the labor force.

• I have a number of clients who are in the exact same spot. They are looking at building or remodeling. If you can get a contractor to return a phone call, that means you have a good relationship with them. And that’s just to let them know that they’re going to be nine to 18 months out because of the backflow.

Do contractors feel the same worker shortage that everybody is experiencing?

• I firmly believe that’s part of it, but it’s also the demand and lack of contractors available. There’s generally not a drywall crew that comes in, or a stunt crew. I mean, a lot of our contractors are doing everything.

• I had a contractor tell me, “My margins don’t change if I have 15 employees or 20 employees.” He said, “I’m better off with 15 employees versus hiring 20. I’m doing more, I’m still making about the same money.” So, they shrink back.

• Well, we have a concern for housing up in the Windom area too. They’re actually looking at a housing program for 48 units, I think. But they have to go through the whole process and figure out where the funding is going to come from. So, housing is a general issue for us as well. You pull away from neighboring communities and they’re probably 40 miles away? 45 miles?

• How do we deal with that? We looked at a busing service for one of our larger areas that we draw from, the Worthington
area. Kind of slow, but we’ve got it to a 90 to 95 percent occupancy rate on a daily basis, so that’s one solution that we’ve found successful for us.

What about the lack of available child care as a constraint for work?

• In Martin County, there’s a shortage of 180 spots.

• We held a child care meeting here a couple of weeks ago, and one of the spouses was a pharmacist. The other spouse is quitting her job to stay home. That’s another person out of the workforce that we needed in the workforce. If we don’t get a handle on this child care thing, people are going to have to make that decision.

• We ran into the issue when we had our son. There were people paying for a spot for a baby who wasn’t conceived yet.

• So, we’re working with First Children’s Finance to address the problem, and we’ve received a grant to help. We’ve done a number of community events, and we totally understand it’s an issue. We’ve heard horrible stories about people having to quit their jobs, and now they can’t make their house payment, or now they can’t make their car payment, and it’s awful.

• I have a friend who chose to not be a licensed day care because there are many hoops that you have to go through to follow all the rules and regulations.

Let’s ask the banker. What do you see as you look at the state of agriculture in Fairmont?

• The competition for land and assets on the farm side remains incredibly strong. A lot of my clients are fearful of tax implications. On a farm, you keep depreciating and pushing things out, and what not. But, I am really excited about the up-and-coming generation of farming. They seem, in my portfolio of clients, like they’re kind of trending on that younger age group because you don’t have all that history ingrained in them. They’re getting a little more creative and partnering with other marketing firms. So, as far as their ability to crunch the numbers and take small profits if they’re there, they’re willing to do that, which excites me. They’re also getting really creative on their input side. They are working with their agronomists and trying different things.

• I see a lot more of them using newer technology, too. I’ve seen a few guys using drones to check and see the wet spots on their lands, whereas the older farmer, the older producer, probably won’t be using that. Or even think of using that.

• And also, they’re open to it. I referred a couple of new clients who are younger farmers to the adult farm business management group, and they were just so excited about working with them and being able to add them to the team.

Finally, many praise the opportunities in southern Minnesota. Is there a sufficient coalition of interests working together collectively to push that message?

• I think GreenSeam is a perfect example of an effort that’s important to all of us, whether you’re a producer or you’re making electronics that go into a tractor. I think we need to continue to do more things regionally.

• If [COMPANY] is doing well in Jackson, that’s going to be good for Fairmont and vice versa. Mankato’s just another growth center that provides more opportunities for people to come this way. We need to think regionally to continue to grow.
Let’s start by asking you to name the greatest opportunities and challenges facing Minnesota’s ag economy and the Marshall area, in particular.

- I think our greatest opportunity is with technology. Especially with the co-ops, we are looking at applicators that are able to spray on their own. In a sense, that replaced the individuals we no longer can find, and it’s the rate at which technology is moving compared to what we can keep up with. So, I think that’s our greatest opportunity. From a challenge standpoint, it’s generational differences—the balance between wanting a flexible work life but also wanting the extra hours and working overtime to get additional money.

There is an organization based in the Twin Cities that predicts the worker shortage will be with us for the long haul. They say there could be as many as 260,000 unfilled jobs in Minnesota within just four years. What’s your take on that? What will employers have to do to meet that challenge?

- That’s a big question, but from the standpoint of where we are and how bad it’s going to get, we’re trying to be as proactive as possible given those things that we obviously have no control over. In a tight ag economy, that puts a lot of pressure on budgets, and it puts a lot of pressure on additional money for training and development. I’ve been with [COMPANY] for nine years, and this is the first year in my nine years there that I have been told we need to watch what we’re spending, which is hard. I was in agriculture prior to nine years ago, so I’ve experienced really good ag times too, and it’s pretty easy when ag is good.

- Ag is tough right now, and a lot of things are out of our control, and there’s really nothing we can do about it, right? So, we are trying to be as creative as possible, and we’ve really tried to hit the social media side of the business because it doesn’t cost a lot of money and it can get a large reach. We’ve been trying story telling to reach out to a large mass of people for a relatively low cost. We’re still continuing to embark on training and development because regardless of whether or not we have a lot of money in the budget, that’s still always going to be important. We are looking at trying to bring foreign workers to our local area, primarily from South Africa, because we just can’t find the full-time or seasonal people that we need.

So, do you have unfilled jobs right now?

- We do. Typically, they’re operational roles. So historically, something like custom application has never been an issue for us. But the last two years it has been a brutal challenge. I feel for people who have had this challenge for many years.
• It’s terrible to say it this way, but as long as you’re a body and you’re willing to learn, we’ll train you, right? We’ll get you your applicator license, we’ll get you hazmat. As long as you’re willing to do it, we’re willing to get you there. But we don’t have bodies willing to do it.

Why?

• I think a lot of our workforce has already retired. We’ve targeted essentially two groups. One is retirement and trying to bring them back into the workplace, and the other is high school—stop going to college, we want you directly when you graduate. At our last HR council meeting, we talked about how to convince high school graduates to do a gap year and work for us directly out of high school. And then at the end of that year ask, “Does it makes sense for you to not go to an ag school, and are you going to come back to us? Do we need to help pay for that?”

How much of the skills gap is due to the fact that parents, teachers, and guidance counselors still advise young people that the only path to a successful career is through a four-year degree?

• A significant amount.

• Absolutely.

• Significantly, yeah. I see it all the time working with businesses in the ag industry specifically. There are well-paying jobs that don’t require a four-year degree and don’t have you graduate with $50,000 in debt. You can begin making $40,000 or $50,000 a year, without even working those overtime hours. But I think it starts with the parents, because they are the biggest influence on these students’ lives. It’s also the guidance counselors and educators. One of the things we’ve talked about locally, and somewhat regionally as well, is maybe setting up a day or a series of days to get educators and guidance counselors into some of the ag production places and let them see it’s not what their grandparents used to do. Ag is so much different now.

• So, it kind of goes back to that story telling piece of what the jobs look like. They’re fun, you get to work out in God’s country every day, who wouldn’t want to do that?

• And you can make good money.

• And you can make good money doing it.

• That’s the piece that is missing.

• They don’t understand that. They don’t think the jobs pay well. Most people come to us and say they want to be in sales. I mean, they can have no sales skills or abilities, but they’ve been told that sales is the only place they’re going to make money. I have operational roles, whether it’s a manager or an applicator, making more money in some situations than the sales people.

How much of this is due to the fact that employers who require tech degrees don’t do a good enough job of telling their stories?

• Well, I think right now especially, we’re in this harder time with ag, and the parents are the ones feeling it, right? They’re the ones experiencing that the economy right now for them is not good, and so it’s hard for them to encourage their kids to go into that when they’re the ones struggling. But it’s about helping them understand that the whole economy in our area is based on agriculture and helping them stay here will help support all of us.

• Historically, we’ve never had an issue with general labor. It was always just enough people who walked in the door, referrals, friends, enough to get the job done. That has come to a quick halt. We are looking at
how to go outside of our realm for the first time.

How much of the problem is due to the attitudes of the younger workforce?

• We had a conversation on this yesterday at the State of Manufacturing event in Willmar. It easily translates over into the ag industry because a lot of the manufacturers there were ag manufacturers. So, they were talking about the workforce and how the older workforce is mainly focused on health care and benefits, whereas the younger workforce is focused on scheduling: I have kids, can I go to a school event if I need to and then come back? Or, it might even be, do I get enough vacation time? The values of the entering workforce right now are different than the values of those who have been in the workforce for 20 years. Some of the companies are realigning their benefits packages to appeal to the newer workers coming in, and I think there’s opportunity there. But that’s not going to fix all of the issues because, like you guys have all mentioned, there are not enough bodies with the shortage.

• The hardest part about that is we still have a great number of individuals who are a part of the older generation and want the benefits. If we start cutting them off, or start taking that away, then all of a sudden they’re retiring early because we upset them, and we need those individuals still.

How important are relationships with parents and students through the schools?

• We’re starting to work on that a little bit. Chambers throughout the state are following this initiative that’s been set down by the Minnesota Chamber Business Education Network, and it’s a career pathway program. So students, even as early as seventh and eighth grade, know what career pathway to take to get the job they want. Often times, high schoolers will pick a college before they know what their major is, and when they get out of college, they don’t even know what to do with a biology degree. Then they have all this debt that’s tearing at them.

• I think there’s been an insurgence at the state level and even the regional level of internships, apprenticeships, and short-term, one-year commitments. Then people just kind of stay on because they get used to it, and they learn that they like it. I think taking a hard look at the credentialing that’s required for some of these positions should be encouraged, because sometimes you’re dead set on a position requiring a four-year degree, but maybe it only needs a two-year degree or lower because of the internship or apprenticeship.

• We’re in our seventh year of a school outreach program, where we get into high schools and target 9th through 11th graders. Initially when we did this, they were very leery of us. They were very standoffish. So, it’s a matter of going in and letting them know who we are, what we do. We’re just not a turkey plant, we’re a company that feeds a world. We may have 7,000 employees, but we have 70 different careers. And we play a game with them: try to match up the career with the wages and the educational level. We’ll give them all our different careers, we’ll put them on flashcards, and then we’ll put the educational level on flashcards and yearly income, and they need to figure out what education levels go with that position and what that position gets paid.

How well is it connecting with the students?

• Oh, they love it. It’s called the Step Up Soon program. We can’t have them in our production facility because they’re under 18 (you have to be 18 years of age), but we have them in the office. They’re really
unsure of what they want to do, not sure if they want to go to college or vo-tech, or what. But they may have a career in mind, so we’ll bring them in, we’ll pay them and mentor them, and they work an entire summer. They’re from all different walks of life.

Let’s go back to the story telling. You said something about the public’s perception of farming may be hurting the farm economy or the ag economy’s ability to attract and retain people.

• Well, with pig farming especially, people think it’s a very dirty job. It’s not glamorous going into a pig barn, and it is smelly sometimes, but I think there are extreme people out there who think that having pigs in barns is cruel and abusive. I think removing that stigma would get more young people involved. We do care about our animals a lot; we are out there taking care of them every single day. We have had a lot of luck with employing high school students part-time. We had one a number of years ago, and he went to school in Mankato and got a degree, worked somewhere else for a couple of years, and now he’s back managing one of our farms and oversees 12 people. We reach out to the ag teachers to say, “Hey, we’re looking for a couple of summer people. They’re going to be working hard, but they’re going to get paid more than at Dairy Queen.” So, I think that’s a good way to get people. Success isn’t always putting on a suit and going and sitting at a desk every day. You can go to school for two years, come out, work on the farm, work on tractors, even be a plumber, an electrician, and make a really good living.

How much of it is the perception?

• It seems like whenever there’s something about agriculture in the news, it’s bad. We had a news outlet come out to our farm a month or two ago, and they did a story about African swine fever, which is a huge threat to our industry right now. So, that’s negative. It’d be great to have a news team that wants to come out and do a positive story about agriculture in our county, but that’s not exciting news for people. So, to share a positive story with the general public, we have to rely more on doing it ourselves and using social media.

• It would be great if there was a way we could leverage the agriculture industry as a whole, as opposed to just everybody trying to do their own individual thing.

Give us the view of economic developers.

• Going back to the workforce and talent thing, when we used to work with businesses, their first question would always be: What locations do you have open for us to build on? And now their first question, by far, is what is your local workforce? If we have people who aren’t working, what is their education level? Is there a skills gap? Are they not employed because they can’t find child care?

How much of a challenge is housing?

• We’re in a town of 800 people, and we employ 3,000 people. There’s no housing. If we’re going to expand, there’s no place to build. And nobody’s going to put an apartment building up, because you don’t make any money off an apartment building.

What do you do?

• We don’t expand. If you’re going to do that, you’re going to have to look at going someplace else, going to a different state, buying another company. We automate; we just built a $33 million plant for that specific reason.

• I’m running into that problem with our TN program, if anybody has any
recommendations. But just trying to secure housing that is not ridiculously costly or is even available in some of these smaller communities. The TN program is a professional visa through NAFTA. They come from Mexico, and have to first get a college degree from Mexico, but they can come in.

Is there a limit on the amount of time they can stay here?

• Their visa gets approved for three years and as of right now, they can apply to continue it indefinitely, and then they can bring their spouse and children up here as well.

• No. We’ve had one who’s been here for a year now, and he went home in May for three weeks to visit his family and is now back.

Have you faced the same housing issues with them?

• No, we have a couple of farm sites that people have retired and moved off of, and so we’re able to rent those. Our south farms are way outside of town because we want the pigs away from people, and we can’t have the barns close to town. So, the challenge is getting people who are willing to drive half an hour to go to work, which if you live in the Twin Cities, you do that every day. So, we haven’t seen a huge issue with housing yet.

• What we’ve experienced is that those we bring back because they’re from the local area want to be in their home town or want to be in that local area. Those who we’ve relocated from the cities or other areas, they want to be in the bigger towns. So, if they’re not used to the rural environment, if they’re not used to a specific town, even if they grew up in rural central Minnesota, they want to be in the bigger city. But if they’re specifically from that area, they want to be in that area. And then it’s more then likely they’re staying with mom and dad or a relative. It’s not that they’re looking to build and looking to get their own place immediately because they have family here.

• And then you also cross the boundary of personal life with work life.

• We had one of our naturally affordable apartment units close for a while, and we lost employees. They improved the units, but then that comes at a cost. These employees are line workers, English is a second language or they speak no English, so they’re looking at proximity because some of them don’t have cars or don’t have transportation. Or they have a lot of kids and one of the parents has to stay home. So, naturally affordable units and then proximity to the workplace are two major things.

What do you mean by naturally affordable?

• Naturally affordable is not a brand new unit that’s subsidized, but they’re just naturally affordable because they’re older units or less desirable than some of the others in town. So, then we look at maybe a tax credit project, or master leases like some employers do in Worthington. But if it’s just one person, or just one parent working, the cost of that in relationship to the percentage of their income, that’s a tough pull. And then if you get state funding to help with the cost of the housing, you’re paying prevailing wages. In Greater Minnesota, our wages are different from those in the Twin Cities. Plus, construction costs are higher, input costs are higher. Housing is major.

What about child care?

• In my opinion, it’s secondary to housing, but it’s still very much a factor because we’re losing some of the trailing spouses.
• It's horrible in the area. I think the next infant opening in Marshall is not until January 2021. So, if you have an infant in the next year and a half, you don’t have a spot for him or her.

• Or you find an alternative of some sort. I mean, yeah, if it comes to that. If you can find a nanny or you have a grandma, that’s one thing. But whether it’s a center or in a home, you can’t get in. And especially when you want to have multiple kids. So, you have one in day care, and you’re bringing the infant to a different center because it’s the only spot you can get.

• People get on the list to hold a spot before they find out they’re expecting. It’s crazy.

Why doesn’t supply and demand kick in? Why aren’t there more child care facilities to meet the obvious demand?

• Regulation.

• Who wants to be with kids all day?

• Some businesses have their own child care center, but you don’t want to get into that.

• They have to meet so many requirements. But now that the governor has sent four year olds to school, it took away the profitable kids because the four year olds make the money compared to the infant ratios. So, the whole industry is messed up with child care.

• In Minnesota, you need day care certification and yada yada. In South Dakota, you have the choice of getting the certification or not, and you can still open a day care. You just can’t get government funding on food and everything else that you would get if you were certified. But there are a lot of individuals who take it because then they can take more kids. In Minnesota, day care is very regulated.

• Nobody is fighting the regulation for the safety of kids, but there are certain things that other states don’t do and so we wouldn’t have to do either, in my opinion. Everybody wants the kids to be safe, that’s not the issue. There are other things beyond that we need to change.

• I mean, just personally, when we moved back we wanted to be in this area. I found the job, my husband considered opening a day care, but again it’s the same thing regarding the certification process, the regulation behind it. Ultimately, it made more sense for him to go find a job and for us to struggle finding day care and pay whatever we have to for it.

• I’m going to retire next year, and I’m leaving Minnesota. I have lived here my entire life.

• Relocation is extremely challenging to bring people to Minnesota.

• I think there’s a border battle between Minnesota and Wisconsin when it comes to taxes. But out here in the western part of the state, where we’re competing more with North and South Dakota, maybe Iowa, we have this struggle everyday where we’ve been courting these businesses, ag related, manufacturing related, and we lose them to South Dakota. I think the state of Minnesota does a good job in aiding and assisting businesses with growth and expansions and stuff, but as far as the initial incentives to get started, South Dakota does a really great job at that. And they have programs like Dakota Resources, where there’s tuition reimbursement if you move there, live there, and work there for three years, and we’re lagging behind in a lot of that stuff.
I think out in rural Minnesota we get 
forgotten about once in a while. It’s all 
about the Twin Cities. Where in South 
Dakota, it’s a lot more rural in general.

They embrace it.

Yeah, where here it’s kind of an 
afterthought.

Is it a part of the story telling to 
policymakers?

Oh, for sure. We were supposed to get 
funding for transportation because of the 
truckin’ involved with corn plants, and 
every single project that got funded with 
state funding was within 60 miles of the U.S. 
Bank Stadium; that’s BS.

We haven’t really had an opportunity to 
address the major truck driver issue that we’re 
going to face thanks to increased regulations, 
but that’s going to be a real issue.

It will continue to be an issue, and secondly, 
the education and student loan debt that 
these individuals have coming out of 
college is making it really challenging to 
recruit people.

But I don’t think they see it until it’s real, 
meaning after college: Mom and dad have 
paid for everything up until this point, so 
I don’t understand what that debt really 
means to me until I already have it.

And I get that companies are putting 
tuition reimbursement and student loan 
forgiveness in place, and I think that's great. 
I wish I had it. I’m still paying college tuition 
debt to this day. But again, it’s just another 
thing to try and add in when you’re already 
working with really tough margins and 
tough times.

So, does everybody in here have truck 
drivers as a part of their business?

I work with businesses like that.

Any solutions, or as some people have said, 
work arounds?

I think it’ll be really interesting to see how 
businesses pick up on it. I know Uber, for 
instance, has just launched or is in the pilot 
mode of a freight line that you can request. 
An Uber CDL driver would come and pick 
up your load. So, I think we’re going to start 
seeing more and more of that.

I think there is one market that might 
open up for truck drivers, but it’s kind of 
unfortunate that this is how it’s going to 
happen. A lot of independent farmers are 
going to be struggling in the next couple of 
years; they’re going to need a secondary 
job, or they’re going to quit farming and be 
looking for a job, and I think that’s going 
to be one solution. A lot of them probably 
aren’t going to have a CDL because you 
don’t have them as an independent farmer, 
but they’re going to have a lot of truck 
driving experience and could easily get 
that job.

Yeah, that’s the only thing I don’t drive on 
the farm is a semi, because I know I’d get 
stuck in it if I learned.

We’ve trained probably about 30 people to 
be CDL drivers, and the first year we did it 
we partnered with [COMPANY]. But it was 
hard. They had to sign an agreement with 
us that if they didn’t complete the program 
or if they left within three years, they would 
need to pay us back for the training.
There is an organization in the Twin Cities that predicts Minnesota will have around 260,000 unfilled jobs within four years. What do we have to do to confront this challenge?

• A good workforce, being able to find good quality workers and sometimes just workers in general, is a huge issue. But we have a resource here in the community with a number of students. For a lot of companies that have a job opening, I think attracting and retaining is a big issue. I was down in Fairmont yesterday, and the workforce issue came up. We have the resources, but how do we engage and retain them?

How many HR people are here? Excellent. What’s your take?

• I think we find talent now among animal care workers on farms. But looking into the future, in the next five to 10 years, we will have substantial positions open, like an executive director, that we need to figure out how to replace.

Where do those people come from?

• It’s a needle in a haystack, a lot of times. You have to find someone who grew up in the community or is at a point in his or her life to move to a rural area and work. I think that’s what we struggle to find. It takes months to fill an open position, to find that individual. It takes a whole team to really look.

• First of all, I’m in the construction business. One of the things that we need to do is adapt to what is going on with society. We used to build dealerships. That changed. Then we had to make ethanol. We built ethanol plants. That’s not being done now. Now we’re into wind farms and energy has become very important. I think that’s a whole gamut we need to look at in general. Ten years ago I would not have built prayer rooms. Now we are constructing prayer rooms for religious groups in order to entice workers. You need to reach out to different nationalities, different religions. Those are things that we need to adapt to.

• We’re having trouble finding talented labor. We’re exploring employing veterans. We’re looking at adult and teen challenge programs where people are recovering from an addiction of some sort. We’re looking at incarcerated people in a work program. We have, throughout the years, employed people who are incarcerated. We pick them up in the morning, take them back at night. We as a society, not just from the standpoint of our own good, need to serve these other populations as well.

• I’ve always challenged our managers to reduce our dependency on human labor and explore things that are automated. As we go forward, I think there are certain positions that are going to be undesirable, and it’s going to be extremely hard to find people who want to do them. Are there opportunities for us with technology so we attract younger people? I’m not quite sure.
We’ve seen some success with that, and I think we should continue to explore that where we can.

- This is crazy to us now, but there are vehicles driving themselves. Right now I can’t find qualified truck drivers, and the DOT is making it even more difficult for people to get licensed. Maybe that’s the thing of the future. Maybe they’re just going to drive themselves. I don’t know.

Do you have to overcome a stigma related to robotics and other things that enhance production? People say, eh, you bring in a robot, you’re displacing a worker.

- We haven’t because there are no workers to be displaced.

- I think that’s a very common perception. But, you’re not replacing anyone at all.

- I would agree that technology has to be part of the answer, but there are certain things that we don’t have plans to automate. We still need people, and immigration has to be part of the answer too.

Let’s talk about that. What kind of solutions could exist in immigration to help solve this?

- I think part of it is going to be education. Some years ago, it was said there were 87 different dialects in the Minneapolis and St. Paul schools. Yes, we need to automate because we won’t be displacing everybody, but we still need a lot of workers. And the U.S. population is not replacing itself. They’re saying we’re having 1.2 kids now. I haven’t seen what a .2 looks like.

- We’re going to have immigration, and the schools aren’t going to be the only ones doing the teaching. I think we might need centers for people who come into the U.S., so they can have different teachers help them speak English, assimilate into our society, and do the jobs that are very much needed.

How many people are creating relationships with immigrant communities now to help resolve your worker issue?

- I would say almost a third of our employment is Somali. We have 10 to 12 Somali dialects currently in our facility right now. I understand the language barrier, but they’re mainly doing basic manual labor like uploading sticks or hanging meat or doing sanitation. There is a big learning curve to be able to operate the machines.

It has worked culturally?

- Yes, but there were some barriers. We have some minor issues here and there. Paper towels in the toilet or whatever because they don’t understand where it goes. We have events like Celebrate Our Nation, where people bring in different food and we celebrate where they’re from and welcome that into our community. They are more than willing to share. We need to be open to that. For our leadership team, it’s a little bit of a learning curve to understand that. Like you said, the prayer room thing, that’s totally new to people.

What kind of employees are you looking for? Certain skill sets or warm bodies?

- Attitude. You need to find somebody who wants to work. In our company, we say attitude teaches the skill. If you have the right attitude, the rest you can learn.

- I don’t think there’s one description of what we’re looking for in a person. We’re struggling to get people to even come to interviews. Fifty percent of people return our calls from phone screens. Another 50 percent show up for scheduled interviews. Maybe 25 percent pass the drug and background tests. Maybe somebody will make it three days through a computer training before they quit or get fired. That is seen from sweeping the floors all the way to the top. It’s hard for me to put a label on what we’re looking for because we are looking for every skill set along the
way. There is a problem of nobody being available, nobody showing up or being willing to make sacrifices. With the past five people, three of them called off sick in the very first week during training. That’s not going to work for anybody.

- Everybody wants to blame it on the Millennial generation. That is so not true. From ages 20 to 60, it’s the same story.

- You take a quick ride down the main street of a small town, and every other business has a help wanted sign. Workers know that if they don’t take this job because they don’t want it, they can move right down the street. There’s another job waiting for them.

- We look for commitment and loyalty, long-term people who want to stay because of a desire to be in ag, help other farmers out, other families out. You can be the brightest wiz on the computer, but if they don’t have the guts to stay, all the training you do and all the time and effort you spend is gone. And then you have to start all over again.

- I think that is a common denominator, especially with our cooperative systems here. The people have a passion for agriculture. The skill sets and the education vary, but they all have the passion.

Let’s focus on the skills gap for a moment. A lot of business owners say one reason for the shortage of potential employees is that parents, counselors and high school teachers continue to say that the only path to a lucrative, satisfying career has to be through a four-year college degree. They don’t encourage two-year degrees or certificate programs. Are you finding that?

- Well, yeah, I’m finding that. Just speaking of my experience, we heard you have to go for four years. That hasn’t really changed. I think we need to focus on the skills. We need the people we can hire right now, but we also need to think about 10 years from now, 20 years from now. We need to think about the kids who don’t know what a tractor does, don’t know what a soybean is, and they live in southern Minnesota.

- As supporters of ag, we need to do more and talk to more people to get more youth involved. If they’re from here, we want to keep them here. We don’t want them going somewhere else. I think that starts at two, three, four, five years old.

Talk about what Farm America is doing.

- Farm America partners with the Minnesota Agricultural Interpretive Center. We partner with Junior Achievement. We’re taking some of their career curriculum and combining it with an agricultural twist. All the volunteers have an ag background, so they get in front of 7th and 8th graders and talk about what they’re doing in agriculture, what their passion is, and how they got into their career. A piece that we added this year is that all the students first do a career interest survey through the CAREERwise website. This gives students an understanding of where their career cluster interests might be before they come to the Center. As they’re working with volunteers and rotating through different learning sessions, they can figure out how ag might actually intertwine with their interests. We are trying to break some of those misperceptions about agriculture, such as it’s just farming, and I’m not from a farm. Or, I don’t want to be in agriculture because that’s just pigs, and they’re stinky. Which is totally not true, because I grew up on a hog farm.

Are you finding light bulb moments? Are you finding students who say, “I might want to do this?”

- I think they are at least making the connection. If they have an interest in art, or in technology or graphic design, that interest can still fall into an agricultural pathway without even leaving the community.
Anything that reaches out to parents?

- No. There are a ton of career expos, and I feel like there is also a career expo program for recruiting students. I don’t know if you guys are finding good results from that. Do you think the students are responding to you when you go to those? Are they interacting with you?

- So, Mankato has career expos. I know Crystal Valley had some folks there too, with high school sophomores.

- I think if you send one person over there, we can get through a couple of hundred sophomore kids. They do rotations. But you see the light bulb go on; I saw it once or twice when someone was into computer programming. I talked about drones and how they can fly over a field and look at the infrared reflections from the leaves. Even if the kids are interested in physics, you can get them into the game. There is some opportunity there. Younger people need to be educated about where their food comes from and the opportunities out there.

Minnesota State Mankato has an ag education program that is in its fourth year. Have you had opportunities with recruiting and finding people who have interest in this?

- The key word is innovation. Students like that. Food, they understand. Business, they kind of understand. Ag is the very first part of that, and we’re trying to change the dialogue. How do we attract for other positions? How do we get a student in finance or accounting to think about positions in agriculture? That is one of the things that we’re trying to do. We have a lot of students who come from southern Minnesota. We also have more than half of our 15,000 students come from the Twin Cities. How do we frame ag as food innovation? Those things really attract them and keep them here.

I’m surprised there always hasn’t been a program like that.

- It is very important to our region, and we need to step up as a university. South Central, Bethany, and other colleges and programs continue to get the word out about these very good careers with very different points of entry.

There are other issues that affect the local economy. How about housing? Is the lack of housing preventing local companies from growing profitably?

- I’ve had some clients who are investing in buying housing to move people out to the rural areas and investing in transportation from those homes to the farming operation. They’re seeing it’s a big investment, but at the same time, it’s a necessity and part of the benefit of getting hired.

- It’s very expensive, and they keep throwing up apartments. Hopefully they’ll be filled. It’s expensive compared to the wages.

- I think because of the university, it seems like whenever something does open up that is a decent size, they’re rooming it out at $600 to students instead of renting it to a single family. It just becomes really out of range for what a family can afford.

- Construction costs are high.

- There’s also the cost of land, okay. It’s not just investment in infrastructure that goes with it. It’s the total cost, not just the new construction costs. Can you build an office building where you get this kind of return on investment as opposed to housing? That’s the issue here. Along with that, even if you build a new housing development, you get the infrastructure that goes along with it. Who pays for that?

- Part of it is your regulatory environment. When I was a kid, which was way back, every farmer who raised sugar beets around Lincoln County had housing on their farms, either trailer housing, modular housing or an old farm house. They housed the immigrant workers who worked in their sugar beet
fields. Now you can't even have two dwelling on one farmstead in North County. You could have a whole lot of farmers put additional housing on their places to supply that need across the board, whether it's for those working the fields of agriculture or whether they're working for us. You have a regulatory environment that's working against us.

• The Minnesota Association of Realtors sends out information that says the cost to comply with government regulations on creating a lot and then building a house is between $80,000 and $84,000 right now. A starter home now is between $225,000 and $250,000. A lot of that is just complying with regulation.

• Affordability is probably not as much of an issue in Sleepy Eye as in a metropolis like Mankato. We struggle to find houses in small communities. We don’t put houses where our farms are at necessarily, but looking for a small community that you can bring in two or three people from immigration and support them is a challenge anywhere. It’s not so much about affordability but availability.

• I was going to say some communities are more welcoming than others. [COMPANY] has recently received a lot of attention for its integration of newcomers to this country and making it all work.

• Apparently, from what I understand, it’s the big companies. It’s the main street people. It’s the government. They’ve gotten together to make it happen.

Should government be more involved in doing things to help resolve the housing crisis?

• I don’t know if they should be actually supplying or building or providing all that stuff. Just remove the regulatory barriers.

• I’m going to argue against that, and I’ll tell you why. In the past, we’ve often built without looking ahead to the future, and it’s cost us down the line. The reason why regulations occur is because somebody has taken some shortcut that has cost somebody else down the line a bunch of money. Governments don’t want to be caught paying down the line. Certainly, though, there are regulations that are unnecessary. For instance, my interest is in energy, and I see buildings being constructed that will cost us money down the line when we could build those buildings for almost the same price and make them more energy efficient.

• We’re in the construction business, so we deal with this every day. It’s overregulated, number one. Secondly, if you build multiple homes now, you have to make them handicap accessible. You have to build the ramps. You have to build the elevators and all that goes along with it. That was not necessarily the case in the past. It is now. That adds to the cost side.

• I wouldn’t say my first priority is for the government to focus on housing.

• Amen.

• I would much rather have them focus on immigration and loosening that than focusing on housing.

What about child care?

• It's horrible. You can’t afford it.

• Doesn’t exist.

• I’m moving back to the small town of Long Prairie. I’m expecting, so I reached out to all 16 day care providers in this rural community. Only one of them had a potential opening for when we need day care. Otherwise, the others are like no, no, no, or not until December 2020. It’s an issue. I really don’t know what we’re going to do.

• We’re in the same boat. My granddaughter is 16 months old, and we’re trolling everywhere because my daughter is going to college this fall. It’s a no. The response is yeah, next year we can get you on the waiting list for next
year. She’ll be in high school by the time something is available.

- I think that impacts employment because you’ll have to make a decision. If I can’t find day care, do I keep working?
- You wouldn’t have a choice.
- Or you would have to drive to another community to drop your child off on your way to another community for work. We have a lot of that. One family in particular, they both work in Lake Crystal but they live in Nicollet. They drive from Nicollet to Mankato to drop their child off and then go to work in Lake Crystal.
- It’s because there’s not care anywhere.

**And the reason for this?**

- The regulations.
- There are a lot of in-home day cares that are closing because they can’t afford to comply with all the regulations out there.
- Yes, but if we look at other countries that don’t have this problem, they guarantee day care through the government. France, Sweden, all the Scandinavian countries, Germany, countries like that, they make sure the people who work in day care get affordable wages, are in safe environments, and it’s paid for by taxes. Oops, I said a bad word.
- Other countries also allow one-year maternity leave, which is helpful if your child is older, because you can only take one infant at a time to a day care.
- The day care issue is for infants.
- You have a point. If an employer or the government allows more time off, then you wouldn’t have that issue because you don’t have the infant issue.
- Our day care provider already has a rule. They ask us, are you going to have more kids? It’s kind of awkward, but otherwise your spot gets filled by so and so.
- Yeah, my daughter will be one in August. Her spot’s already full for next year.
- One issue that hasn’t been brought up goes back to cost. When you look at a day care center in a small town, you have a lot of investment in cost. You have to be able to cash flow the thing, as well. It’s a real battle, especially in these smaller communities outside the regional centers. Fortunately, we’re working with our community, and the school, and the city. We have a pretty good team put together, and I think we’re going to do something about it. It’s been a long road to get all the pieces together.
- I think one point of the solution could be that an employer needs to have a child care facility on site. We added a child care center right to the facility. I think we need to do that. It just becomes part of the cost of doing business. I think that’s one solution.
- Besides cost is availability for all shifts. We often have second shifts or overnight shifts. We have a lot of turnover on those schedules. We start some of our schedules at 5 a.m. They can’t come in until 6 a.m. That availability time slot is also a challenge for around-the-clock manufacturers.
- We took a church with classrooms and converted those to child care areas. It’s a mission project for our church. For families with two children who can’t go back to work, we give them scholarships. We’re still not at a break-even point, but it’s worth looking into if you can find a facility, whether it’s a church or whatever, and use classrooms during the week, weekends. We’ve done that with several of the churches that we’ve built.
• Our school is actually going to open its child care center back up this fall and manage it. It’s been closed for three years. The community ed director is going to manage the staff so we can afford to pay them. Ages three and over are actually going to a preschool program at the school. So, the child growth center will just be for infants and toddlers. I think that’s a good thing. We’ll see what happens in the fall.

Companies talk about how the chronic lack of truck drivers continues to hurt them.

• They’re hard to find and hard to keep in compliance. There’s a lot of competition.

• In February 2020, they’re going to have to go through six weeks of educational training up in the Twin Cities. That expense alone, let alone the time it takes to get a CDL, is huge.

• From my perspective, it’s one of the single biggest risks you’ll have. Say we’re shipping something to Chicago. We oftentimes can’t get a truck until two, three, four, five days after they already wanted the order. The livelihood of my business could be one or two customers, and they get mad because they can’t get their order. That’s half of my volume. Then we’re having a big agricultural business problem that’s going to impact not just what we do, but farmers and all their suppliers as well. That’s purely based on trucking. That’s not even a weekly thing. That’s a daily struggle for us.

• Our whole educational system needs to change, and it needs to change sooner rather than later.

• A teacher, coming out of school with a four-year degree, is going to make less money than one of my construction workers. Is that right? Absolutely not. We need to start with education. For a while, we were heading down the vocational route, but it seems to be reversing the last few years. I think that’s going to change if salaries change a little bit.

• A CNC operator in Thief River Falls can make $90,000 out of school.

• And should. I think it’s a stigma more than anything. There’s a stigma that if you’re not getting a four-year degree you’re wasting your education.

Let’s talk about the end game. We’ve talked about a lot of impediments to economic growth. Are we going to be better off in five years? Is the economy here going to be better off in five years? Or do you not know?

• It’s a little indecisive.

• It’s hard to tell.

• The economy is pretty good right now. We’ve been looking forward to full employment for a long time, and here we are. Now we don’t have enough people. Demographers were telling us this 10, 15, 20 years ago.

• And it’s not going away.

• The worker shortage is not going away.

• We need to do something about the immigration system. How do we get these people to work easier, more readily, all of that. That’s a huge issue. I don’t have a solution. But for our workforce, that’s a big deal.