



## Why Manufacturers Are Betting Big On Iowa



STORY ON PAGE 10

### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**OCTOBER 13**  
Iowa Manufacturing Conference  
ALTOONA

**OCTOBER 14-24**  
Elevate Iowa Manufacturing Tour  
STATEWIDE

**JANUARY 13, 2027**  
Legislative Briefing and Reception  
DES MOINES

**MARCH 24, 2027**  
Business Day in Des Moines  
DES MOINES

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## FROM THE CHAIR

# Investing in Iowa's Future

There is something encouraging about seeing a company make a significant investment in Iowa.

Whether it is a new facility, an expansion or an investment in new technology, those decisions represent more than a business transaction. They reflect confidence in Iowa — in our communities, our workforce and our ability to support businesses as they grow.

As someone who has spent 30 years working at MidAmerican Energy and alongside businesses and communities across Iowa, I have had the opportunity to see what goes into those decisions. Companies consider many factors when determining where to invest, but some fundamentals remain important. A strong workforce matters. So does reliable infrastructure and access to the resources businesses need to operate and grow.

Iowa has a lot going for it.

Our manufacturing industry is a great example. Companies are investing in new facilities and technology, expanding their operations and creating opportunities for Iowans. Those investments strengthen the companies making them while also creating opportunities for the communities where they operate.

At the same time, we cannot take that position for granted.

The manufacturers making these investments today are already thinking about what their workforce will look like five, 10 or 20 years from now. They are adapting to new technologies, including automation and artificial intelligence, while continuing to need people with the skills to operate and advance those technologies.

That is why connecting businesses with education and workforce partners is so important. Preparing students for

careers and helping current employees develop new skills will be critical as Iowa's economy continues to change.

The same is true for the communities where these companies choose to invest. When a business grows, it becomes part of the community around it. Strong partnerships can help make sure that growth benefits both the employer and the people who live and work there.

Iowa's success has always depended on people working together. As we celebrate the investments companies are making in our state, we should also think about what those investments tell us.

Businesses see opportunity here.

Our responsibility is to continue creating the conditions that make Iowa a place where companies want to invest, grow and build their future.

That is good for business, and it is good for Iowa. **ABI**



**Kathryn Kunert**

ABI Board Chair  
MidAmerican Energy

## CAPITOL BUSINESS

# Federal and State Policy Action to Boost Iowa Manufacturing

Business decisions for manufacturers are shaped by markets, but the public policy, thoughtfully implemented, can often help in the decision to start, expand or relocate a business. Quarterly surveys of ABI CEOs indicate that companies are poised for growth and capital investment. 2026 is the first full calendar year since federal tax legislation HR1, known alternately as the "Working Families Tax Cut" or the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" was enacted. Major portions of the new law are aimed at properly incentivizing pro-growth manufacturing decisions. Consider these pro-growth provisions:

- For C-corps, the new law made the federal corporate income tax rate of 21% permanent, rather than allowing it to return to a rate of up to 35%. The lower rate is important, and the permanence

allows long-term tax planning.

- For pass-through entities, the new law made the 20% Qualified Business Income deduction permanent allowing for a lower tax burden and long-term tax planning for projects.
- The law made permanent 100% bonus depreciation for qualifying property.
- The law increased the Section 179 expensing allowance for equipment and software.
- Allows, on a temporary basis, the immediate expensing of real estate used in production.

All of the above policy changes will help manufacturing businesses nationwide as they consider opportunities for growth and investment across the country. To

make Iowa stand out as a preferred location for manufacturing growth and investment, ABI began working with Governor Reynolds and legislators in 2025 soon after the federal law was enacted. The policy goal was to ensure that the federal tax benefits were reflected in Iowa tax law. Efforts were successful and the 2026 legislature allocated over \$200 million to make sure Iowa manufacturers received both the federal benefits and matching state tax treatment. This does make Iowa a standout regionally as efforts to follow or "couple" with the federal tax law were unsuccessful in Illinois and Minnesota and projects in those states will have a higher total tax burden. It is hoped that this pro-growth tax policy will help businesses start, grow, and locate in Iowa and compete globally. **ABI**



**JD Davis**

Vice President, Public Policy  
ABI  
jddavis@iowaabi.org

ABI FOUNDATION

Elevate Iowa Manufacturing: Building Talent; Celebrating Excellence

Elevate Iowa Manufacturing, a program of the ABI Foundation, is committed to strengthening Iowa's manufacturing workforce by connecting students with educational opportunities and promoting careers in the industry. A key part of that mission is providing scholarships to Iowa high school graduates pursuing manufacturing-related programs at Iowa's community colleges. These scholarships help students gain the skills and training needed to succeed in high-demand careers while supporting Iowa manufacturers' future workforce needs.

This year's scholarship recipients include:

- **Gensley Cinoble** - Indian Hills Community College
- **Yani Lemuz** - Kirkwood Community College
- **Raygann Mileson** - Marshalltown Community College
- **Wyatt Skidmore** - Iowa Central Community College
- **Colin Snyder** - Hawkeye Community College
- **Reyden Wentz** - Northwest Iowa Community College

Elevate also recognizes outstanding industry leaders through

the annual Legends in Manufacturing Awards, presented by Nyemaster at the Iowa Manufacturing Conference. The awards honor individuals whose leadership, innovation and dedication have made a lasting impact on Iowa manufacturing. Through this recognition, the program celebrates those who have strengthened Iowa's manufacturing industry and inspired future generations of leaders.

This year's honorees include:

- **Under 100 Employees** - Steve Anderson, Merrill Manufacturing (Storm Lake)
- **100-300 Employees** - Lori Schaefer-Weaton, Agri-Industrial Plastics Company (Fairfield)
- **300+ Employees** - Pat Weiler, Weiler (Knoxville)
- **Manufacturing Champion** - Terry Branstad, Former Governor of Iowa and Ambassador to China

By investing in future talent and celebrating manufacturing excellence, Elevate Iowa Manufacturing continues to support the growth and success of one of Iowa's most important industries. ABI



**Olivia Jones**  
Marketing and  
Communications Coordinator  
ABI  
ojones@iowaabi.org

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COVER STORY FROM PAGE 7

# Why Manufacturers Are Betting Big On Iowa

BY CHELSEA KEENAN PRIEST



From Cedar Rapids to Des Moines, manufacturers are putting hundreds of millions of dollars into Iowa manufacturing facilities and expansion projects. The investments are creating hundreds of jobs and suggesting that manufacturers see great value in putting down roots in the state.

The state's strong manufacturing workforce, easy access to transportation and energy, and central location make it a hot spot for companies to expand.

Sub-Zero — a Wisconsin-based high-end kitchen appliance manufacturing company — is investing more than \$300 million in Cedar Rapids to build two large facilities and bring more than 500 jobs to the area. Bacon production factory Fair Oaks Foods recently opened a \$134 million, 150,000-square-foot-facility in Davenport, while Amazon opened a new last-mile delivery station and Robotics Fulfillment Center.

Robinson, a custom metal manufacturer headquartered in De Pere, Wisconsin, is on track to open a 640,000-square-foot-facility in Altoona this January, and Algona-based Kinetic Technologies is opening a second facility in Des Moines this fall.

One big reason companies are choosing to grow in Iowa is its strong manufacturing base, company leaders said. Manufacturing accounts for 17% of Iowa's Gross Domestic Product, contributing \$35 billion annually to its economy and making it the state's largest industry, according to the Iowa Economic Development Authority (IEDA). What's more, the state expects manufacturing employment to grow significantly over the coming decade.

"We cast a wide net," said Sam Thomas, president at Robinson Inc. "We looked at several states, mostly in the Midwest, but across the country. We felt like Iowa was a good fit for us," he said. "That labor data piece was a pretty important part of our decision. The manufacturing base is pretty sound there."

The facility will employ about 100 people at first, but Mr. Thomas said he believes it could easily add 400-500 jobs in the next five years.

"This is a big step," he said. "It's our first venture out of Wisconsin and we're very excited about that. We want to take care of our people. People spend a lot of time at work and it should be fun."

Iowa's central location and easy access to major interstates is also a big selling piece for manufacturers looking to expand.

"We transport large, heavy units that are expensive to ship. Logistically, Iowa made a lot of sense," Mr. Thomas said.

"This is the first green space we've built since 2000," Mr. Thomas added. "This facility will be far more efficient than other spaces we've moved or expanded into. It's built for optimal flow and efficiency."

That existing workforce and industrial infrastructure can make expansion easier for companies that already operate in the state. Instead of building an entirely new supply chain, manufacturers can work with established suppliers, transportation networks and communities experienced in industrial production.

Kinetic Technologies, a systems integrator for robotic welding, has been in business for about five years. It will keep its mechanical design and production in Algona and will use its new Des Moines facility for technology development.

"When you need to automate the welding process, there are several components you need," said Mark Barglof, president and owner of Kinetic Technologies. "You don't just buy a robot and bring it into the facility. The robot and system need to work together to position the part."

The Des Moines facility will be a place to bring customers to run test cases with the robot, troubleshoot problems and then send out the final product. It plans to keep manufacturing in Algona but will work on product development



in Des Moines, Mr. Barglof said.

"We've got easier access to customers in Des Moines," he said. "We ship our cells all over the country, and most of our customers aren't in Iowa."

But both Mr. Thomas and Mr. Barglof said a key to keeping manufacturers investing in Iowa is for the state, educational institutions and companies to continue investing in the future workforce.

"As boomers retire and younger people come into the workforce, the math doesn't work," said Mr. Thomas. "We're fighting an uphill battle to get the labor we need."

Automation, robotics and AI will certainly help fill some of those gaps, he said, but skilled, qualified workers will always be needed. In recent years, Robinson has developed the Robinson Training Academy, which gives students and entry-level employees the chance to learn how to work in the company's different departments and use the new technology before being matched with a mentor on the shop floor. It gives employees the chance to advance in their careers, he said, and has worked great as a retention tool.

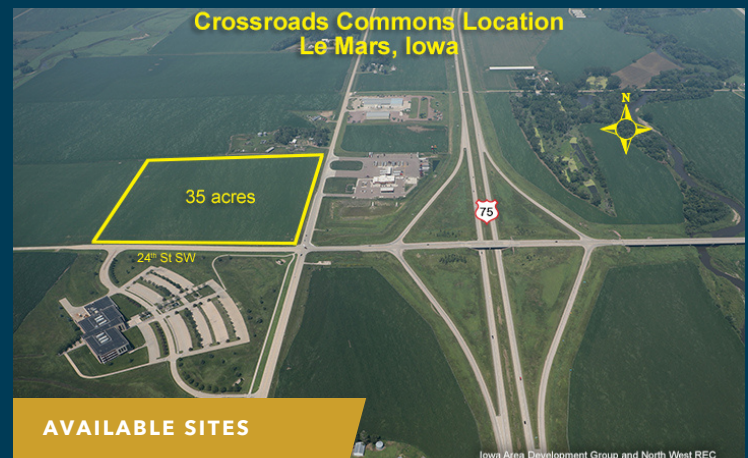
"There are lots of machine shops here," Mr. Thomas said. "We're not competing for revenue or customers but we are competing from a labor standpoint."

Iowa is doing a great job in focusing on STEM in the classroom and helping students understand what manufacturing jobs look like, Mr. Barglof said.

Iowa is also trying to address one of manufacturing's biggest challenges: finding workers with the right skills. In June, the state announced a \$4.7 million federal grant for its Advanced Manufacturing Pathways Development initiative. The program is designed to help employers train workers in advanced manufacturing and prepare employees for increasingly automated and technologically sophisticated factories.

As manufacturers modernize their factories and build new capacity, the state's challenge will be making sure there are enough skilled workers and infrastructure to support continued growth.

"There are a lot of people who don't understand the current state of manufacturing and what the future of it looks like," said Mr. Barglof. "With automation and AI, we are extremely productive, facilities are fantastic and have amazing capabilities and technology inside of it. As manufacturing continues to evolve, I hope we see more interest in manufacturing." ABI



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# Q&A: Healthy Communities, Strong Economies: Why Rural Health Matters to Every Iowa Business

The health of Iowa's rural communities may not be at the top of your next board meeting agenda. But it impacts many of the large challenges Iowa business leaders face today, from economic growth and community vitality to employee retention and workforce development.

When people struggle to access basic services, including the healthcare they need, the impact extends far beyond individuals and families. It's felt by schools, local employers and entire communities. And with one in three Iowans living in rural areas, the effects of these issues are felt across our state's economy.

At Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield, we work hard every day to make healthcare better. For us, that means more than improving health outcomes. It means helping build communities where businesses can grow, people can thrive and future generations can succeed. Through The Wellmark Foundation, we live this purpose by identifying partnerships that help remove the barriers that prevent people from living long, healthy lives.

As someone who benefitted tremendously from growing up in rural Iowa, I have a lot of passion for the work we do. And with National Rural Health Day coming up in November, I wanted to share a few questions I hear most often and why the answers matter to every Iowa business leader.

## Q: Why does rural health matter, and what challenges are communities facing?

**A:** Let's start here: Where someone lives should not determine how long — or how well — they live.

For the one in three Iowans living in a rural community, there is no single challenge. Rural communities face a combination of issues that often intersect: Nutritious food can be hard to find. Behavioral health services may be limited. Maternity care options continue to shrink. Some families must travel hours for specialty care. And many hospitals and first responders are stretched thin. These gaps make it harder for rural residents to live well every day.

At Wellmark, we know that good health starts well before someone enters a doctor's office. Research shows that many of the factors influencing health happen where people live, learn, work and play (American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 2016). If we're serious about creating thriving communities



**Laura Jackson**  
Executive Vice President  
of Health Improvement at  
Wellmark Blue Cross and  
Blue Shield and chair of The  
Wellmark Foundation

that enable a strong and healthy workforce, we must also be serious about helping communities address the conditions that shape health in the first place.

## Q: Why is Wellmark involved in improving community health?

**A:** As Iowa's leading health insurer, we see every day how health is shaped by far more than what happens in a doctor's office (KFF, 2024). Access to affordable, high-quality care matters, but so do education, economic opportunity and local community resources. If we want health care to cost less, we, as Iowans, need to use less of it — because we're staying healthy.

Working to improve these factors is incredibly complex, and no one organization can solve them alone. Lasting progress requires meaningful collaboration and that's where The Wellmark Foundation plays an important role. While Wellmark works to improve healthcare coverage, The Wellmark Foundation focuses on breaking down barriers to good health across Iowa. Our approach is not to dictate solutions. It's to use data to identify opportunities where strategic investments and strong partnerships can help create sustainable improvements.

## Q: What does investment in rural health look like in action?

**A:** One example we are especially proud of is The Wellmark Foundation's School-Centered Behavioral Health Grant

program, designed to support the state's long-term behavioral health strategy.

Behavioral health needs among Iowa's youth continue to rise, and rural families often face the steepest barriers. The goal of the grant is simple: remove barriers to much needed care for Iowa's youth by meeting them where they are. In its first year, the program supported access to behavioral health care to more than 33,400 students across 37 rural Iowa school districts.

The impact is already evident, and it doesn't stop at the school doors. Kim Buryanek, superintendent at Denison Community School District, told us, "This truly is a multi-generational impact that The Wellmark Foundation is having. Not only is the child who is sitting in the classroom benefitting, but also the families are as well. And then if you think about the child who now has those coping skills, they're going to grow up to be an adult in the community that is successful."

That's why this work matters. Behind every statistic is a child who now has support they need and the opportunity to thrive well into the future.

## Q: Why are partnerships essential to improving rural health?

**A:** True progress happens when strengths come together — healthcare, education, business, philanthropy and government, all focused on stronger communities and healthier outcomes for Iowans.

Take Simulation in Motion-Iowa (SIM-IA). In partnership with the University of Iowa College of Nursing, The Wellmark Foundation is helping bring mobile, hands-on clinical training to rural hospitals, emergency medical services teams and first responders at no cost. These efforts equip rural healthcare providers with the training and resources they need to deliver high-quality care close to home, helping create a safer community.

Another example is The Wellmark Foundation's support of the Iowa Perinatal Quality Care Collaborative. This public-private partnership will help Iowa birthing hospitals, especially those with fewer resources, strengthen participation in statewide programs that improve care for mothers and newborns. These efforts aim to make sure every mother and child in Iowa have the best possible start, no matter where they live.

## Q: Why should Iowa businesses care about rural health?

**A:** Because rural health isn't separate from business success, and healthy communities power a strong economy.

Access to quality healthcare services and community resources influences employee well-being, productivity, attendance, retention and the long-term strength of the workforce pipeline.

Investments in removing barriers to good health also drive opportunity for the next generation. The School-Centered Behavioral Health Grant program is helping students get support earlier, giving them a stronger foundation for success both in and out of the classroom.

As Central Decatur Community School District PK-6 Principal Amy Whittington said, "Ultimately, our whole community benefits. For many of our students, when they graduate from Central Decatur, they stay in this area. So, we're making our community stronger by that early investment in supports for students."

When businesses support healthy communities, they support Iowa's future. That's why Wellmark's mission and the work of The Wellmark Foundation are so closely tied — to help more Iowans live long, healthy lives and keep our communities strong for generations.

With National Rural Health Day around the corner, it's a good reminder that rural health is everyone's business. Together, we can remove barriers so where you live never determines how well you live.

*Wellmark, Inc., and The Wellmark Foundation are independent licensees of the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association*

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## WHAT'S TRENDING

# Beyond Wages: Employee Ownership as Manufacturing Workforce Strategy

For years, Iowa manufacturers have competed for talent through wages, benefits, and workplace flexibility. Those tools remain important. But as manufacturers continue to face challenges attracting skilled workers and retaining experienced employees, some companies are adding a different element to the equation: ownership.

An employee stock ownership plan, commonly known as an ESOP, allows employees to obtain a beneficial ownership interest in the company where they work. Unlike stock options or an employee stock purchase plan, employees generally do not pay to participate. Instead, the company contributes to a trust that holds company stock for the benefit of eligible employees.

ESOPs are often discussed, and appropriately so, as a business success

sion strategy. They can give owners of privately held companies a market for their stock while allowing the business to remain independent. For Iowa manufacturers, however, the workforce impact may be just as important.

Manufacturers depend heavily on institutional knowledge. Experienced employees understand the equipment, production processes, customers, and practical solutions that may never make it into an operations manual. When those employees leave, the company loses more than labor. It loses knowledge that can take years to replace.

Employee ownership can give employees another reason to build their careers with the company. As the business grows, employees have the opportunity to share in that growth through their ESOP accounts. That connection

can help employees see how their daily work, improving quality, reducing waste, serving customers, and training coworkers, contributes to the company's long-term success.

An ESOP alone, however, does not automatically create an ownership culture. Successful employee-owned companies communicate regularly about business performance, help employees understand how their work affects value, and encourage employees to think like owners.

ESOPs are not right for every business, and implementation requires careful financial and legal planning. For the right Iowa manufacturer, however, employee ownership can be more than an exit strategy. It can help retain talent, preserve institutional knowledge, and keep a successful business rooted in its community. **ABI**



**Caleb Brus**

Attorney  
BrownWinick Law Firm  
caleb.brus@brownwinick.com

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EXPERT ADVICE:

# Five Business Fraud Trends Every Company Should Watch

Business fraud continues to rise, and advances in artificial intelligence are making scams more convincing than ever. According to the Federal Trade Commission, consumers reported losing \$3.5 billion to imposter scams in 2025, nearly tripling the reported losses from 2020. Fraudsters are increasingly targeting businesses through email, phone calls, text messages, payment systems, and online accounts. Here are a few fraud trends to watch:

## 1. Social Engineering

Social engineering scams manipulate employees into revealing sensitive information or taking unauthorized actions. Common tactics include:

- **Phishing:** fraudulent emails designed to steal information or deliver malicious links
- **Vishing:** phone calls from imposters posing as trusted contacts
- **Smishing:** text messages that prompt recipients to click links or share credentials

## 2. Business Email Compromise (BEC)

BEC schemes often involve spoofed email addresses, fake websites, or malware that allows criminals to monitor legitimate business communications. Fraudsters then pose as executives, vendors, or business partners to divert funds or obtain confidential information.

## 3. Account Takeover Fraud

Criminals use stolen credentials obtained through

phishing, malware, or other scams to gain access to online banking and business accounts. Once inside, they can initiate unauthorized transactions or access sensitive company data.

## 4. Payment Fraud

Businesses continue to face fraud involving checks, ACH payments, and wires. Stolen checks may be altered or counterfeited, while ACH and wire fraud frequently stem from phishing attacks, account takeovers, and business email compromise schemes that trick employees into sending funds to fraudulent accounts.

## 5. Credit Card Fraud

Fraudsters obtain payment card information through skimming devices, phishing attempts, or fake websites, then use the information to make unauthorized purchases.

## Protecting Your Business

Organizations can significantly reduce risk by requiring dual approval for ACH and wire transactions, implementing Positive Pay services, using multi-factor authentication, verbally verifying payment changes through trusted phone numbers, and reviewing their business insurance coverage for fraud-related losses.

The most effective defense remains simple: when something seems unusual, contact your financial institution or account representative using a trusted phone number before taking action. One phone call can prevent a costly loss. **ABI**

Source: [ftc.gov]



**Kevin Tiernan**  
SVP, Treasury Management  
Senior Manager  
Bankers Trust



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**Iowa Association of Business and Industry**  
400 East Court Avenue, Suite 100  
Des Moines, IA 50309  
515-280-8000 or 800-383-4224  
abi@iowaabi.org, www.iowaabi.org

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