Despite the Twin Cities’ status as Minnesota’s economic engine, data shows signs the state’s rural recovery from the recession outpaced the metro area in many ways.

Incomes across most non-metro Minnesota counties increased significantly above the state average, according to Star Tribune analysis of economic data spanning 2009 to 2015, while other metrics like taxes paid, government aid, home prices and wages followed similar trends.

Statewide and in the metro, average personal income increased about 12 percent from the end of the recession, while growing 16 percent in Greater Minnesota.

**NARROWING GAPS IN PERSONAL INCOME**

**http://datadrop-dev.startribune.com/20170712-mnrecovery/builds/production/?chart=gaps**

Going county-by-county, only two in the metro – Carver and Washington – were above the state average for personal income growth, while 47 non-metro counties surpassed it, sometimes significantly.

For instance, Swift County saw a more than 30 percent jump in average personal income, while Kittson, Stevens and Red Lake saw growth of 20 percent or more. Places that grew more slowly include Ramsey County with a much lower 8 percent increase over the time period, while Hennepin rested at about the state average.

**PERSONAL INCOME BY COUNTY**

**http://datadrop-dev.startribune.com/20170712-mnrecovery/builds/production/?chart=personal**

So though the Twin Cities still accounts for more than half the state’s income tax revenue and has bounced back on many metrics, it’s been at slower rates than much of outstate Minnesota.

There are certainly economic indicators where the metro has seen positive changes more quickly, specifically job recovery – which has been slow nationally – and decreases in the number of children in poverty.

Personal income -- a single individual’s income before taxes -- differs from median household income, which measures the combined income of everyone in a household. But looking at household income reveals similar trends, with nearly 50 outstate counties showing growth above the state average of 3 percent, while much of the metro area rests somewhere below that.

**MEDIAN INCOME BY COUNTY**

**http://datadrop-dev.startribune.com/20170712-mnrecovery/builds/production/?chart=household**

Overall, the median household income in the metro grew at about the state average from 2009 to 2015, while in outstate it grew about a percentage point faster.

[The same trends are found](http://explorer.naco.org/index.html?dset=County%20Economies&ind=Average%20Real%20Wage%20Growth%202016%20vs%202015&external=true) when looking at changes in both wages and home prices from 2015 to 2016, according to a [recent report from the National Association of Counties](http://www.naco.org/resources/county-economies-2016-widespread-recovery-slower-growth), which shows much of outstate Minnesota growing faster than much of the metro area.

Changes in income, of course, trigger shifts in tax revenue.

Taxes paid per capita in non-metro counties increased 23 percent from 2009 to 2013, slightly outpacing the 21 percent increase in the Twin Cities. Most counties in the metro area also saw significant drop-offs in taxes paid per capita over the time period.

**MORE ABOUT TAXES HERE**

**TAXES MAP**

**http://datadrop-dev.startribune.com/20170712-mnrecovery/builds/production/?chart=aids**

Also, the amount of government aid rendered per capita across Minnesota has narrowed to be nearly the same overall between metro and outstate – roughly $2,600 – signaling a shift in aid eligibility in some counties.

Not all rural counties have seen equal growth, and the NACo report shows that growth everywhere is slower than expected. But while some areas are still struggling, the data shows upswings in a vast majority of outstate Minnesota.

Since no one metric can paint a clear picture of economic conditions, it’s helpful to delve into multiple different indicators to see what’s going on.

**INDEX MAP**

**http://datadrop-dev.startribune.com/20170712-mnrecovery/builds/production/?chart=index**

Measuring what’s driving Greater Minnesota’s economic recovery is a little trickier to isolate, especially since there are multiple explanations and every region of the state has its own story to tell.

But economic experts have floated several possibilities to explain how many outstate counties have recovered so well from the recession.

First, some of the greatest growth is found in northwestern Minnesota, which has been partially affected by the past decade’s North Dakota oil boom. This relationship has caused some downturn in these counties due to fluctuations in oil prices, but it certainly helped them through the recession.

Experts have also cited the working age can start at adolescence in rural counties and stretch well past the typical retirement age, whereas in the metro, people tend to retire in their sixties.

Additionally, studies show [rural counties didn’t lose as many jobs as metro areas](https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2014/october/rural-employment-in-recession-and-recovery/) did during the recession years, so they had a shorter path back to recovery.

Manufacturing in Greater Minnesota has also done well in recent years, and wages have risen at various factories in order to maintain their workforces.

[Agricultural industries also showed big growth in 2012 and 2013](http://www.startribune.com/rural-counties-in-minnesota-leading-economic-recovery/289682881/), helping to stabilize the economy in many rural counties.

Then there’s migration and immigration, with more and more people moving into Minnesota, especially from outside the United States, which may have driven average incomes down in the metro counties they’re flocking to, phenomena the outstate areas haven’t had to deal with to the same degree.

Regardless of the causes, experts have noticed these data points and are continuing to study their underlying causes.

Meanwhile, the data also describes some of the rural economic anxieties discussed over the 2016 presidential campaign, with the NACo study showing a majority of counties that swung from Democrat in 2012 to voting for Donald Trump in 2016 had weak job recoveries.

But in Minnesota, of [19 counties Trump flipped in the 2016 presidential election](http://www.startribune.com/13-takeaways-from-the-presidential-election-in-minn-nationwide/400722341/?refresh=true), 15 saw significant increases in income since the end of the recession, along with boosts in tax revenue and wage growth. Additionally, the [report shows](http://explorer.naco.org/index.html?dset=County%20Economies&ind=Election%20Results%20and%20Job%20Recovery&external=true) about half of those flipped counties have seen recoveries to their job markets.

**TRUMP MAP**

**http://datadrop-dev.startribune.com/20170712-mnrecovery/builds/production/?chart=trump**

How well these trends can hold up in coming years remains to be seen, and a notable economic chasm still exists between the Twin Cities and Greater Minnesota. But when taken as a whole, it seems things have bounced back from national economic crisis pretty effectively beyond the metro area.