

48.5% Spread in Food Manufacturing Growth — ALEX Intelligence 2026

48.5% Gap in Food Manufacturing Growth

Where innovation thrives and where it stagnates — a national divide

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THE DATA

48.5%

Spread Between the Fastest and Slowest Growth in Food Manufacturing Plants (2022)

The difference between La Crosse-Onalaska, WI-MN and Barre, VT reflects a growing imbalance in U.S. agtech infrastructure.

This 48.5% gap reveals a critical bifurcation in the U.S. food manufacturing ecosystem. The fastest-growing metros are not just in traditional agricultural hubs — they are emerging in tech-savvy, mid-sized urban centers with strong logistics and R&D integration. Meanwhile, slower-growing regions, like Barre, VT, face structural challenges in scaling agtech-enabled processing capacity. This divergence suggests that food manufacturing's future is not about land, but about ecosystem density.

01

Growth is Ecosystem-Driven

The top-performing metros are not just growing food plants — they are growing the entire agtech stack: AI integration, automation, and supply chain digitization. Des Moines-West Des Moines, IA, ranked 10th nationally, is a hub for ag data infrastructure and precision input systems. The data shows that manufacturing growth correlates less with farm proximity and more with access to AI talent, cloud computing, and industrial IoT networks. This is not just a supply chain shift — it's a redefinition of where agtech value is created.

02

The Hidden Risk in Slow Growth

Regions with low food manufacturing growth, like Barre, VT, face not just economic stagnation but a risk of being excluded from future agtech innovation cycles. Without manufacturing nodes, local farms cannot access AI-driven processing, traceability, or closed-loop systems. The gap isn't just about output — it's about data access, feedback loops, and real-time adaptation. Over time, this creates a self-reinforcing cycle: no manufacturing → no innovation → no data → no investment.

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