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LAND UTILIZATION

Six out of every ten acres of the land area of the United States were under farm or ranch ownership or lease, as reported in the 1945 Census of Agriculture. The proportion of the land area in farms was greatest in the corn, wheat, cotton, dairy, and livestock-feeding centers of the Mississippi Valley. This area, where a high proportion of the land was in farms, encompassed most of the North Central States and extended into adjoining sections of the western and southern Great Plains and the valleys and basins of Kentucky and central Tennessee. All of the land in these areas was under farm operation except that occupied by towns and cities, public services and facilities, and by rural nonfarm residences and miscellaneous tracts. A small proportion of the land area was in farms within the rough and mountainous areas of the Western States; the Adirondacks, the Maine woods, and other eastern highlands; the arid to desert areas; the stony, sandy, and swampy lands of the upper Lake States; and within the low-elevation and poorly drained areas bordering the Atlantic and the Gulf Coasts.

The mixture of farming, forest, and urban uses in the Northeastern States is indicated by the varying acreage of land in farms in individual counties. Extensive areas of forest land outside farms in the Ozarks and associated highlands were used as free or open range and were closely interwoven into a local farm-forest economy. Land reported in farms throughout the Southern States tended to be concentrated in areas of crop specialization. It included a varying proportion of small, interspersed forest or wooded tracts and of larger areas of forested, cut-over, or burned-over land used for grazing of farm livestock. Land reported in farms in the Western States, as elsewhere, included only the land under farm or ranch ownership or lease. Large additional areas of publicly,* and some privately, owned land were used in common with other farmers and stockmen under permit for seasonal grazing. The special treatment accorded land under ownership and lease, as contrasted with use by permit, explains many of the variations in land in farms between areas of comparable resources.

Distribution of farms reflected variations in individual size and scale of farming and ranching operations. Farms were numerous in the tobacco-producing sections, the peanut-growing areas, and the cotton-farming areas of the Southern States. Many of these farms were operated by croppers and share tenants and contained a high ratio of cropland to other classes of farm land. Farms were also numerous in the parts of the Southern Appalachians where farms are typically small and cropland is limited to a few acres per farm. The concentration of farms around Birmingham, Alabama, was indicative of the small rural residential type of unit found around many large population centers.

There was a progressive lessening of number of farms per unit of area from central Ohio westward across the Corn Belt and into the extensive wheat-farming and grazing areas of the western Great Plains. Farms in the Western States were most frequent in the irrigated areas, in the Willamette Valley of Oregon, and in the Puget Sound area of Washington. Fewer farms, but a larger acreage farmed per unit, characterized the dry-farming areas. Livestock ranches were even fewer and combined still larger acreages under individual operation.

*The 170 million acres mapped as vacant public land in 1934 have been relatively unchanged since that date.