

IOWA Department of REVENUE

Iowa Leading Indicators Index March 2011 Report

Tax Research and Program Analysis Section
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The Iowa Leading Indicators Index (ILII) rose to 104.5 (100=1999) in March 2011 from a revised 104.3 in February. The Iowa non-farm employment coincident index experienced its ninth consecutive monthly increase with a 0.09 percent rise during March following a revised 0.08 percent rise in February.

The ILII's value increased 0.2 percent in March, down from 0.6 percent increases in February and January, but extending the streak of monthly increases to eighteen. During the six-month span through March, the ILII rose 3.6 percent (an annualized rate of 7.1 percent). The six-month diffusion index (value of 87.5) reflects an increase of 0.05 percent or greater over the last half year in seven of the eight components, with new residential building permits experiencing a drop exceeding 0.05 percent over that time. The monthly diffusion index dropped to 50, its lowest level since October 2009.

In March, four of eight Iowa Leading Indicators Index components contributed positively. The positive contributors were the agricultural futures profits index, unemployment insurance claims (inverted), the new orders index, and diesel fuel consumption. Average weekly manufacturing hours, new residential building permits, the national yield spread, and the Iowa stock market index were the negative contributors.

Figure 1. Iowa Leading Indicators Index and Iowa Non-Farm Employment Coincident Index: January 1999-March 2011

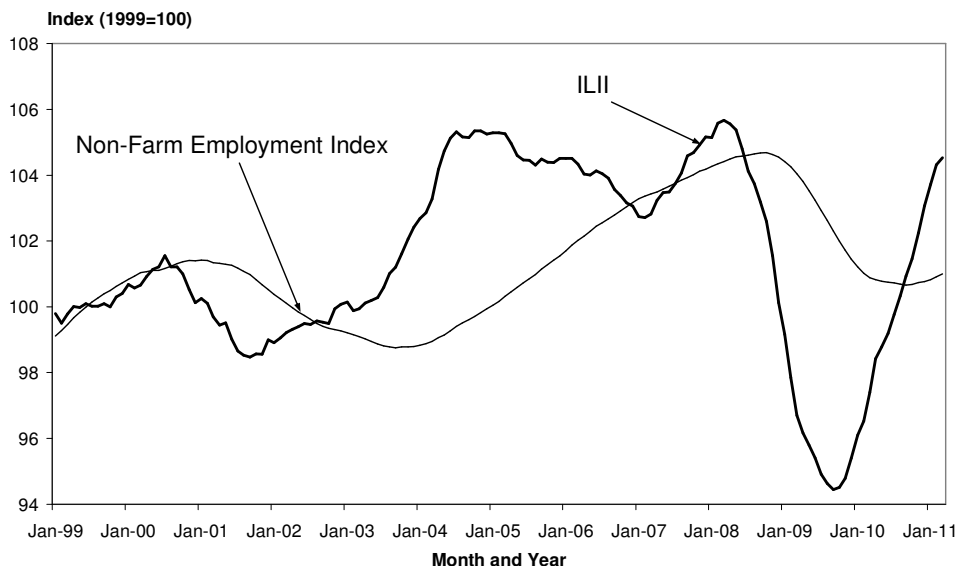


Table 1. Iowa Leading Indicators Index: Six Month Overview

Monthly Values	2010			2011		
	October	November	December	January	February	March
ILII	101.5	102.2	103.1	103.7	104.3	104.5
Percentage Change ^a	0.5%	0.8%	0.8%	0.6%	0.6%	0.2%
Diffusion Index ^b	75.0	87.5	100.0	75.0	75.0	50.0
Six-Month Values	Apr to October	May to November	Jun to December	Jul to January	Aug to February	Sep to March
	October	November	December	January	February	March
ILII						
Percentage Change	3.1%	3.5%	3.9%	4.0%	4.0%	3.6%
Annualized Percentage Change	6.2%	7.0%	7.8%	7.9%	8.0%	7.1%
Diffusion Index	62.5	75.0	87.5	87.5	87.5	87.5

Source: Tax Research and Program Analysis Section, Iowa Department of Revenue, produced April 28, 2011.

a. Percentage changes in the ILII do not always equal changes in the level of the ILII due to rounding.

b. A diffusion index measures the proportion of components that are rising based on the actual changes (not the standardized contributions to the ILII). Components experiencing increases greater than 0.05 percent are assigned a value of 1.0, components that experience changes less than an absolute value of 0.05 percent are assigned a value of 0.5, and components experiencing decreases greater than 0.05 percent are assigned a value of 0.0.

Table 2. Iowa Leading Indicators Index Components: Six Month Overview

Component Series Monthly Values ^a		2010			2011		
		October	November	December	January	February	March
AFPI ^b	↑ ^c						
Corn Profits (cents per bushel)		64.8	81.5	100.2	123.8	153.8	183.2
Soybean Profits (cents per bushel)		217.8	246.8	279.1	322.6	364.4	407.4
Hog Profits (cents per pound)		23.0	23.3	23.1	23.1	23.4	23.3
Cattle Profits (cents per pound)		3.7	4.2	5.1	5.7	5.9	6.1
Iowa Stock Market Index (10=1984-86)	↓	65.21	68.51	73.67	77.92	80.53	78.47
Yield Spread (10-year less 3-month)	↓	2.41	2.62	3.15	3.24	3.45	3.31
Building Permits	↓	610	622	626	624	613	605
Average Weekly Unemployment Claims ^d	↑	5,031	4,915	4,743	4,567	4,453	4,328
Average Weekly Manufacturing Hours	↓	41.0	41.2	41.3	41.3	41.2	41.1
New Orders Index (percent)	↑	69.8	69.4	70.1	72.2	73.6	74.1
Diesel Fuel Consumption (mil gallons)	↑	53.68	54.27	54.44	54.57	54.87	54.92

Source: Tax Research and Program Analysis Section, Iowa Department of Revenue, produced April 28, 2011.

a. For all component series except for the yield spread and the Iowa stock market index, the values represent 12-month backward moving averages.

b. The agricultural futures profits index is computed as the sum of the standardized symmetric percent changes in the four series, each weighted by the commodity's annual share of Iowa cash farm income (updated August 31, 2010).

c. Arrows indicate the direction of the series' contribution to the ILII for the latest month.

d. Changes in unemployment claims are inverted when added to the ILII, thus a negative change in the series contributes positively to the index.

ILII Components

- **Agricultural futures profits index:** Composite measure of corn, soybean, hog, and cattle expected profits, measured as the futures price less estimated breakeven costs, weighted by the respective share of annual Iowa cash farm income. Changes are calculated based on a 12-month moving average. During March, this component contributed 0.26 to the ILII value as the 12-month moving average of expected profits for corn, soybeans, and cattle improved, with increases in the average daily futures prices of soybeans, hogs, and cattle in March compared to February. Although corn prices in March were slightly lower than February, prices remain nearly double the levels of last year and soybean prices are up over 40 percent.
- **Average weekly unemployment claims:** Weekly average of initial claims for unemployment insurance in Iowa. Changes are calculated based on a 12-month moving average and are inverted when added to the ILII. This component contributed 0.10 to the ILII value. The 12-month moving average of claims fell to 4,328 with unemployment claims for the month 29.8 percent below March 2010 claims. However, initial claims for March 2011 were still 46.6 percent above average March claims (1987-2008).
- **New orders index:** Diffusion index measuring the share of purchasing managers in Iowa reporting increases in orders received for manufacturing output. Changes are calculated based on a 12-month moving average. In March, the index dipped to 80.2 from 81.9 in February, but exceeded the 74.3 reading from a year ago. The 12-month moving average of the new orders index rose to 74.1, contributing 0.03 to the ILII.
- **Diesel fuel consumption:** Number of taxable gallons of diesel fuel sold in Iowa. Changes are calculated based on a 12-month moving average. Diesel fuel consumption rose 1.4 percent between March 2010 and 2011, causing the 12-month moving average to rise 0.1 percent to 54.92 million gallons, and contributing 0.02 to the ILII value.
- **Iowa stock market index:** Capitalization-weighted index of 34 Iowa-based or Iowa-concentrated publicly-traded companies. During March 2011, only 10 of the 34 companies gained value, including just 3 of the 12 financial-sector companies. The stock market index fell to 78.47, contributing -0.04 to the ILII value.
- **Yield spread:** Difference between the yield on 10-year Treasury bonds and 3-month Treasury notes. During March, the yield spread shrank to 3.31 percent as the long-term rate decreased 17 basis points while the short-term rate decreased three points. For the month, the yield spread contributed -0.05 to the ILII.
- **Building permits:** Number of total permits issued in Iowa for the construction of residential housing units. Changes are calculated based on a 12-month moving average. For March, this component contributed -0.05 to the ILII with the 12-month moving average slipping to 605. March 2011 permits were 11.8 percent lower than the number of permits issued in March 2010 and 40.3 percent below the historical average for March (1998-2008).
- **Average weekly manufacturing hours:** Weekly average of hours worked in the manufacturing sector in Iowa. Changes are calculated based on a 12-month moving average. For March 2011, the 12-month moving average fell to 41.1, contributing -0.06 to the ILII. March 2011 hours were 39.9, down from 41 hours reported in March 2010. Average manufacturing hours remained over one hour below the historical average (1998-2008) for the fourth consecutive month. February hours were revised downward by 1.5 percent from 40.3 to 39.7, which caused the downward revision in the ILII for February.

Table 3. ILII Components and Standardization Factors for FY 2011

Iowa Leading Indicator Index Components	Standardization Factor
Agricultural Futures Profits Index	0.054
Iowa Stock Market Index	0.017
Yield Spread	0.326
Building Permits	0.037
Average Weekly Unemployment Claims	0.034
Average Weekly Manufacturing Hours	0.284
New Orders Index	0.062
Diesel Fuel Consumption	0.186

Source: Tax Research and Program Analysis Section, Iowa Department of Revenue, produced August 31, 2010. The standardization factors are the inverse of the standard deviation of the month-to-month changes in each component over the January 1999 to June 2010 period. These factors equalize the volatility of the contribution from each component and are normalized to one. The month-to-month changes are based on 12-month backward moving averages for all components except the yield spread and the Iowa stock market index. The yield spread and new orders index changes are simple arithmetic changes; month-to-month changes for the rest of the components are computed as symmetric percentage changes. The factors are updated annually during August.

Comments

The Iowa Leading Indicators Index (ILII) is designed to forecast the likely future direction of economic activity in the state of Iowa. The techniques used to build the ILII follow those used by The Conference Board to construct the national Leading Economics Index (LEI) prior to the 2001 revisions. A one-month movement in such an index does not produce a clear signal, rather it is necessary to consider the direction of the index over several consecutive months. The Conference Board considers a contraction signal in the LEI reliable when two conditions are met: 1. the index declines by at least two percent over a six month period (using an annualized rate); and, 2. a majority of the individual components decline over those six months (the six-month diffusion index less than 50.0).

The Iowa non-farm employment coincident index measures the change in non-seasonally adjusted, total non-farm employment in the state of Iowa. Changes are based on a 12-month moving average of employment and are computed as symmetric percentage changes. The index is a representation of overall economic activity in Iowa.

The employment index and the ILII are constructed to have a value of 100 in the year 1999.

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