

Retail Trade Analysis

Fiscal Year 2024

Hamilton County

report created: 05/13/2026

Overview

This report examines local retail sales and related economic trends using a variety of historical and peer-based performance measures.

The retail measures are based on sales of goods and services that are subject to Iowa's statewide sales tax, as reported in the Iowa Department of Revenue Annual Sales and Use Tax Report.

Retail sales data have been adjusted for inflation and are stated in Fiscal Year 2024 dollar equivalents, unless otherwise noted. The 2024 fiscal year began July 1, 2023, and ended June 30, 2024.

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<https://indicators.extension.iastate.edu/Indicators/Retail>

Table 1. Hamilton County Key Retail Indicators

	2023	2024	% Change
Real total taxable sales	\$152,538,916	\$138,956,477	-8.9% ▼
Estimated population ¹	14,766	14,729	-0.3% ►
Annual average sales per capita	\$10,330	\$9,434	-8.7% ▼
Monthly average number of sales tax return filings ²	305	328	8% ▲

1) The population estimate describes the average number of residents in households, dormitories, nursing homes, correctional institutions, and other group quarters during the fiscal year.

2) The required filing frequency for sales tax returns increased to a monthly basis for most firms beginning in FY24.

10-Year Summary of Taxable Retail Sales Statistics

Figure 1 shows the dollar amount of total taxable retail sales reported by local businesses, measured in millions of real (i.e. inflation-adjusted) dollars.

Figure 1. Real Total Taxable Sales (in \$ millions)

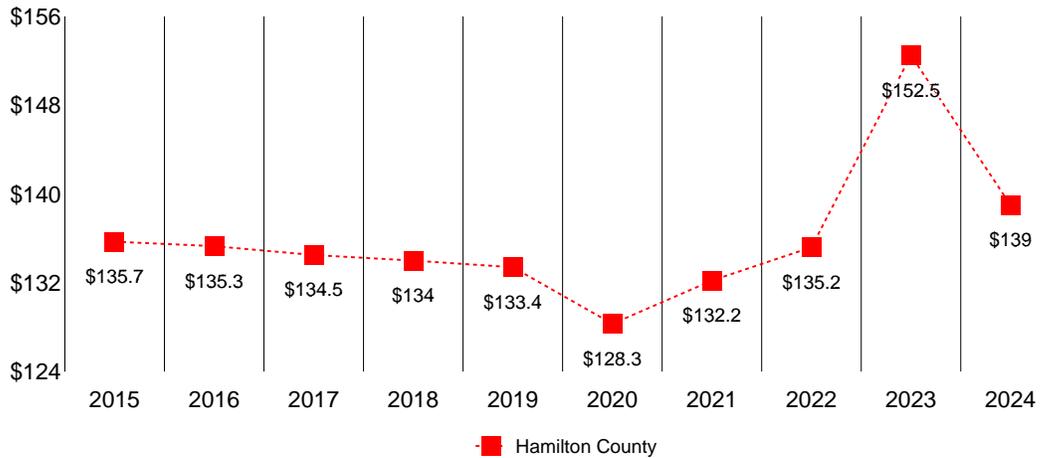
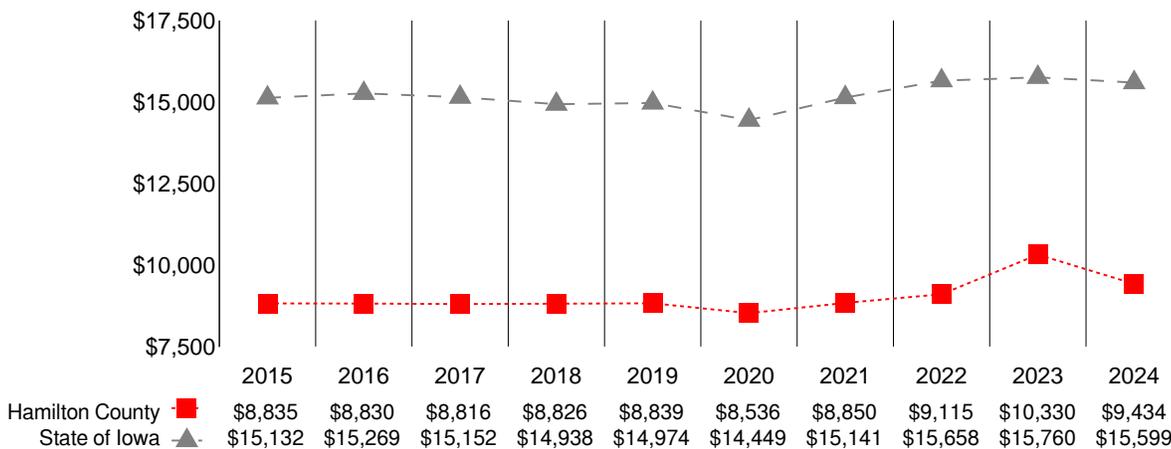


Figure 2 measures local taxable sales on a per capita basis, with comparisons to statewide averages by year. The per capita averages are expressed in real dollars.

Figure 2. Real Per Capita Taxable Sales



Historical Trends in Taxable Retail Sales

Table 2. Historical Statistics for Hamilton County

Fiscal Year	Total Returns Filed	Total Taxable Sales (\$)		Estimated Population	Real Sales Per Capita (\$)	Statewide Sales Per Capita (\$)
		Nominal	Real			
2024	3,933	138,956,477	138,956,477	14,729	9,434	15,599
2023	3,655	149,589,787	152,538,916	14,766	10,330	15,760
2022	1,861	127,809,162	135,207,709	14,833	9,115	15,658
2021	1,914	117,347,505	132,189,287	14,936	8,850	15,141
2020	1,944	109,377,771	128,336,410	15,035	8,536	14,449
2019	1,900	112,486,195	133,398,335	15,092	8,839	14,974
2018	1,836	111,402,344	134,009,013	15,183	8,826	14,938
2017	1,808	109,568,448	134,503,053	15,256	8,816	15,152
2016	1,824	108,302,165	135,268,887	15,320	8,830	15,269
2015	1,812	107,536,724	135,670,861	15,356	8,835	15,132
2014	1,816	102,403,175	129,431,709	15,390	8,410	14,561
2013	1,904	96,877,715	124,160,962	15,410	8,057	14,425
2012	1,968	97,131,631	126,127,194	15,440	8,169	14,581
2011	1,960	95,015,229	125,679,339	15,566	8,074	14,223
2010	2,032	94,302,021	127,893,592	15,686	8,153	14,240
2009	2,048	97,067,456	133,999,543	15,799	8,482	15,312
2008	2,024	97,695,179	134,488,742	15,924	8,446	15,140
2007	2,028	94,222,065	133,552,272	16,065	8,313	14,994
2006	1,916	92,110,857	133,909,363	16,202	8,265	15,206
2005	1,944	86,713,394	129,616,706	16,272	7,966	15,054
2004	1,896	87,409,904	134,423,075	16,325	8,234	15,179
2003	1,928	88,371,298	139,272,526	16,351	8,518	15,396
2002	2,064	90,625,507	145,822,987	16,287	8,953	15,605
2001	2,144	93,488,720	152,400,339	16,330	9,333	15,802
2000	2,192	89,663,837	149,104,680	16,388	9,098	15,694
1999	2,232	88,159,305	150,313,914	16,363	9,186	15,688
1998	2,316	85,858,280	148,516,410	16,358	9,079	15,130
1997	2,320	85,288,420	148,704,147	16,336	9,103	14,826
1996	2,360	88,121,404	156,320,190	16,386	9,540	14,533
1995	2,408	84,412,956	152,942,629	16,327	9,367	14,239
1994	2,448	82,563,733	152,744,524	16,190	9,434	13,945
1993	2,432	80,018,835	151,125,451	16,191	9,334	13,638
1992	2,360	78,336,948	151,636,337	16,148	9,390	13,450
1991	2,368	80,892,682	160,750,167	16,061	10,009	13,331
1990	2,412	76,527,624	157,154,628	16,140	9,737	13,238
1989	2,460	75,320,249	161,477,348	16,328	9,890	13,077
1988	2,480	73,383,701	164,204,868	16,502	9,951	12,888
1987	2,512	71,243,520	165,642,044	16,677	9,932	12,834
1986	2,548	68,967,727	165,298,336	16,854	9,808	12,491
1985	2,560	71,253,848	174,501,613	17,033	10,245	12,490
1984	2,628	73,077,496	185,211,585	17,214	10,759	12,544
1983	2,684	74,433,265	195,797,051	17,397	11,255	12,620
1982	2,680	71,708,643	196,636,104	17,582	11,184	12,712
1981	2,748	70,898,706	205,184,270	17,768	11,548	13,035
1980	2,768	74,908,504	236,224,251	17,888	13,206	14,213
1979	2,752	67,736,661	236,630,604	17,939	13,191	14,378
1978	2,744	59,144,117	224,993,437	17,991	12,506	13,945
1977	2,664	55,692,206	226,588,916	18,043	12,558	13,685
1976	2,664	53,820,234	233,216,898	18,095	12,888	12,980

Population Trends

Population change is a key factor influencing local retail sales performance. Population gains or losses from year to year directly impact the number of potential shoppers in the region.

In the longer term, population trends also reflect the region's general economic climate. Population growth or stability suggests a more favorable retail environment than population decline, which may signify erosion in the region's economic vitality.

Figure 3. Population Trends for Hamilton County

Figure 3 shows annual population estimates for the county and state, expressed as percentages of baseline values from 10 years ago.

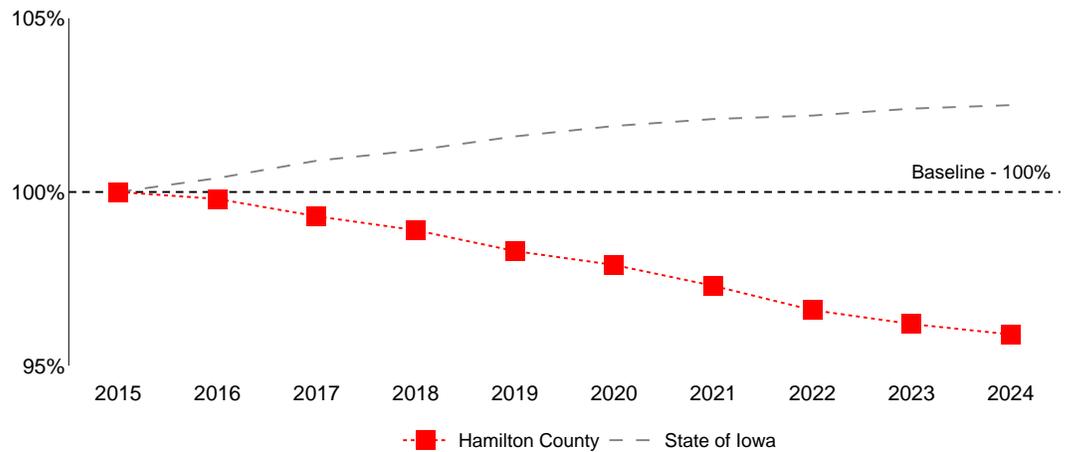
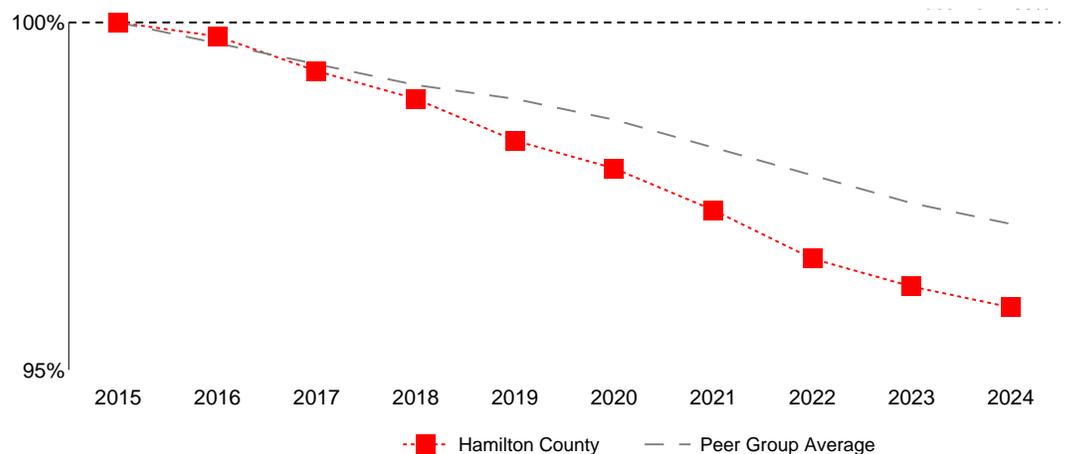


Figure 4. Population Trends for Group 3 Counties

Figure 4 compares the local population trend to the average experience for similarly-sized counties in Iowa. See Table 3 for peer group definitions and Table 7 for a list of Iowa counties by peer group.



Peer Group Comparisons

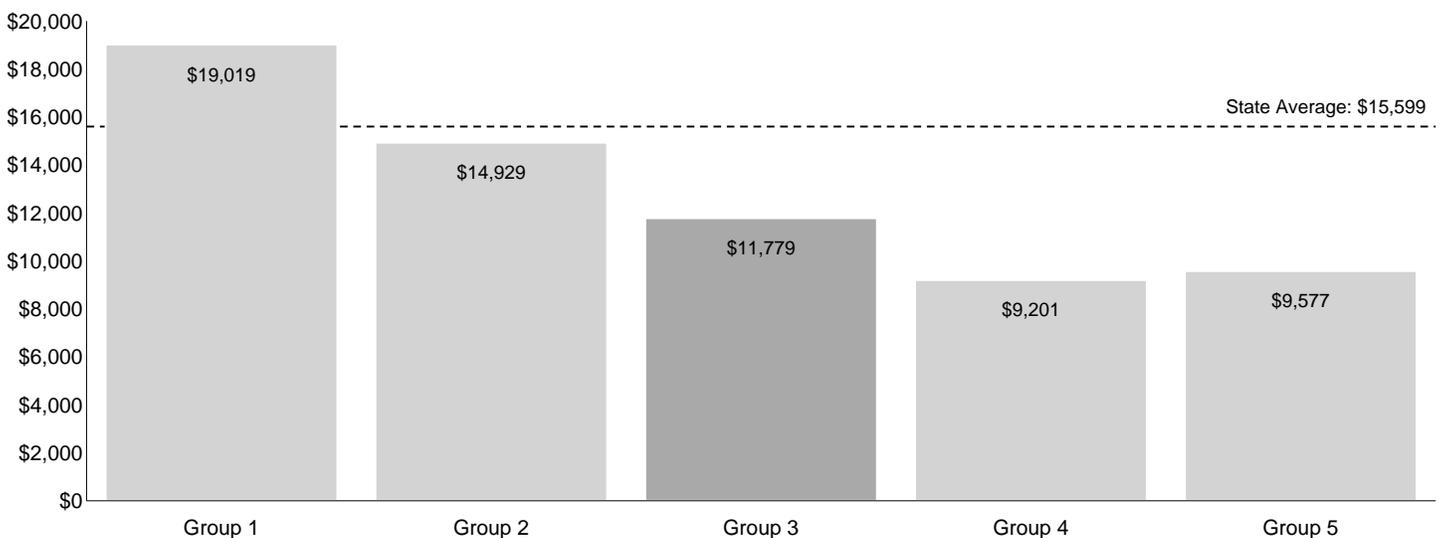
Iowa's 99 counties and their trade centers vary in the level and types of retail activity they can support. In general, retail sector size and diversity tend to increase with community size. Other determining factors include the proximity and size of competing trade centers in neighboring counties and the overall population density in the region. Counties that are similar across these dimensions serve as useful benchmarks for gauging local retail performance.

This report assigns all counties in Iowa to peer groups based on their population size and urbanization characteristics. **Table 3** contains peer group definitions. The relevant peer group for the county is highlighted in bold (see **Table 12** for a complete list of counties by peer group). **Figure 5** compares the average sales performance of all county peer groups during the most recent fiscal year.

Table 3. Peer Group Definitions

Group	Metropolitan or Micropolitan Status	Number of Counties	% of State Taxable Sales
Group 1	Core county of a metropolitan statistical area	10	64.8%
Group 2	Core county of a micropolitan statistical area	15	14.0%
Group 3	Non-metro county whose largest city is between 5,000 to 10,000 in population	23	8.6%
Group 4	Outlying (non-core) county in a metropolitan statistical area	12	5.2%
Group 5	Non-metro county whose largest city is less than 5,000 in population	39	7.3%

Figure 5. Average Sales Per Capita by County Peer Group



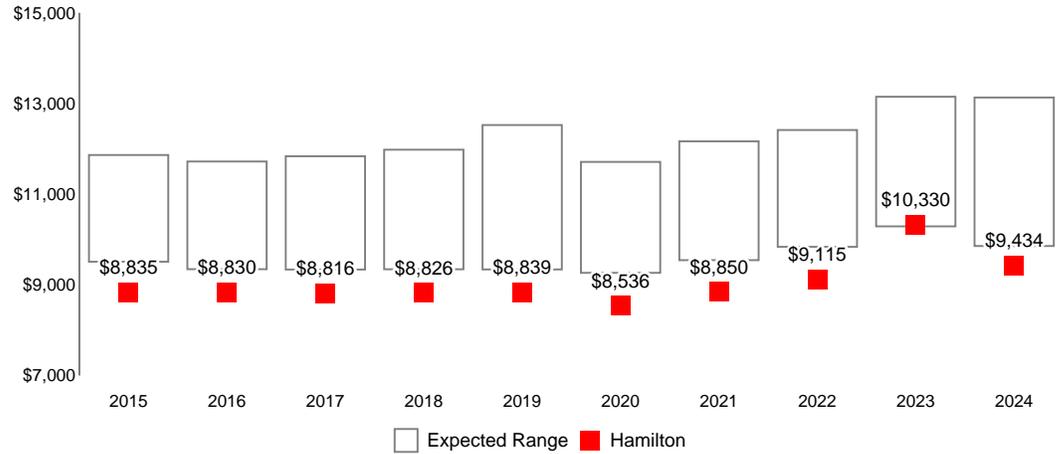
Peer Group Comparisons

Expected Sales

Using peer group data to describe an expected sales range, this benchmark helps determine whether local sales have been higher than, lower than, or typical for counties of similar size and urbanization characteristics. **Figure 6** illustrates whether recent local sales trends align with peer group expectations.

Figure 6 compares local sales with typical values for peer counties. The gray rectangles illustrate the 25th to the 75th percentile range of values for the peer group. The solid red squares show actual local per capita sales.

Figure 6. Expected and Actual Sales Per Capita



Regional Competition

This section explores broadly regional trade patterns competitive forces at work within the region. **Figure 7** compares county per capita sales to averages in neighboring counties. **Table 5** lists cities within the county that reported taxable sales activity during the most recent fiscal year.

Figure 7. Per Capita Retail Sales for Nearby Counties

Figure 7 shows the five nearest counties as measured from the center of each county. The counties are listed in descending order by their average per capita sales.

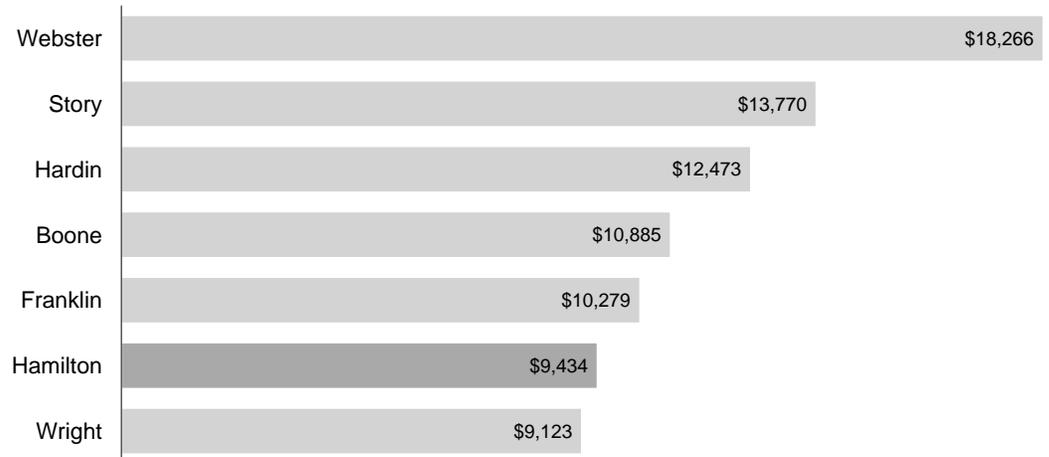


Table 4. Reporting Jurisdictions in Hamilton County

Values for unincorporated areas and for cities with 10 or fewer sales tax permit-holders are suppressed; however, sales data for those localities are included within the county totals.

Area Name	Population	Total Returns	Sales \$ millions
Hamilton County Total	14,729	3,933	139.0
Blairsburg	176	89	0.9
Ellsworth	492	267	14.9
Kamrar	176	90	1.6
Stanhope	353	92	1.9
Stratford*	682	335	4.2
Webster City	7,713	2,260	100.8
Williams	298	113	6.3

Values for any cities marked with an asterisk (*) include neighboring county residents who fall within the city limits; consequently, the sum of values for all cities listed in **Table 6** may exceed reported totals for the county.

Iowa's Retail Sales Tax Reporting

The state of Iowa imposes a six percent tax on the gross receipts from sales of taxable tangible personal property and taxable services.

Retailers file sales tax returns to the Iowa Department of Revenue on a semi monthly, monthly, quarterly, or annual basis depending on their amount of sales.

The Department of Revenue compiles the data from sales tax returns and publishes quarterly and annual retail sales tax reports that provide the primary source of data for this report.

The state's reporting does not include retail transactions that are exempt from the statewide sales tax. Consequently, this report describes only taxable, not total, retail sales. Several types of exempt activity are listed on the following page.

Occasional anomalies may arise in retail sales data reported at the local level. For example, the locations of specific firms may not precisely align with the administrative jurisdictions used for tax reporting purposes. Such discrepancies may result in under statement or over statement of actual local retail sales activity.

When analyzing trends, users should note that changes in Iowa's retail sales tax laws or changes in administrative or accounting practices may affect the comparability of taxable sales data over time.

Other cautions for using taxable sales data to analyze local retail performance are listed at right. Users seeking more detailed information are encouraged to consult the Iowa Department of Revenue's website at <https://tax.iowa.gov>

Cautions and Limitations for Interpreting Reported Sales Data

- **Non Taxable Goods & Services.** Because certain goods and services are exempt from the statewide sales tax, the sales information presented in this report provides only a partial picture of retail and service sector activity in Iowa's communities.
- **E-commerce Sales.** Neither the volume of e-commerce purchases by Iowa residents nor e-commerce sales by Iowa retailers are currently measurable.
- **Large Public Institutions.** The presence of large public institutions such as correctional facilities or universities may distort local sales measures, as their institutional purchases are excluded from taxable sales but their residents are included in local population estimates.
- **Sales or Service Territories.** Sales levels in some cities may be inflated by the administrative presence of firms serving a much larger geographic service territory, such as rural telecommunications and other cable or internet service providers.
- **Non-Disclosure Rules.** To avoid disclosing information traceable to specific firms, the Iowa Department of Revenue only reports data from localities with 10 or more tax returns filed per quarter or 40 returns per year. Sales data for areas below this threshold are grouped into a "remainder of county" value.

Notable Exclusions from Iowa's Retail Sales Tax

The retail data analyzed for this report only capture transactions that are subject to Iowa's statewide sales tax. In general, merchandise goods are taxable unless specifically exempted, whereas services are exempted from the tax unless specifically enumerated by the state.

Following are several types of sales activity that are **not** covered by this report.

Exempt or Excluded Goods. Some of the goods not subject to the sales tax include:

- Certain foods for home consumption
- Prescription drugs and medical devices
- New or used cars and other vehicles, as they are taxed separately under the state's one time registration fee.
- Gasoline, which is subject to a separate fuel tax

Exempt Services. Unlike tangible goods, services are exempt from tax unless specifically enumerated. Many professional services such as medical and legal services are exempt from the sales tax.

Sales to Tax Exempt Organizations. Local and state government entities are exempt from the sales tax. Sales to private nonprofit educational institutions for educational purposes are also exempt. Sales from fund raising activities are exempt from sales tax if the proceeds are used for educational, religious, or charitable purposes.

Internet/Catalog Sales. Prior to 2019, many out of state purchases by Iowa residents were untaxed. Iowa implemented regulatory changes on July 1, 2019, to require collection of sales taxes on residents' purchases from firms without a physical presence in Iowa but who generate \$100,000 or more in gross revenues from Iowa sales.

Sales to Agriculture. Sales tax exemptions for agriculture apply to the purchase of feed, seed, fertilizer, farm machinery and equipment, fuels and utilities, and some services.

Utilities. The state has phased out taxes on sales of metered gas, electricity, and fuel used as energy in residential dwellings, apartment units and condominiums. This phase out was completed by 2006. Specific exemptions for utilities may also apply to certain businesses and industries.

Sales to Manufacturing and Other Industries. The state exempts sales of many goods and services that are used as inputs to industrial processes. Exemptions to manufacturing include purchases of tangible inputs that become an integral part of manufactured goods ultimately sold at retail; fuels, chemicals, and other inputs that are consumed during production processes; industrial machinery, equipment, and some computer equipment; and many services.

The state has created additional exemptions targeted toward specific industries such as wind energy and information technology. See the Iowa Department of Revenue Web site for more detailed information.

More detailed information about Iowa's sales tax is available from the Iowa Department of Revenue at <http://tax.iowa.gov/iowa-sales-and-use-tax-guide>.

Definitions of Retail Measures

Retail Sales. This term refers to the reported sales of goods and services that are subject to Iowa’s retail sales tax. Iowa’s current sales tax rate is 6 percent.

Fiscal Year. Iowa’s annual sales tax reports reflect a July 1 June 30 fiscal year period.

Reporting Firms. This value reflects the average number of tax returns filed each quarter during the year, and it serves as a proxy for the number of local retail firms.

Nominal Sales. Nominal sales are the dollar amounts as reported in the year the transactions actually took place. These values have not been adjusted for inflation.

Real Sales. “Real” dollar values have been standardized to reflect the purchasing power of a dollar in the current fiscal year, thus removing the effects of price inflation.

Sales Per Firm. Per firm sales are calculated by dividing the annual dollar value of sales by the average number of reporting firms in that year.

Sales Per Capita. Per capita (or “per person”) sales are calculated by dividing the dollar value of sales by the estimated population for the subject place. No distinctions are made among residents of households, educational institutions, nursing homes, or other group quarters in the calculation of per capita sales and related indicators.

Population: Population values in this report describe the estimated, average number of residents during a given fiscal year. The estimates are based on data released annually through the Population Estimates Program, U.S. Census Bureau. The Census Bureau’s published estimates, which reflect the population on July 1 st of each year, may differ from the average values appearing in this report.

With each of its annual data releases, the U.S. Census Bureau may revise its estimates from prior years. This report incorporates the most recently available estimates and revisions. As a consequence, population based statistics published in this report may not reconcile with those appearing in earlier retail trade analysis reports. In most cases, the discrepancies are minor.

City to County Assignments: The incorporated territory of many Iowa cities crosses the boundaries of two or more counties. For this report, all cities are assigned to the county that contained the greatest percentage of its population in the 2020 Decennial Census.

Price Deflators: Except where otherwise noted in this report, the dollar values for all retail sales and personal income data have been adjusted for inflation using the Implicit Price Deflator for Personal Consumption Expenditures published by the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Frequently Asked Questions

Are business group sales data available at the city or county level? Subject to disclosure limitations to protect the confidentiality of local firms, local data for up to 12 business groups may be available upon request from the Iowa Department of Revenue.

Are the retail sales statistics fully comparable over time? No. Changes to Iowa's statewide sales tax laws have redefined the mix of goods and services comprising taxable sales transactions over time.

Why do historical data in this report differ from previously-published ISU retail reports? The underlying population and income data used in this report are subject to backward revision by the U.S. Census Bureau and sister agencies, meaning that historical data are revised as new information becomes available. Any revisions to population and income estimates may result in re-statement of per capita retail sales, pull factors, and related measures for prior years. This report incorporates the most recently-revised statistics, and no effort is made to reconcile the historical data with prior versions of the ISU Retail Trade Analysis reports.

Data Notes (continued)

Table 5. Peer County Groupings and 2020 Population (page 1 of 2)

	2020 Population	Metropolitan or Micropolitan Area	
Group 1	Black Hawk	130,471	Waterloo-Cedar Falls, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
	Dallas	111,092	Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
	Dubuque	98,887	Dubuque, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
	Johnson	157,528	Iowa City, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
	Linn	228,972	Cedar Rapids, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
	Polk	505,255	Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
	Pottawattamie	93,179	Omaha-Council Bluffs, NE-IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
	Scott	174,270	Davenport-Moline-Rock Island, IA-IL, Metropolitan Statistical Area
	Story	98,566	Ames, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
	Woodbury	105,951	Sioux City, IA-NE-SD, Metropolitan Statistical Area
Group 2	Buena Vista	20,567	Storm Lake, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Carroll	20,522	Carroll, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Cerro Gordo	42,406	Mason City, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Clay	16,511	Spencer, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Clinton	46,158	Clinton, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Des Moines	38,253	Burlington, IA-IL, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Dickinson	18,056	Spirit Lake, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Lee	32,565	Fort Madison-Keokuk, IA-IL-MO, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Mahaska	21,874	Oskaloosa, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Marion	33,770	Pella, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Marshall	40,014	Marshalltown, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Muscatine	42,218	Muscatine, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Plymouth	25,722	None
	Wapello	35,166	Ottumwa, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Webster	36,485	Fort Dodge, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
Group 3	Appanoose	12,119	None (not part of a metropolitan or micropolitan area)
	Buchanan	20,691	None
	Cass	13,130	None
	Clarke	9,588	None
	Crawford	16,013	None
	Emmet	9,229	None
	Fayette	19,210	None
	Floyd	15,326	None
	Hamilton	14,729	None
	Hardin	16,463	None
	Henry	19,547	None
	Humboldt	9,500	None
	Jackson	19,342	None
	Jefferson	15,440	Fairfield, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
	Kossuth	14,396	None
	Montgomery	10,139	None
	O'Brien	14,012	None
	Page	15,014	None
	Poweshiek	18,453	None
	Sioux	36,246	None
Tama	16,833	None	
Union	11,906	None	
Winneshiek	19,815	None	

Data Notes (continued)

Table 5. Peer County Groupings and 2020 Population (page 2 of 2)

	2020 Population	Metropolitan or Micropolitan Area
Group 4		
Benton	25,796	Cedar Rapids, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
Boone	26,590	Ames, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
Bremer	25,307	Waterloo-Cedar Falls, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
Grundy	12,384	Waterloo-Cedar Falls, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
Guthrie	10,722	Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
Harrison	14,670	Omaha-Council Bluffs, NE-IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
Jasper	37,919	Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
Jones	20,900	Cedar Rapids, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
Madison	16,971	Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
Mills	14,633	Omaha-Council Bluffs, NE-IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
Warren	55,205	Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
Washington	22,560	Iowa City, IA, Metropolitan Statistical Area
Group 5		
Adair	7,389	None
Adams	3,544	None
Allamakee	14,074	None
Audubon	5,534	None
Butler	14,172	None
Calhoun	9,763	None
Cedar	18,302	None
Cherokee	11,605	None
Chickasaw	11,658	None
Clayton	16,969	None
Davis	9,169	None
Decatur	7,665	None
Delaware	17,600	None
Franklin	9,875	None
Fremont	6,458	None
Greene	8,584	None
Hancock	10,615	None
Howard	9,376	None
Ida	6,833	None
Iowa	16,381	None
Keokuk	9,914	None
Louisa	10,513	None
Lucas	8,747	None
Lyon	12,324	None
Mitchell	10,518	None
Monona	8,493	None
Monroe	7,504	None
Osceola	5,978	None
Palo Alto	8,810	None
Pocahontas	6,976	None
Ringgold	4,642	None
Sac	9,686	None
Shelby	11,806	None
Taylor	5,924	None
Van Buren	7,266	None
Wayne	6,557	None
Winnebago	10,571	None
Worth	7,297	Mason City, IA, Micropolitan Statistical Area
Wright	12,656	None

**Iowa State University
Department of Economics**

For more information about
this report, please contact:

Liesl Eathington
175 Heady Hall
Iowa State University
Ames, IA 50011

Phone: (515) 294-2954
E-mail: leathing@iastate.edu

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Indicators/Retail](https://indicators.extension.iastate.edu/Indicators/Retail)

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In producing this report, we acknowledge the pioneering work of Kenneth E. Stone, now Professor Emeritus, in applied analysis of retail trade patterns in Iowa's cities and counties.

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