



Building Nebraska's Bioeconomy:

Key Findings and a Strategic Path
Forward

Introduction

In early 2026, Bio Nebraska commissioned a study to explore a straightforward question: Does Nebraska need an industrial biomanufacturing pilot facility?

The answer turned out to be nuanced. Rather than simply evaluating one piece of infrastructure, the project evolved into a broader assessment of what Nebraska needs to strengthen its position in the growing bioeconomy. Discovery showed that a pilot facility is not the state's most pressing investment today. However, the work identified several higher-impact opportunities that can position Nebraska for long-term growth and revealed a more targeted opportunity in biologicals that warrants further exploration.

The result is not a recommendation to build a facility. It is a call for a stakeholders to develop a roadmap on where investments can be made to grow one of Nebraska's most important industries.

This document is an overview of some of the key findings of the study.

Study Findings: Key Takeaways

1. Nebraska does not currently need a general industrial biomanufacturing pilot facility.

Although Nebraska companies, including several Bio Nebraska member organizations, have taken pilot-scale work to facilities outside the state, the national landscape has changed. Research showed that existing facilities are underutilized, additional capacity is being developed through BioMade, and building a new statewide facility today would carry significant financial and utilization risk. What appears to be lacking are specific unit operations (e.g., downstream processing, scale-up expertise and communications within the United States biotech community of where resources exist.)

The need is real, but the market conditions do not currently justify the investment for a new facility.

2. A biologicals-focused pilot facility deserves further evaluation.

Unlike a general industrial biomanufacturing facility, Nebraska already has many of the assets needed to support a biologicals pilot facility:

- Established biopharma and animal health companies
- University of Nebraska's (UNL) successful Biological Process Development Facility
- National Strategic Research Institute presence and engagement
- Existing industry demand

A biologicals facility differs from an industrial biomanufacturing facility in that it is smaller in scale and requires increased certification for production. It does, however, require users and operators to have the same skillsets as those using an industrial biomanufacturing facility.

This is not a recommendation to move forward; it is a call for more exploration into this possibility.

3. Nebraska has more immediate opportunities to strengthen its bioeconomy.

The analysis identified several actions likely to generate greater impact than constructing a new facility today.

These include:

- Developing a statewide industrial biotechnology strategy
- Engaging with ADM, Cargill and Green Plains to expand activity at their Nebraska locations, i.e. Columbus, Blair and York, respectively
- Re-engaging UNL's Industrial Agricultural Products Center
- Building relationships with out-of-state pilot facilities to recruit companies to Nebraska
- Strengthening workforce development earlier in the talent pipeline
- Exploring Opportunity Zone designations for biomanufacturing development

These initiatives require significantly less capital while creating a stronger foundation for future growth.



4. Nebraska's strengths compared to our neighbors make these recommendations possible.

State Comparison of Feedstocks			
Feedstock	Nebraska	Iowa	Illinois
Corn Production	#3	#1	#2
Corn Leaving State (How much is available)	37%	14%	43%
Corn Wet Mills (Sugar)	2	8	4
Ethanol (% cap.)*	13%	26%	11%
Soybean Production*	#7	#2	#1
Soy Crushing (% cap.)*	8%	20%	11%
Soybeans Leaving State (How much is available)	30%	15%	56%
Carbon Cap & Seq	Existing Pipeline	Pipeline Stalled	Local Geology
Methane Digesters	2	8	2

The table to the left compares Nebraska with Iowa and Illinois, two regional peers with established wet milling infrastructure and strong industrial biotechnology sectors. Rankings are based on data from 12 Midwestern states: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin.

The metrics included in this analysis were selected because they represent key factors influencing industrial biotechnology investment. Corn and soybean exports indicate the volume of

feedstocks that could be redirected to new value-added processing. Methane digesters represent potential sources of renewable hydrogen and carbon capture infrastructure are increasingly important to companies seeking to meet sustainability and decarbonization objectives.

5. More work is needed in two important areas.

Additional work should focus on:

- Better understanding Nebraska's university research strengths and commercialization pipeline
- Evaluating tax policy and incentive strategies needed to compete with peer states

About This Assessment

This study was conducted by BioCognito and funded by Bio Nebraska and the Nebraska Corn Board.



The original objective was to determine whether Nebraska should build a biomanufacturing pilot facility. As stakeholder conversations progressed, it became clear that the more important question was: What does Nebraska need to remain competitive in the bioeconomy? That broader perspective shifted the project from evaluating a single piece of infrastructure to identifying the investments and partnerships most likely to accelerate industry growth.

This report should be viewed as a preliminary needs assessment designed to inform future decision-making.

It is not:

- A feasibility study
- A facility business plan
- A comprehensive statewide gap analysis

Instead, it identifies strategic directions deserving additional investment and discussion.

The methodology consisted of the following:

- In person or phone discussions with Nebraska stakeholders
- Conference attendance and conversations
- Survey of industry participants to determine what is needed

Path Forward

Rather than beginning with capital investment, the next phase should focus on validating demand, strengthening Nebraska's competitive position, and building a coordinated statewide strategy.

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