

## Nebraska has opportunity in new economy

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Economist Larry Swanson did an excellent job last week of identifying an economic development opportunity for rural Nebraska.

“The geography of economic activity is now a moving target,” he said. “All of the old textbooks need to be thrown away.”

“The old economy encouraged urbanization. The new economy encourages growth where people want to live.”

The trends toward outsourcing, globalization and the Internet mean that companies now often depend on independent contractors that are sometimes spread around the globe.

In today’s economy, a resident of the United States may end up talking to someone in the Philippines if they are having trouble with their computer. Hospitals may send their radiology images to India to be read.

Swanson, a native of Edgar who earned his doctorate in economics at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, has witnessed people take advantage of new economic possibilities in Montana, where he has lived since 1988.

One can almost hear the naysayers already. They’re thinking, sure people are moving to Montana, but Nebraska doesn’t have mountains, beaches or other natural wonders that attract people.

They sell Nebraska short.

Nebraska does have outstanding natural amenities of its own, such as the Sandhills and the Missouri River. And most of Nebraska offers rural pleasures on a personal scale.

Consider this possible scenario. A young professional couple with Nebraska roots who have the background to appreciate the benefits of rural life could cut housing expenses in half by moving to small town Nebraska.

With extra disposable income, the young couple realizes they could schedule regular jaunts to Chicago, New York and San Francisco. They could jet across the pond on annual or semiannual trips to Europe.

In short, the decision to live in rural Nebraska could make their life more stimulating and fulfilling. They could savor the bucolic joys of raising a family in rural and small-town Nebraska, living on a few acres with enough land for a big vegetable garden and regular sightings of wild turkeys, hawks, deer and other wildlife.

Best of all, the lifestyle comes with the added plus of Broadway shows in New York and shopping sprees on the Champs Elysees in Paris.

There are a few requisites for this vision. Someone with the skills and ability to compete in the global economy will want quality communities with good schools and good neighbors. They’ll definitely want a fast Internet connection.

In a speech last week at the Great Plains Art Museum, Swanson noted that population declines are quickening in rural Nebraska. Swanson estimated that many Nebraska communities have only five to 10 years left to reverse the trend. It’s urgent that Nebraska begins pursuing the opportunities offered by the new economy before it’s too late.