

NORTH AMERICA: NORTHCENTRAL U.S.

These states, along with Kansas and Missouri (p. 9), make up the American Midwest, one of the world's most productive agricultural areas. The central location gives it access to transportation on the major rivers (Mississippi, Missouri, and Ohio), the Great Lakes, and St. Lawrence Seaway, and to extensive rail and road networks. The lower tier of states makes up the "corn belt." Much of America's most valuable crop is grown here to feed cattle that are sent to feedlots in the Midwest for fattening before slaughter. Wheat, the most important human food crop, dominates the western fringe of states. The northern states specialize in "spring wheat" while those to the south grow "winter wheat." In addition to the two wheat belts, there is a "dairy belt" across the northcentral states. Wisconsin, the leading dairy producer, and the four states east of the Mississippi are industrial power-houses as well as major agricultural producers. These states are ideally situated between the iron deposits of northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan and the coal deposits of the Appalachian Mountains to the east. Interstate commerce via the Great Lakes was expanded to include international trade when the completion of Canada's St. Lawrence Seaway opened a route to the Atlantic (see map on p. 6). Except for northern Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan, this region has very few trees. Much of it is rolling hills or flat prairie that gradually ascends to 5,000 ft. (1,524 m) at its western edge.

ILLINOIS_A

Area: 56,400 sq.mi.(145,963 km²). Population: 12,600,000. Capital: Springfield, 112,000. Economy: Corn, soybeans, heavy machinery, food products, hogs, coal, electronics. □ As a leading agricultural and industrial state, Illinois (ill uh noy) produces the most corn, soybeans, meat products, farm and road-building equipment, and diesel engines. Chicago (3,000,000), the nation's transportation hub, handles more passengers and freight through its air, ship, rail, truck, and bus terminals than any other city in North America. With the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, Chicago became the world's busiest inland port. It is the trade, financial, and cultural center of the Midwest. Its 110-story Sears Tower is the world's tallest building (1,454 ft., 443 m), and O'Hare is the busiest airport. Over 60% of the state's population lives in the greater Chicago area. The Fermi National Accelerator Lab, a leader in atomic research, is in the suburb of Batavia. Illinois is nearly surrounded by water: Lake Michigan and the Mississippi, Illinois, Ohio, and Wabash Rivers.

INDIANA_B

Area: 36,280 sq.mi.(93,893 km²). Population: 6,200,000. Capital: Indianapolis, 800,000. Economy: Coal, iron and steel, electrical and food products, corn, soybeans, hogs, limestone. □ Though only 38th in size, Indiana ranks among the top agricultural and industrial states. The 50 mi.(80 km) Lake Michigan riverfront of Gary and Hammond is one of the world's great industrial regions—a center for iron and steel, chemicals, oil refineries, and general manufacturing. Indianapolis, the capital and business center, is a major livestock distribution hub with many interstate truck routes passing through it. The city is the home of the Memorial Day automobile racing classic, the Indianapolis 500. Notre Dame University is located in South Bend. Nearby Elkhart is the leading producer of band and orchestral instruments. Most of the limestone used in the nation's buildings is cut in quarries located in southern Indiana.

IOWA_C

Area: 56,274 sq.mi.(145,693 km²). Population: 2,950,000. Capital: Des Moines, 200,000. Economy: Corn, hogs, soybeans, food products, farm machinery. □ The golden, gently rolling hills made famous in the paintings of Grant Wood reflect the agricultural richness of this state. Its deep, rich, topsoil—from past glacial activity—amounts to 25% of the nation's best farmland. Though it is medium-sized in area and population, Iowa ranks second only to California in food production. The state alternates with Illinois as the leading corn producer. It is first in hogs, second in soybeans, and among the leaders in cattle (most of which are brought into the state to be "corn-fattened" before slaughter). A quarter of the food production is exported abroad.

MICHIGAN_D

Area: 58,220 sq.mi.(150,731 km²). Population: 10,100,000. Capital: Lansing, 115,000. Economy: Autos, machinery, iron ore, oil, food processing, salt, and tourism. □ Surrounded by four of the five Great Lakes, Michigan is almost all coastline. The state consists of two peninsulas: the larger, the shape of a mitten, contains most of the population, factories, and farms; only 3% of the population lives in the iron-rich upper peninsula. At its tip is one of the busiest canals in the world: the Sault Ste. Marie, which connects Lake Superior with Lake Huron. The northern forests (with over 10,000 lakes) and an extensive coastline make Michigan a leading recreational area. More cars and trucks are produced in Detroit (925,000), Flint, Lansing, and Pontiac than in any comparable region. In the processing of grains, Battle Creek is known for breakfast cereals. Much of the nation's freshwater fish comes from Michigan's many inland fisheries.

MINNESOTA_E

Area: 84,401 sq.mi.(218,514 km²). Population: 5,025,000. Capital: St. Paul, 290,000. Economy: Dairying, grains, iron ore, timber, electronics. □ The Indian name "Minnesota" means "sky-blue water," which befits a land of many rivers, streams, swamps, waterfalls, and over 15,000 lakes. Glacial action that flattened large sections of the state was not quite as effective in the hilly, iron-rich, north-eastern "Superior Uplands" (the lower tip of the rocky Canadian Shield). In that region, the Mesabi Range, the largest open-pit mine in the world, has been extracting iron ore for over 80 years. Although the premium ore is gone, newer technology has made it feasible to continue mining inferior grades. The ore is shipped, along with timber and grains, out of Duluth and Superior (Wisconsin), two of the busiest ports on the Great Lakes. Half of the population (which includes the most Scandinavians in the U.S.) lives in the twin cities of Minneapolis (390,000) and St. Paul, modern centers of business and culture. The famed Mayo Clinic is located in Rochester. Grain and dairy production has earned Minnesota the title "Bread and Butter State."

NEBRASKA_F

Area: 77,354 sq.mi.(200,270 km²). Population: 1,740,000. Capital: Lincoln, 240,000. Economy: Wheat, corn, cattle, hogs, food products, alfalfa, oil. □ The "Cornhusker State" actually ranks third in corn production, but first in alfalfa and second (after Texas) in cattle. As much as 95% of the land is devoted to agriculture. The corn-growing farms are located in the wetter eastern half of the state. Wheat and cattle are raised in the west. Numerous varieties of grass for cattle forage are grown throughout the state. Omaha (400,000), the largest city, is a major livestock trading center and a hub for finance and insurance. Nebraska is the only state with a single-house legislature; its members are elected without any party affiliation. In the 19th century, many Nebraskans provided services for pioneers passing through the state on their way west. The famous Oregon Trail ran along the Platte and North Platte Rivers.

NORTH DAKOTA_G

Area: 70,700 sq.mi.(183,042 km²). Population: 643,000. Capital: Bismarck, 55,000. Economy: Oil, lignite coal, wheat, flax, sunflower seeds, barley, oats. □ In this sparsely populated state, only four cities have more than 25,000 residents, with Fargo (80,500) being the largest. Lack of growth is not surprising, given a climate that ranges from blazing hot and dusty summers to frigid winters with paralyzing blizzards. North Dakota is the nation's leading producer of lignite (a soft coal), spring and durum wheat (the latter is used in pasta), flax seed (pressed into linseed oil), sunflower seeds, and barley. Coal and oil deposits are mined in the rugged western region. The narrow Red River Valley, on the eastern border, is a remarkably fertile ancient lakebed, settled in the 19th century by Norwegians and Germans. The Garrison Dam on the Missouri created Lake Sakakawea, 178 mi.(285 km) long.

OHIO_H

Area: 41,228 sq.mi.(106,739 km²). Population: 11,450,000. Capital: Columbus, 750,000. Economy: Machinery, aircraft parts, iron and steel, coal, rubber products, corn, soybeans. □ Despite its modest size, Ohio's strategic location, coal reserves, and fertile soil have made it a major industrial and agricultural state. It is among the leaders in the production of rubber products, machine tools, iron and steel, aircraft parts, general manufacturing, corn, soybeans, and hogs. The "Buckeye State" was covered with buckeye trees before the land was cleared for farming. Cleveland (470,000) is no longer larger than Columbus (730,000), the capital. Cincinnati (325,000), on the Ohio River, draws commuters and shoppers from Indiana and Kentucky.

SOUTH DAKOTA_I

Area: 77,114 sq.mi.(199,648 km²). Population: 765,000. Capital: Pierre, 14,000. Economy: Food processing, tourism, wheat, cattle, sheep, gold. □ Next to agriculture, tourism is the largest industry. Visitors come to see the Black Hills (the highest mountains east of the Rockies), the Badlands (grotesque formations of rock and clay in a desert environment), and the four presidential heads—Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson, and Theodore Roosevelt—carved in the granite face of Mt. Rushmore. Also of interest is Deadwood, once the most lawless town on the frontier, and a magnet for gold prospectors, gamblers, dancehall girls, and gunslingers. Gold is still mined in the Black Hills, the spiritual home of the Sioux Indians, who were driven out by invading miners in the 1870s. Descendants of the Sioux have received reparations from Congress for the land taken from them. The state is so sparsely settled that Sioux Falls (130,000) is the largest—only three cities to exceed 25,000. The Missouri divides the state into a rugged western part and a flat, fertile eastern half. The construction of four large dams on the river in the 1930s created a source of irrigation and hydroelectric power.

WISCONSIN_J

Area: 56,155 sq.mi.(145,386 km²). Population: 5,450,000. Capital: Madison, 215,000. Economy: Dairying, engines, turbines, food, paper, beer. □ Wisconsin is called America's dairy—it produces 40% of the nation's cheese—but the state's economic wealth is in industry: paper products, engines for outboards and lawnmowers, beer brewing, and food processing. The northern region—the base of Michigan's northern peninsula—is a popular recreational area. Despite indiscriminate lumbering of the past, a highly successful forestry program has restored much of Wisconsin's forests, which cover half the state. Milwaukee (570,000), the largest city and industrial center, is the nation's beer-brewing capital and, not surprisingly, home to the nation's largest German-American community. A German creation, the kindergarten, was introduced to America over 100 years ago in a small Wisconsin village. The state has been the most socially progressive, passing legislation regarding jobs, health, and welfare.

