



Fillmore County

Business Survey Results – Summer 2015

Overview

The Fillmore County Development Corporation (FCDC) has assisted, supported and applauded business growth in the past few years. Many local people have expanded their current businesses by enlarging their facilities, adding employees, and keeping up with the demands of their industry sector. Local expansion has become the leader in driving future economic growth in Fillmore County. In an effort to become a stronger partner with businesses the FCDC conducted “Business Retention and Expansion” (BR & E) visits with manufacturers and those companies who do much of their services and sales outside a 50-mile radius of the County during May of this year.

Twenty-four businesses in Fillmore County participated in the Fillmore County Business Visitation Program this spring. The businesses answered an 11 question survey and discussed their recent achievements and future plans with local FCDC staff and Board members along with utility economic developer partners. The businesses this year were located in Exeter, Fairmont, Geneva, and Shickley.

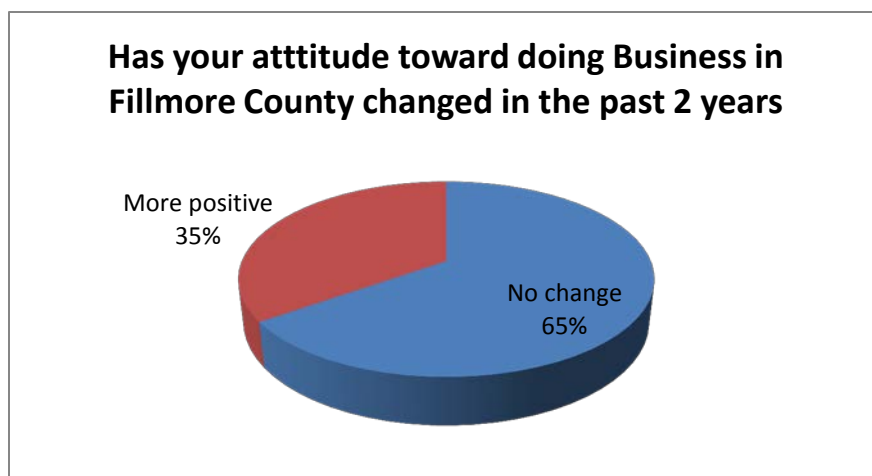
Conducting the visits were the FCDC Executive Director Patt Lentfer, members of the Board and the Recruitment-BR & E Committee, Cheryl Brandenburgh, Black Hills Energy Economic Manager, Rick Nelson, NPPD Economic Development Manager, Craig Vincent, NPPD Account Manager, and Corrinne Pedersen, NMPP Energy Community Development Services Manager.



Survey Questions

The first question of the survey was “What is your company’s greatest achievement(s) in the past three years?” Answers varied from “keeping up with the demands of their business sector”, “improved working operations”, “increased sales”, “profitability and growth”, and “facility expansion”. Every business interviewed had some successes to share and were glad to be in Fillmore County.

All the businesses surveyed said they had a positive attitude toward doing business in Fillmore County which had not changed in the past few years. Thirty-five percent of the responders said their attitude toward doing business in Fillmore County was actually more positive.



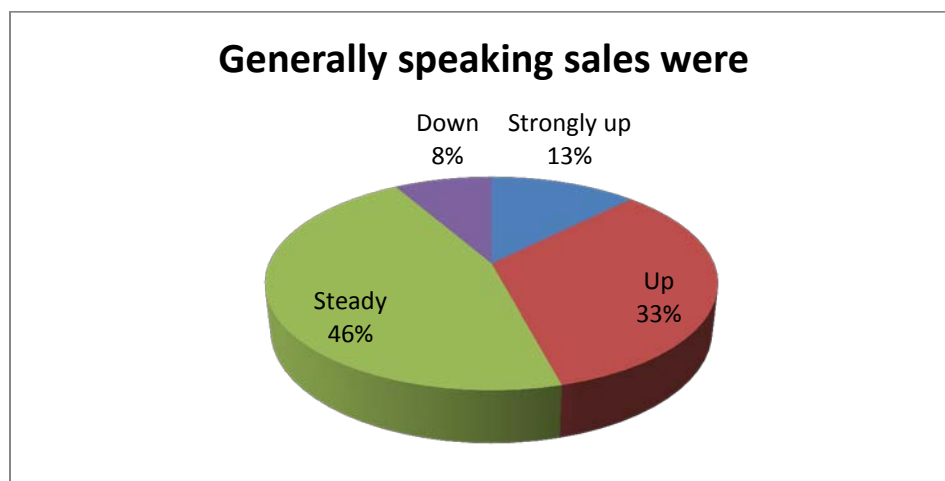
Businesses were asked how likely it was that they would recommend Fillmore County to another business owner/executive as a good place to do business. All business owners said they would recommend Fillmore County.



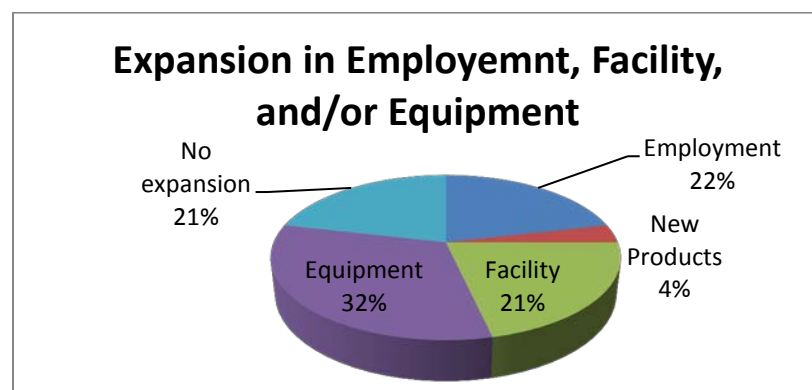
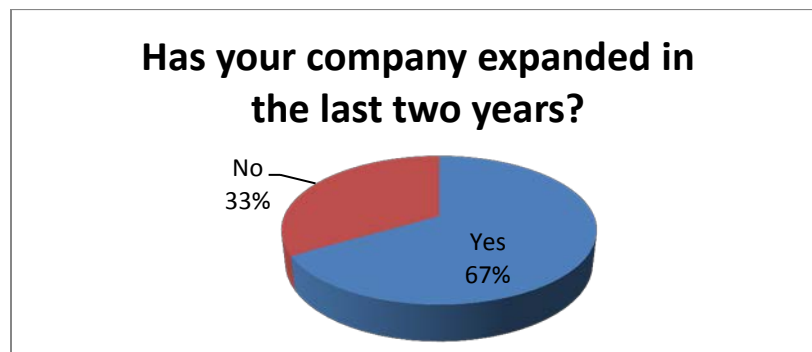
Businesses were asked if their sales were local, regional, multi-state, or international. Most of them had sales beyond the local area.



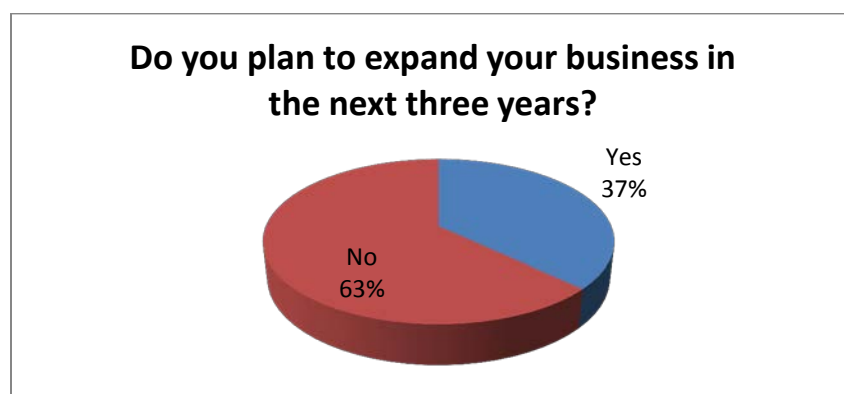
The businesses were asked if generally sales were up or down. Most reported that sales were steady or slightly up in the past two years. The changing farm economy affected most of the businesses interviewed. Hence, the survey done in 2013 showed many more businesses answering sales as "strongly up."



The interviewers asked the business owners/managers if the company had expanded in the past two years and if the expansion included employment, facility, new products and/or equipment. Several companies had expansions in more than one area.

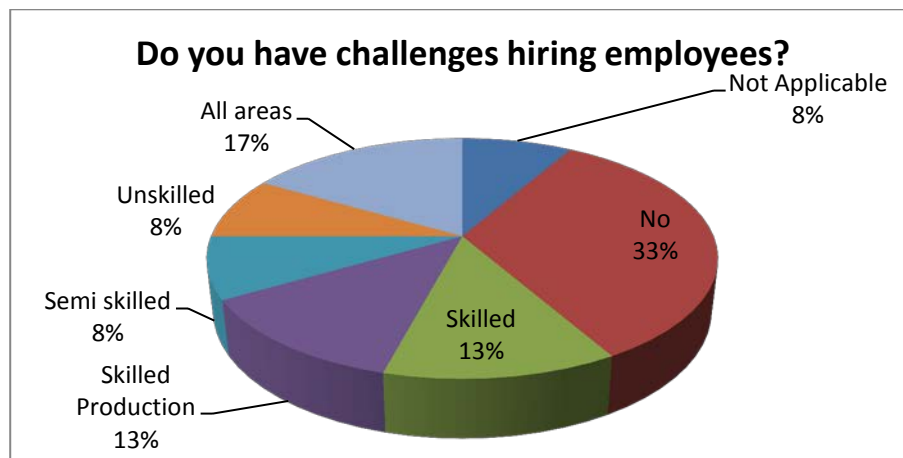


The follow-up question to the business owners/managers was do you plan to expand in the next three years at your current location or a different location. Several of the businesses were planning to expand facilities and add equipment. Only one of those businesses will do their expansion at another location.

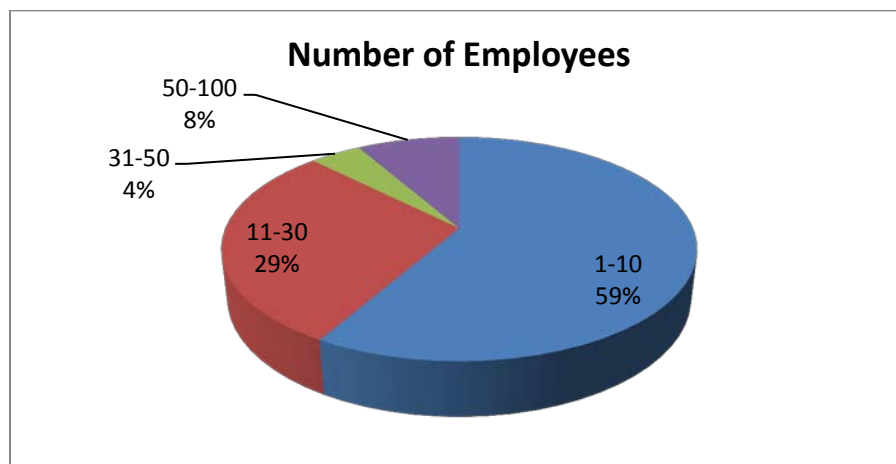


Business owners/managers were asked if they have any challenges with hiring employees and in what areas. About two-thirds of them do have challenges with hiring especially hiring employees needing specialized skills. Unemployment rate in Fillmore County was 2.8 % as of May 2015. The Nebraska unemployment rate in May was 2.6%

Only about 15% of the companies had a problem with retaining workers and it was usually with a specific job area.



The 24 business were asked how many people they currently (May 2015) employ. The number of employees varied from 1 (one) to 90. Nine of the businesses use part-time employees in addition to their full-time employees.



The final question asked to the owners/managers of the businesses was “Have you made any of the following changes in the past 3 years, or do you anticipate any changes over the next 3 years.” The following list was presented to them

- Changed ownership
- Changed management
- Added new product(s)
- Discontinued new product(s)
- Entered new markets
- Added or expanded export activity
- Exited markets
- Added workers
- Reduced workforce
- Adopted labor saving technology
- Adopted technology to provide new products/services

The answers were as diverse as the businesses but several themes emerged. New workers were added at many of the businesses. Products were introduced and others discontinued which was not surprising when two-thirds of the companies had either adopted labor saving technology and/or adopted technology to provide new products and services.

Conclusion

The results of the Business Retention and Expansion visits showed that Fillmore County businesses are planning to be around for a while and grow. Every established business had a positive attitude about doing business in Fillmore County.

It was also positive that many businesses had steady sales or even seen sales growth despite the down turn in the farm economy. Over half of the businesses interviewed had done expansions in the past two years by adding employees, enlarging their facility and/or making capital investments. Thirty-five percent of the businesses are now planning expansions in the next three years many based on new products or services.

The immediate challenge facing Fillmore County businesses is finding skilled employees. With a decreasing population in rural Nebraska and a limited housing stock it is difficult to find quality workers. This challenge is not limited to Fillmore County, but also adjoining counties.

Fillmore County Development Corporation will assist individual employers with workforce issues on a need-by-need basis. We keep the available jobs list current on our website so if your company has a job you would like posted, let me know. We collaborated with York and Seward County to host a job fair the past two years. The FCDC board and membership wants to keep the businesses in Fillmore County growing and will offer any assistance that they can.

Thank you for taking the time for the Business Retention and Expansion survey and for establishing and growing your business in Fillmore County.

Patt Lentfer, Executive Director