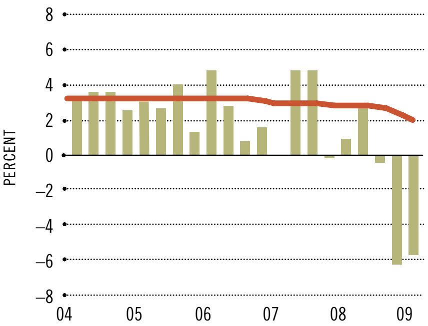
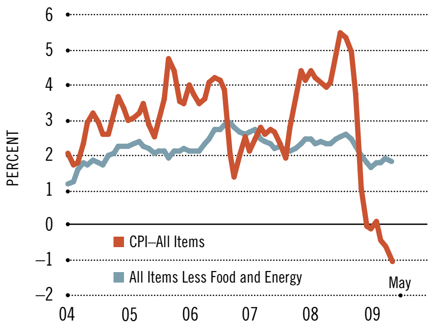
Eleven more charts are available on the web version of this issue. Among the areas they cover are agriculture, commercial banking, housing permits, income and jobs. Much of the data is specific to the Eighth District. To go directly to these charts, use this URL: www.stlouisfed.org/publications/re/2009/c/pdf/7-09-data.pdf.

REAL GDP GROWTH



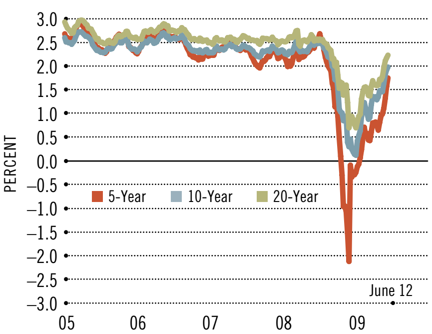
NOTE: Each bar is a one-quarter growth rate (annualized); the red line is the 10-year growth rate.

CONSUMER PRICE INDEX



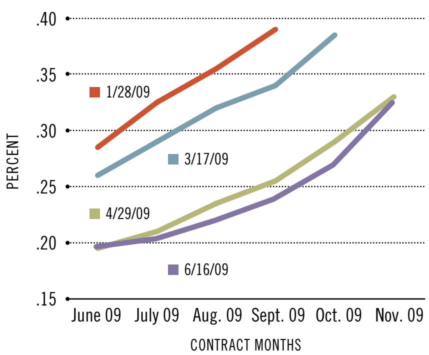
NOTE: Percent change from a year earlier.

INFLATION-INDEXED TREASURY YIELD SPREADS



NOTE: Weekly data.

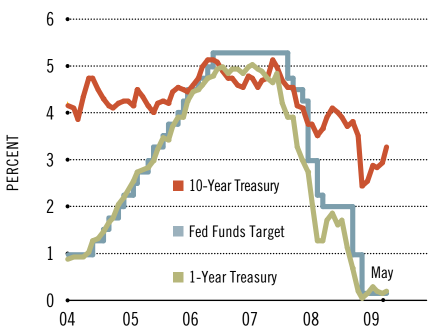
RATES ON FEDERAL FUNDS FUTURES ON SELECTED DATES



CIVILIAN UNEMPLOYMENT RATE

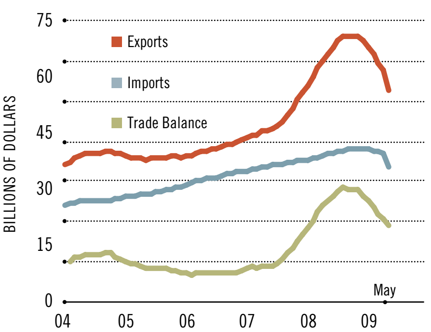
NOTE: Beginning in January 2003, household data reflect revised population controls used in the Current Population Survey.

INTEREST RATES



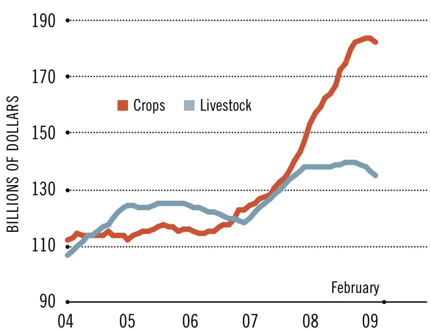
NOTE: On Dec. 16, 2008, the FOMC set a target range for the federal funds rate of 0 to 0.25 percent. The observations plotted since then are the midpoint of the range (0.125 percent).

U.S. AGRICULTURAL TRADE



NOTE: Data are aggregated over the past 12 months.

FARMING CASH RECEIPTS



NOTE: Data are aggregated over the past 12 months.

ASK AN ECONOMIST

Dave Wheelock, an economist at the St. Louis Fed since 1993, heads up the banking and financial markets group in the Research division. His research interests are financial and monetary history—especially the Great Depression—and banking. His outside interests include traveling, playing trumpet in the University City Symphony Orchestra and helping to coach his son's baseball team. For more on his work, see http://research.stlouisfed.org/econ/wheelock.

How do the current financial crisis and recession compare with the Great Depression?

The Great Depression of the 1930s was the most severe U.S. economic downturn of the 20th century. Between 1929 and 1933, the nation's production of goods and services (GDP) fell nearly 30 percent, the unemployment rate reached 25 percent of the labor force and the consumer price level declined by some 30 percent.

The current financial crisis is the most severe since the 1930s. However, the current recession is unlikely to rival the Great Depression. The recession began in the fourth quarter of 2007, but GDP did not begin to contract until the second half of 2008 and has fallen by just 3 percent as of the first quarter of 2009. Many economists expect that GDP will begin to rise in the second half of this year. The unemployment rate reached 9.4 percent in May 2009, its highest level since August 1983. Economists expect that the unemployment rate will continue to rise for a while, but few expect the unemployment rate to come close to Depression levels.

In contrast with the deflation of the 1930s, consumer prices have declined only modestly since September 2008. The consumer price index fell 3 percent between its September 2008 peak and April 2009, mainly because of a sharp decline in energy prices. Energy prices have since risen and consumer prices have stabilized. Few economists predict deflation on the scale of the Great Depression.

Like the Great Depression, the current episode has been marked by a sharp decline in the stock market and by other financial distress. The S&P 500 Composite Index fell 57 percent between its peak on Oct. 9, 2007, and its recent low on March 9, 2009, with much of the decline occurring after the middle of September 2008, when the financial crisis intensified. During the Depression, the stock market lost more than 80 percent of its value.

Several very large financial firms have experienced multibillion dollar losses during the current crisis, and a few have survived only with government assistance. However, while the number of bank failures has risen, many fewer banks have failed during the current period than during the Depression or even during the 1980s and early 1990s. Twenty-five banks failed last year and another 36 failed during the first five months of this year. By contrast, more than 100 banks failed every year from 1985 to 1992, including 221 in 1988, and many more savings and loan associations failed.

The distress in the home mortgage market has been a notable feature of the current episode. Unfortunately, the data on mortgage delinquency and foreclosure rates for the Great Depression are not directly comparable with the data for the current crisis. However, while severe, the current level of distress in U.S. mortgage markets is not as severe as the distress in those markets during the Great Depression, when approximately one-half of all homeowners with a mortgage fell behind on their payments.

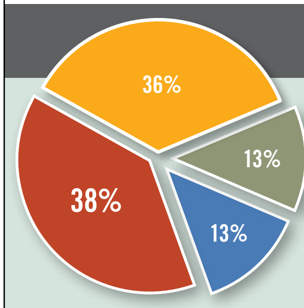
To read more about this comparison, see a Q&A with Dave on the Bank's Great Depression web site for teachers. Go to www.stlouisfed.org/greatdepression/qa.html.

For an up-to-date timeline on the current financial crisis, see http://timeline.stlouisfed.org.

FED FLASH POLL RESULTS

Whenever a new issue of *The Regional Economist* is published, a new poll is posted on our web site. The poll question is always pegged to an article in that quarter's issue. Here are the results of the poll that went with the April issue. The question stemmed from the article "Corporate Social Responsibility Can Be Profitable."

WHAT MOTIVATES YOUR COMPANY TO BE SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE?



- Pressure. Our customer base is forcing us to do this.
- Altruism. Doing the right thing is as important as profits.
- Profits. If people feel good about our corporate image, they will buy more of our product.
- Huh? Our only responsibility is to our stockholders.

611 RESPONSES AS OF 6/18/2009

THIS ISSUE'S POLL QUESTION:

Which of these comes closest to your list of infrastructure priorities?

1. Roads, sewers, schools, health care, mass transit.
2. Mass transit, alternative fuel, Internet, roads, sewers.
3. Schools, health care, roads, sewers, mass transit.
4. Internet, mass transit, alternative fuel, sewers, roads.
5. Roads, power (pipelines, electricity grid, etc.), sewers, Internet, mass transit.

After reading "Digging into the Infrastructure Debate," go to www.stlouisfed.org/publications/re to vote. Anyone can vote, but please do so only once. (This is not a scientific poll.)

CHECK OUT OUR REDESIGNED WEB SITE

The St. Louis Fed has redesigned its web site, www.stlouisfed.org. Besides sporting a new look and feel, the web site includes new features, including easy-to-access and easy-to-understand charts on basic economic data, such as GDP, jobs, inflation and the monetary base. In the new multimedia center, you will be able to watch short videos of such things as President James Bullard speaking on the current financial crisis. In addition, we've beefed up news from our Little Rock, Louisville and Memphis zones.

WE WELCOME YOUR LETTERS

You can submit a letter to the editor electronically by going to www.stlouisfed.org/publications/re/letter.cfm. You can also send a letter on paper through the mail: address it to Michael Pakko, editor, *The Regional Economist*, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, Box 442, St. Louis, MO, 63166.