

Fillmore County

Business Survey Results – Summer 2014



Overview

Fillmore County Development Corporation (FCDC) conducted 14 Business Retention & Expansions (BR & E) visits with agriculture related businesses in July. Much of the economic growth has come from local business expansions during the past few years because of Fillmore County's strong agriculture base. The FCDC was pleased to witness, assist and celebrate with these businesses.

BR & E visits are an effort to become a stronger partner with businesses in the county. The FCDC attempts to assess the business climate and see the strengths and weaknesses there are in Fillmore County to help local businesses grow and expand.

The 14 businesses who participated in the Fillmore County Business Visitation Program this summer were located in Exeter, Fairmont, Geneva, Milligan and Shickley. The businesses answered a 13 question survey. The interviews were conducted between July 23 and July 28, 2014.

Visits were conducted by the Fillmore County Development Corporation staff; Patt Lentfer, Executive Director and Mary Johnson, Administrative Assistant, Cheryl Brandenburgh, Black Hills Energy Economic Manager, Craig Vincent, NPPD Economic Development Manager, and Pat Compton, a Business Consultant for the Nebraska Department of Economic Development.



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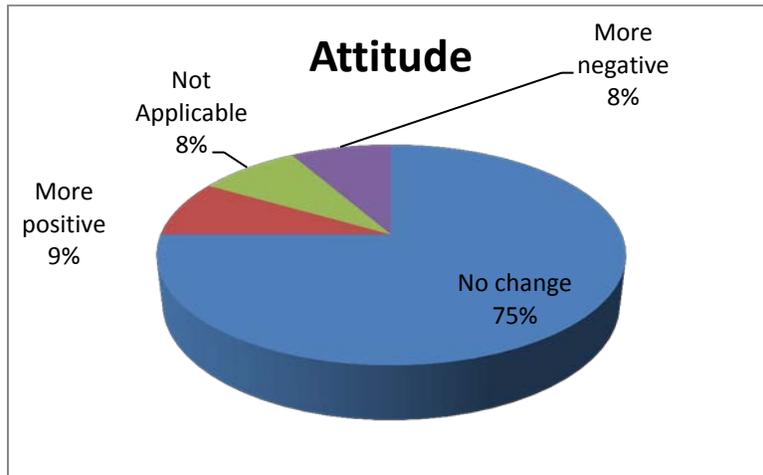
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Survey Questions

The first question of the survey was “What is your company’s greatest achievement(s) in the past three years?” Answers varied from “sales growth”, “hiring more employees”, “new lines”, “staying in business”, and “building capacity”. Every business interviewed had a success story to share.

Nearly all the businesses surveyed said they had a positive attitude toward doing business in Fillmore County and it had not changed in the past two years. Nearly half said the attitude toward doing business in Fillmore County was actually more positive.



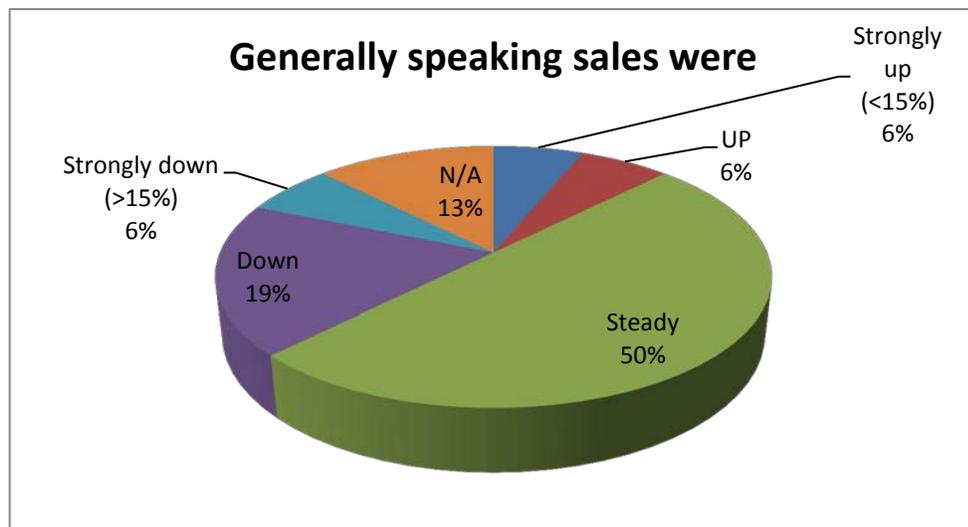
Business were asked how likely it was that they would recommend Fillmore County to another business owner/executive as a good place to do business. All business owners said they would recommend Fillmore County and one said “absolutely.”



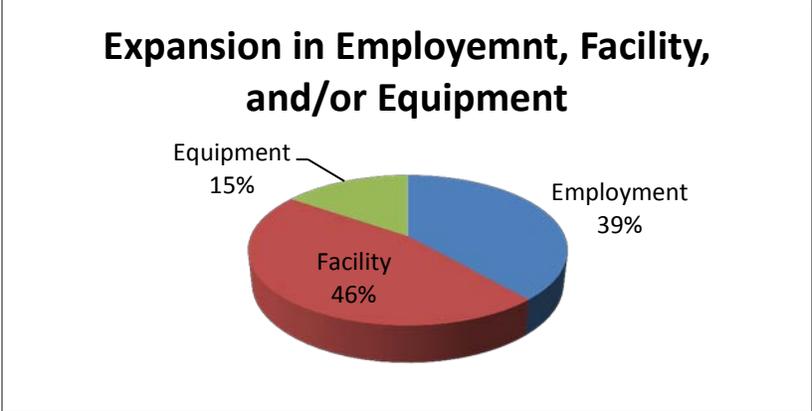
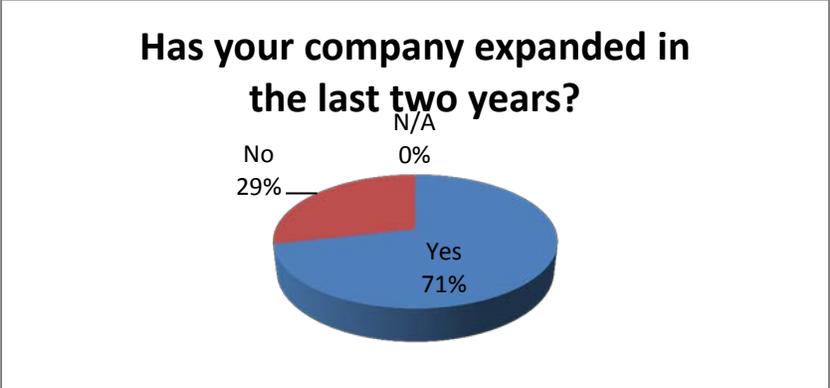
The agricultural related businesses were asked if their sales were local, regional, multi state, national or international. Most of them had sales beyond the local area.



The businesses were asked if generally sales were up or down. Most reported that sales were steady or down in the last two years. Many said their answers would have been different if this question was asked in July of 2013 and would have indicated sales were 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, and/or equipment. Four did no expansion in any area and some expanded in more than one area

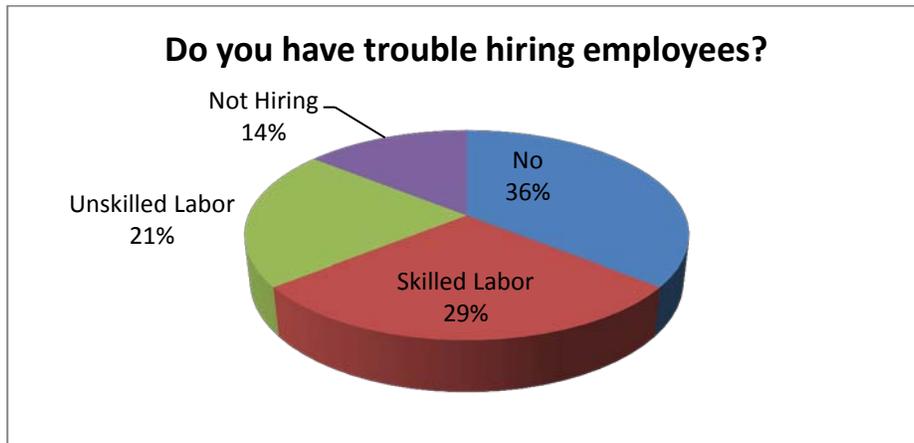


The follow-up question to the business owners/managers was do you plan to expand in the next three years at your current location or a different location. Half of the businesses were planning to expand facilities and add equipment. One of those businesses will push back the expansion a year or two.

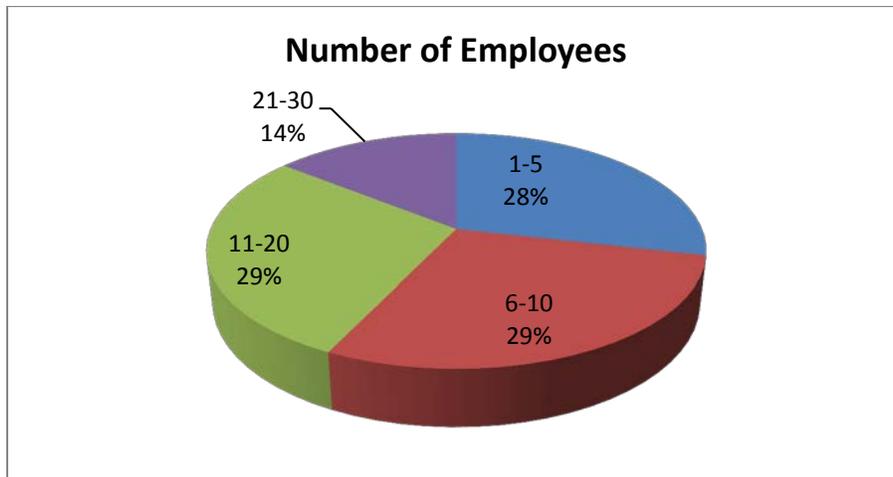


Business owners/managers were asked if they have any challenges with hiring employees and in what areas. Half of them do have challenges with hiring. It was nearly equal to them having trouble finding skilled and technical employees or finding unskilled laborers. Unemployment rate in Fillmore County was 2.6 % as of August 2014 and 3.3% for the Southeast Region of Nebraska. The Nebraska unemployment rate in August was 3.6%

Only about 14% of the companies who answered had a problem with retaining workers.



The 14 agricultural related businesses were also asked how many people they currently (July-2014) employ. The number of employees varied from one (1) to 24. Six of the businesses have part-time employees in addition to their full-time employees.



One of the last questions asked the agricultural related business owners/managers was “Does the market price of grain and/or livestock?” affect your business. All of the respondents said “Yes” and “Substantially”. This was an expected answer.

One final question was asked of the owners/managers of the businesses and that question 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

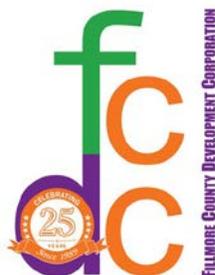
The answers were varied. However, 60 percent of them have or expect to add new products and over 70 percent have adopted labor saving technology and/or technology to provide new products or services. In the 21st Century adapting to change is the only way a business can survive and grow.

Immediate challenges facing Fillmore County are a decreasing population paired with a shortage of available labor. As the county’s businesses grow and need more employers we are now finding a need to improve and enlarge the housing stock. Another need is more daycare capacity. The Fillmore County Development Corporation is working on both of these issues.

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 are also collaborating with York and Seward County to host a job fair on March 17th at the Holthus Center in York. Registrations will be available soon if your businesses would like a booth the job fair. The FCDC wants to keep the businesses in Fillmore County growing and will offer any assistance that we 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



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