

# News Release

Embargoed for release:  
**8:30 am Eastern Time**  
**7:30 am Central Time**  
**April 20, 2015**

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### What is the National Activity Index?

The index is a weighted average of 85 indicators of national economic activity drawn from four broad categories of data: 1) production and income; 2) employment, unemployment, and hours; 3) personal consumption and housing; and 4) sales, orders, and inventories.

A zero value for the index indicates that the national economy is expanding at its historical trend rate of growth; negative values indicate below-average growth; and positive values indicate above-average growth.

### Why are there three index values?

Each month, we provide a monthly index, its three-month moving average, and a diffusion index. Month-to-month movements can be volatile, so the monthly index's three-month moving average, the CFNAI-MA3, provides a more consistent picture of national economic growth. The CFNAI Diffusion Index captures the degree to which a change in the monthly index is spread out among its 85 indicators, averaged over a three-month period.

### What do the numbers mean?

When the CFNAI-MA3 value moves below  $-0.70$  following a period of economic expansion, there is an increasing likelihood that a recession has begun. Conversely, when the CFNAI-MA3 value moves above  $-0.70$  following a period of economic contraction, there is an increasing likelihood that a recession has ended.

When the CFNAI-MA3 value moves above  $+0.70$  more than two years into an economic expansion, there is an increasing likelihood that a period of sustained increasing inflation has begun.

The next CFNAI will be released:  
**May 21, 2015**  
**8:30 am Eastern Time**  
**7:30 am Central Time**

**FEDERAL RESERVE BANK  
 OF CHICAGO**

# Chicago Fed National Activity Index

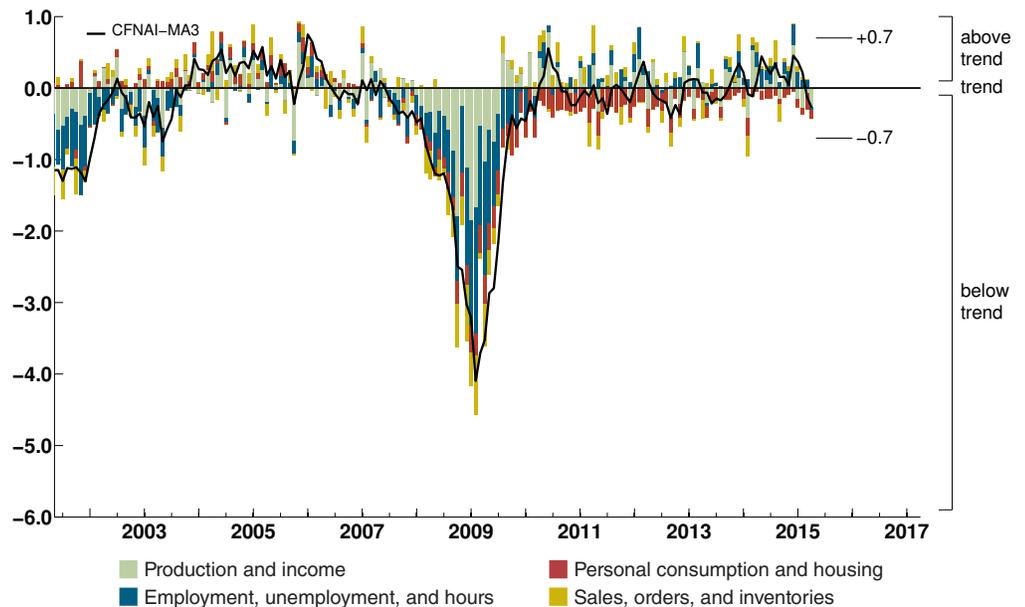
## Index shows economic growth slowed in March

Led by declines in production-related indicators, the Chicago Fed National Activity Index (CFNAI) moved down to  $-0.42$  in March from  $-0.18$  in February. Two of the four broad categories of indicators that make up the index decreased from February, and three of the four categories made negative contributions to the index in March.

The index's three-month moving average, CFNAI-MA3, decreased to  $-0.27$  in March from  $-0.12$  in February. March's CFNAI-MA3 suggests that growth in national economic activity was somewhat below its historical trend. The economic growth reflected in this level of the CFNAI-MA3 suggests subdued inflationary pressure from economic activity over the coming year.

The CFNAI Diffusion Index, which is also a three-month moving average, decreased to  $-0.09$  in March from  $-0.02$  in February. Thirty-eight of the 85 individual indicators made positive contributions to the CFNAI in March, while 47 made negative contributions. Thirty-seven indicators improved from February to March, while 48 indicators deteriorated. Of the indicators that improved, 14 made negative contributions.

Chicago Fed National Activity Index, by Categories, and CFNAI-MA3



### CFNAI, CFNAI-MA3, and CFNAI Diffusion for the latest six months and year-ago month

	Mar '15	Feb '15	Jan '15	Dec '14	Nov '14	Oct '14	Mar '14
<b>CFNAI</b>							
Current	-0.42	-0.18	-0.22	+0.03	+0.85	+0.22	+0.59
Previous	N/A	-0.11	-0.10	-0.02	+0.89	+0.18	+0.59
<b>CFNAI-MA3</b>							
Current	-0.27	-0.12	+0.22	+0.37	+0.45	+0.04	+0.12
Previous	N/A	-0.08	+0.26	+0.35	+0.45	+0.03	+0.12
<b>CFNAI Diffusion</b>							
Current	-0.09	-0.02	+0.14	+0.23	+0.32	+0.11	+0.17
Previous	N/A	0.00	+0.10	+0.21	+0.30	+0.09	+0.17

Current and Previous values reflect index values as of the April 20, 2015, release and March 23, 2015, release, respectively. N/A indicates not applicable.

Production-related indicators made a contribution of  $-0.27$  to the CFNAI in March, down from  $-0.08$  in February. Industrial production declined 0.6 percent in March after moving up 0.1 percent in February. The contribution of the sales, orders, and inventories category to the CFNAI was unchanged at  $+0.01$  in March.

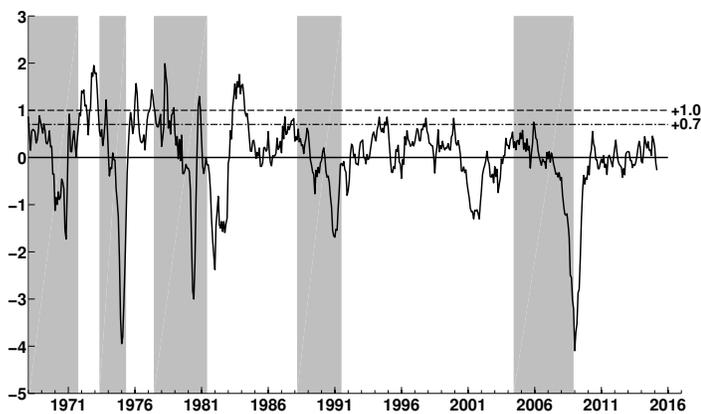
Employment-related indicators contributed  $-0.03$  to the CFNAI in March, down from  $+0.11$  in February. Nonfarm payrolls increased by 126,000 in March, following a gain of 264,000 in the previous month. However, the unemployment rate was steady at 5.5 percent in March.

The contribution of the personal consumption and housing category to the CFNAI increased to  $-0.13$  in March from  $-0.22$  in February. Housing starts moved up to 926,000 annualized units in March

from 908,000 in February. However, housing permits decreased to 1,039,000 annualized units in March from 1,102,000 in the previous month.

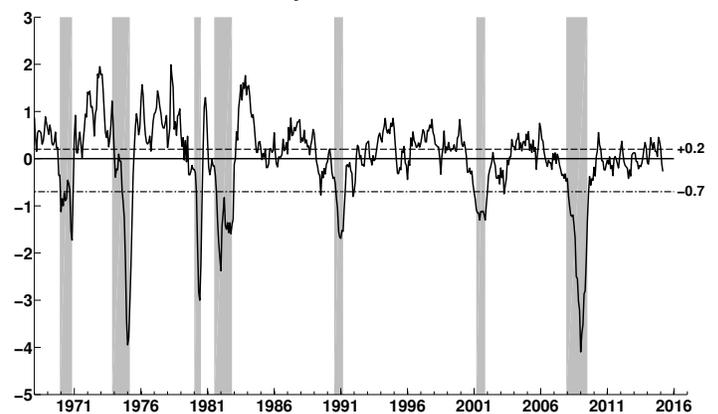
The CFNAI was constructed using data available as of April 16, 2015. At that time, March data for 50 of the 85 indicators had been published. For all missing data, estimates were used in constructing the index. The February monthly index was revised to  $-0.18$  from an initial estimate of  $-0.11$ . Revisions to the monthly index can be attributed to two main factors: revisions in previously published data and differences between the estimates of previously unavailable data and subsequently published data. The revision to the February monthly index was due primarily to the former.

### CFNAI-MA3 and Inflation Cycles



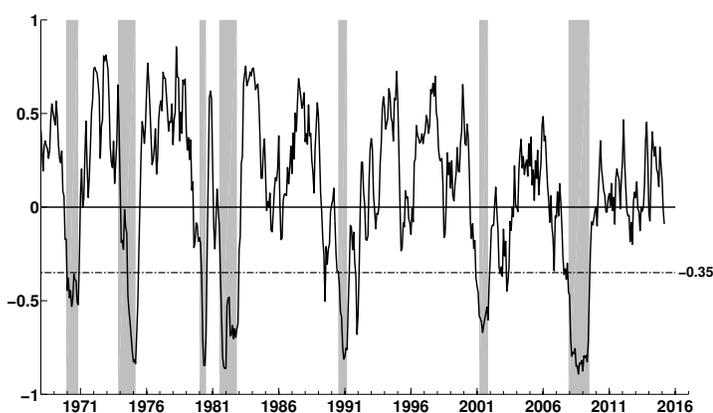
Notes: Shading represents periods of substantial inflation increases. A CFNAI-MA3 value above  $+0.70$  more than two years into an economic expansion indicates an increasing likelihood that a period of sustained increasing inflation has begun. A CFNAI-MA3 value above  $+1.00$  more than two years into an economic expansion indicates a substantial likelihood that a period of sustained increasing inflation has begun.

### CFNAI-MA3 and Business Cycles



Notes: Shading indicates official periods of recession as identified by the National Bureau of Economic Research. A CFNAI-MA3 value below  $-0.70$  following a period of economic expansion indicates an increasing likelihood that a recession has begun. A CFNAI-MA3 value above  $-0.70$  following a period of economic contraction indicates an increasing likelihood that a recession has ended. A CFNAI-MA3 value above  $+0.20$  following a period of economic contraction indicates a significant likelihood that a recession has ended.

### CFNAI Diffusion Index, Three-Month Moving Average



Notes: Shading indicates official periods of recession as identified by the National Bureau of Economic Research. The CFNAI Diffusion Index represents the sum of the absolute values of the weights for the underlying indicators whose contribution to the CFNAI is positive in a given month less the sum of the absolute values of the weights for those indicators whose contribution is negative or neutral in a given month. Periods of economic expansion have historically been associated with values of the three-month moving average of the CFNAI Diffusion Index above  $-0.35$ .

### CFNAI, Monthly Index

