

LaGrange County Economic Development Plan

Analysis of Existing Resources Supporting Amish Entrepreneurship

I. Summary of Findings and Recommendations

This summary lists the relevant cultural issues, and identifies the types of resources currently available for supporting Amish entrepreneurship. This section also suggests recommendations for improving the programs available to Amish business owners, as well as positioning the Amish business sector for future growth.

A. Cultural Issues Relevant to Amish Business Operations

Below are some of the observations (in quotes) from authors Kraybill, Nolt, and Wesner on Amish businesses, excerpted from their books referenced elsewhere in this report:

“Amish lifestyle is dictated by the *Ordnung* (German, meaning: order), which differs slightly from community to community, within a community, and from district to district. What is acceptable in one community may not be acceptable in another.”

The *Ordnung* regarding operating a business in LaGrange County has changed over time, and is continually changing. This allows the businesses to somewhat change and adopt favorable business practices.

“Two key concepts for understanding Amish practices relating to business are their rejection of *Hochmut* (pride, arrogance, haughtiness) and the high value they place on *Demut* (humility) and *Gelassenheit* (calmness, composure, placidity), often translated as ‘submission’ or ‘letting-be.’ *Gelassenheit* is perhaps better understood as a reluctance to be forward, to be self-promoting, or to assert oneself.”

These concepts relate directly to the marketing function in business (which includes self-promotion, assertiveness and status), and most likely explain why the Amish struggle with this part of running a business.

“The Amish's willingness to submit to the "Will of Jesus", expressed through group norms, is at odds with the individualism so central to the wider American culture. The Amish anti-individualist orientation is the motive for rejecting labor-saving technologies that might make one less dependent on community. Modern innovations like electricity might spark a competition for status goods, or photographs might cultivate personal vanity.”

They are challenged by today's technological norms, and the competitive edge that is often inherent in that technology. There appears to have been a change in the *Ordnung* differentiating between how the Amish conduct their personal lives and how they conduct their businesses.

“Business success also threatens *Gelassenheit*. Success creates wealth differentials greater than ones in the farm-based economy. Success affects gender roles because women

entrepreneurs own and operate their own enterprises. Success can mean that children receive less attention as business demands increase. Success increases the visibility and importance of business people in district churches, and has fundamental implications for the status of less wealthy but culturally more highly valued farmers.”

“The Amish businessman is always seeking knowledge. Their learner’s attitude begins early in their business life. The Amish gain hands-on experience in their chosen trade before they start their own business. From there, the Amish will seek out mentor relationships with respected community business leaders to continue their business education. The successful Amish entrepreneur views every learning opportunity, including learning from competitors and customers, as vital sources of business knowledge.”

While researching *Success Made Simple*, Wesner was somewhat surprised to learn that Amish were open to mainstream business wisdom in the form of business books. That coupled with an emphasis on mentorship and hands-on learning has really helped to compensate for the lack of B-school training in this 8th-grade-educated culture.

B. Overall Analysis of Resources

1. The Church

The Church has the most impact on how the Amish conduct their business affairs. Over time, changes have been allowed, and most Amish business owners take advantage of the relaxed rules. Business owners talk about “thinking outside the box,” regarding new changes, but do so with trepidation.

2. Organizational Support

There are many effective organizations in and around LaGrange County that are supporting Amish business owners. The most effective are those that involve the tourism and retail trade segments of Amish business. Strong support also comes from the economic development community, where the Amish woodworking industry is recognized for its importance to the area economy. It is in this manufacturing sector that business improvement programs for the Amish will have the most effect.

3. Associations

Both the Northern Indiana Woodcrafters Association (NIWA) and the Shipshewana Retail Merchants Association meet some of the needs of Amish business owners. Both would benefit from being involved in the promotion of business educational programs and other business support programs to their members.

4. Business Counseling, Education & Training

This is an area that needs improvement. There are counseling programs available, but they are not locally based, and certainly not designed for Amish business owners. The region’s colleges and universities offer business classes, but they don’t logistically or content-wise

match the Amish lifestyle. The Learning Generation Initiative in the past has offered classes specifically for the Amish, but currently does not.

5. Websites

Most of the websites specific to the area's Amish businesses do a good job of representing the culture and promoting tourism and the retail trade. Additional work needs to be done regarding the promotion of the wholesale woodworking industry.

C. Recommendations

1. Offer Business Classes

Coordinate and offer Business classes to include Business Planning & Management, Marketing, and Financial Management. Courses should be designed specifically for Amish business owners. Successful courses provided to Amish business owners in the past have been offered in the evening as a two hour class, one night per week, for four weeks. Transportation to and from the class site may need to be arranged.

2. Increase Business Counseling Activities

The existing counseling program serving the county is the Small Business Development Center (SDBC), located in Ft. Wayne. The SBDC will send a counselor out to a county on a "scheduled" basis, i.e. "the third Tuesday of the month." These sessions are of most benefit to existing business owners.

The program needs to be constantly marketed to make sure the counselor's schedule is full on the day they are in the area. This marketing usually falls to the "host" organization in the county, but should be marketed by all the groups and programs that are listed in this report as resources to Amish businesses in the county.

3. Develop a Mentoring Program

Develop a Business Mentoring Program that would pair successful business owners with emerging & new business owners. The program design could include the emerging business owner working in the successful business owner's business for a day per month.

4. Facilitate the use of business books

Create a lending library of selected business books or generate a "Recommended Reading List" of business books and then distribute the list to Amish business owners for them to check-out at the local public libraries.

5. Professionally Manage NIWA

The Northern Indiana Woodcrafters Association (NIWA) should pursue utilizing outside professional management to run the association. This would allow for the utilization of the

latest in marketing and management practices, and the ability to offer services and programs specific to its members, such as:

- Improvements to the website to draw more dealers to the businesses.
- An overall marketing strategy and specific marketing plans for each business.
- Business education programs.
- Advisory and Mentoring programs.
- Coordination of outside professional service providers, i.e. Accountants, Technology consultants, Legal Assistance, etc.
- Coordination of Packaging and Shipping services.

6. Pursue a Business Incubator Facility

Pursue the feasibility of a Business Incubator facility, offering all of the above programs and services, along with space for new businesses to get started and emerging businesses to grow. The facility could house the NIWA and the LaGrange County Economic Development Corporation.

7. Develop the “Certified Amish Made” designation

Continue to develop the “Certified Amish Made” designation and certification process in order to differentiate “mass-produced Amish design” products from those actually made by Amish craftspeople. This could be developed as a Trademark, much like “The Goodhousekeeping Seal of Approval,” or the Underwriters Laboratories “UL Approved” certification. This will have to be developed and administered with Amish custom in mind.

II. Programmatic review of Resources

This section lists by category the specific resources available to Amish business owners, lists contact information, provides a short description of the resource, and offers a brief analysis of the program or service.

A. Religious Organizations

1. The Churches, Bishops, and Deacons of LaGrange County

According to research data published in 2000, there are over 70 Old Order Amish Congregations with approximately 6,000 adherents in LaGrange County. The data also shows 7 Mennonite Congregations with over 1,600 adherents. A new study was conducted in 2010, but results are not yet available.

Source: city-data.com/county/religion/LaGrange-County-IN.html

Analysis: The Church is the number one influence on how the Amish do business and their support and openness to change is crucial to helping business owners succeed.

B. Economic Development Organizations

1. LaGrange County Economic Development Corporation

304 N. Townline Road, Suite 2, LaGrange, Indiana 46761; (260) 499-4994
<http://www.lagrangecountyedc.com>

The LaGrange County Economic Development Corporation is the single point of contact for economic development efforts in LaGrange County, Indiana. LCEDC works with regional, state and federal partners to support and encourage clients' business development endeavors. Their approach centers on four main areas of concentration: business retention and expansion, business attraction, entrepreneurial development and improving overall quality of life.

Source: lagrangecountyedc.com website

Analysis: LCEDC is highly supportive of the existing business base in the county as well as the start-up of new enterprises. This organization can take the lead in the development of new programs to assist the Amish business community.

2. Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership

300 East Main Street, Suite 210, Fort Wayne, IN 46802; (877) 469-3469;
<http://www.chooseneindiana.com>

The Northeast Indiana Regional Partnership (NEIRP) is an economic development organization dedicated to attracting new business investment to a 10 county region. Supported by key public and private partners, NEIRP serves as a single point of contact for businesses looking at the region for potential investment. LaGrange County is a member of the Partnership.

Source: chooseindiana.com website

Analysis: The NEIRP can be the conduit for any regional needs for the Amish, but county based programs will be supported by the LCEDC.

C. Chamber of Commerce and Convention & Visitors Bureaus

1. The Chamber of LaGrange County

901 South Detroit Street, LaGrange, Indiana, 46761; (260) 463-2443
<http://www.lagrangechamber.org>

LaGrange County Chamber of Commerce is an action association designed to meet business community needs. It is a voluntary organization of small and large businesses, professionals

and interested individuals who join together to advance the interest of the community. It is a legislative representative, information bureau and a business resource tool.

Source: lagrangechamber.org website

Analysis: Many Amish business owners belong to the Chamber and it can serve as a good organization for advocacy and legislative change.

2. Shipshewana/LaGrange County Convention & Visitors Bureau

780 S. Van Buren St. (SR 5), Shipshewana, IN 46565; (260) 768-4008
<http://www.LaGrangeCountyCVB.org>

The Shipshewana/LaGrange County Convention & Visitors Bureau is a full service Visitor Center offering brochures, festival & event information and area maps, all promoting the Amish and Mennonite history, culture, and retail shopping experience.

Source: backroads.org website

Analysis: Good for overall promotion of the Amish lifestyle and retail products.

3. Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau

19 Caravan Drive, Elkhart, IN 46514; (800) 250-4827
<http://www.amishcountry.org>

The Elkhart County Convention & Visitors Bureau promotes information specific to Shipshewana and the Amish culture and retail trade.

Source: amishcountry.org website

Analysis: Good for overall promotion of the Amish lifestyle and retail products.

D. Associations

1. The Northern Indiana Woodcrafters Association (NIWA)

1540 North 50 West, Shipshewana, IN 46565, (260)768-7156
<http://indianawoodcrafters.com>

NIWA is an association made up of over 80 furniture builders who sell wholesale furniture to retail dealers across the United States and Canada. The NIWA was formed by a group of furniture builders who wanted to work together to promote the quality products being built in Northern Indiana. The NIWA requires members to maintain a standard of excellence in their production that ensures consumers get the best quality wood-craftsmanship that is second to none. NIWA maintains a 10,000 square foot wholesale furniture showroom in

Shipshewana, Indiana. The facility is open year-round and serves NIWA member's dealer networks.

Source: indianawoodcrafters.com and lagrangecountyedc.com websites

Analysis: Key resource for the Amish wood crafting industry. NIWA should be the point in many of the recommendation made in this report.

2. Shipshewana Retail Merchants Association

Post Office Box 637, Shipshewana, IN 46565, (260) 768-7589
<http://shipshewana.com>

The purpose of the Shipshewana Retail Merchants Association is to combine resources for marketing purposes, and to plan and promote retail business in a unified effort. The Shipshewana Retail Merchants Association is a not-for-profit corporation whose members consist of retail businesses in and around the Shipshewana community. Any retail (manufacturing or service) business as defined under Membership shall be eligible for membership by the annual dues.

Source: shipshewana.com website

Analysis: Good for promotion of the Amish lifestyle and retail business operations.

E. Business Counseling & Training Organizations

1. Northeast Indiana Small Business Development Center (SBDC)

4312 Hobson Road, Suite B, Fort Wayne, IN 46815; (260) 481-0500
<http://www.isbdc.org/location/northeast-isbdc>

The Indiana Small Business Development Center (ISBDC) is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to have a positive and measurable impact on the formation, growth, and sustainability of small businesses in Indiana and to develop a strong entrepreneurial community.

Serving the Indiana counties of Adams, Allen, DeKalb, Huntington, LaGrange, Noble, Steuben, Wabash, Wells, and Whitley.

The ISBDC provides assistance to entrepreneurs at every stage of business development. Clients range from individuals who need assistance in deciding if self-employment is right for them to business owners looking to expand overseas. ISBDC Business Advisors have access to nationally recognized research tools in order to help clients make calculated business decisions.

Source: isbdc.org website

Analysis: Based out of Ft. Wayne, counseling can be provided on a limited basis in LaGrange County. This office could help arrange training programs in the county.

2. Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence at the Northeast Indiana Innovation Center

3201 Stellhorn Road, Fort Wayne, IN 46815; (260) 407-1754
<http://www.niic.net/growing-a-business.aspx>

Through the Center for Entrepreneurial Excellence (CEE), the Northeast Indiana Innovation Center (NIIC) provides clients with “Comprehensive Business Assistance” that helps entrepreneurs develop strategies and plans.

Source: nicc.net website

Analysis: Business counseling is performed out of the Ft. Wayne office, and they concentrate on high tech businesses.

F. Educational Organizations

1. The Learning Generation Initiative (LGI)

1396 Benham Ave., Suite A, Elkhart, 46516; (866) 898-3908
<http://www.learninggeneration.com>

LGI’s mission is to engage the region's diverse people in the lifelong pursuit of knowledge to improve their economic opportunity and quality of life. LGI serves a diverse population of adult learners in 3 counties in north and central Indiana. In LaGrange County, LGI is working with three partner organizations. These organizations are LGI's link to the LaGrange community. They allow LGI to reach LaGrange County residents where they live. Because LaGrange is an ethnically diverse community, LGI partners provide welcoming environments for all LaGrange County LGI participants.

Source: learninggeneration.com website

Analysis: Has coordinated Business Planning, Marketing, and Finance classes for Amish small businesses in the past.

2. Ivy Tech Community College - Elkhart County Campus

22531 County Road 18, Goshen, IN 46528; (574) 830-0375
<http://www.ivytech.edu/northcentral>

Ivy Tech offers a variety of coursework through personal enrichment courses, seminars, customized training programs and coursework leading to degrees, including Supervision, Business Administration, Entrepreneurship, Marketing, Management and Finance.

Source: ivytech.edu website

Analysis: Classes offered primarily at Goshen Campus. They could provide instructors for LaGrange County classes.

3. Purdue University Extension – LaGrange County

114 W. Michigan Street, Suite 10, LaGrange, IN 46761-1889; (260) 499-6334

The New Ventures Team of Extension Educators, with members in all regions of Indiana, provides assistance in the business development process through advice and educational materials. To arrange one-on-one assistance with the business planner, then contact the New Ventures team at [www.agecon.purdue.edu/new ventures](http://www.agecon.purdue.edu/new_ventures). The website includes a Business Planning tool and tutorial. <https://www.agecon.purdue.edu/planner>

The Extension website includes “The Education Store” which has an entire section devoted to Entrepreneurship. Offerings include both free and nominal charge resources, with such titles as *The Elements of a Business Plan: First Steps for New Entrepreneurs*; *Estimating Breakeven Sales for Your Small Business*; *How to Use Goals to Achieve Business Success: First Steps for New Entrepreneurs*; and *Marketing's Four P's: First Steps for New Entrepreneurs*. <https://mdc.itap.purdue.edu/subcategory.asp?subCatID=242&CatID=7>

Source: purdue.edu website

Analysis: Field office located in the county with counselors out of Allen and Kosciusko Counties. The program concentrates on Food and Agricultural related businesses. They could sponsor classes and provide materials for a business library.

4. Indiana University - South Bend Elkhart Center

125 E. Franklin Street, Elkhart, Indiana 46516; 800-321-7834

http://iusb.edu/~cted/self_employment.shtml

IUSB offers a variety of coursework through professional development and lifelong learning courses, seminars, customized training programs and coursework leading to degrees, including Supervision, Business Administration, Entrepreneurship, Marketing, Management and Finance.

Source: iusb.edu website

Analysis: Classes offered primarily at Elkhart Campus. They could provide instructors for LaGrange County classes.

G. Facilities

1. The Michiana Events Center (The MEC)

7605 N SR 9, Howe IN, 46746; (260) 562-9187
<http://www.michianaevents.com>

The MEC is a 145,000 square foot event center with over 1,000 parking spaces. The MEC hosts the Northern Indiana Woodcrafters Association Annual Furniture Expo, held in late February/early March. The Expo features over 75,000 square feet of products crafted by 80+ area custom-built furniture builders and caters to the retail dealer market.

Analysis: Excellent facility for trade shows.

H. Websites supporting Amish Culture and Woodworking

<http://www.amishcountry.org>

Sponsored by the Elkhart County Convention and Visitors Bureau and includes a section specific to Shipshewana.

<http://www.backroads.org>

Hosted by the Shipshewana/LaGrange County Conventions and Visitors Bureau and supports the culture and retail sector of Amish woodworking.

<http://indianawoodcrafters.com/>

The website of the Northern Indiana Woodcrafters Association, listing their purpose, some info on the Expo, and a gallery of photos of products.

<http://www.shipshewana.com>

Hosted by the Shipshewana Retail Merchants Association and supports the Amish culture and the retail sector of Amish woodworking.

<http://www.amish.net>

Amish.Net was America's first website devoted to Amish Country information, Amish made products and tourism services.

<http://www.onlineamishfurniture.com>

OnlineAmishFurniture.com has been the #1 Selling Amish Furniture site on the Internet for the past 7 years. It offer a complete line of Amish Furniture in solid Oak, 1/4 white sawn Oak, Maple, Brown Maple, Hickory, Walnut and Cherry. The Amish furniture is custom handcrafted by 180 Amish craftsmen in Ohio and Indiana.

<http://www.weaverfurniture.com>

Weaver Furniture Sales, a Shipshewana Amish Furniture store, has been serving clients from all over Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, and the greater Midwest as well as the entire United States for over 20 years (est. in 1989) with Indiana and Ohio Amish furniture.

Analysis: These are websites that either promote the Amish lifestyle or directly sell Amish made goods. These websites should be integrated into any new marketing plans for Amish businesses.

I. Books and Articles on Amish Business Practices

Success Made Simple: An Inside Look at Why Amish Businesses Thrive by Erik Wesner and Donald B. Kraybill; 2010.

An Amish America Q-and-A with Professor Karen Johnson-Weiner: Part Three
<http://amishamerica.com/an-amish-america-qanda-with-professor-karen-johnsonweiner-part-three/> Posted 2009.

Amish Enterprise: From Plows to Profits (Center Books in Anabaptist Studies) by Donald B. Kraybill and Steven M. Nolt; 2004.

Analysis: These resources should be read by anyone who works with Amish businesses or provides training to Amish business people.