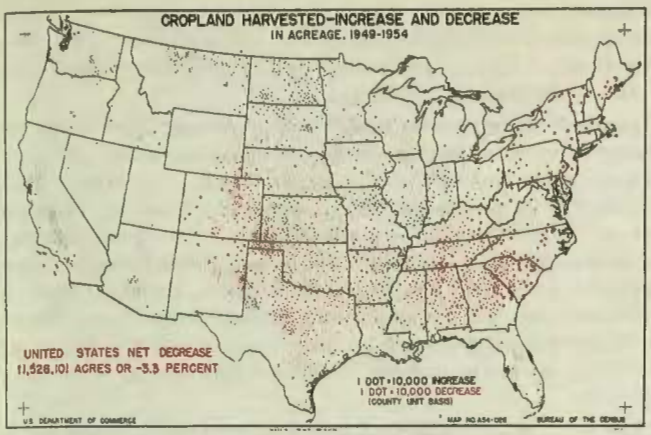

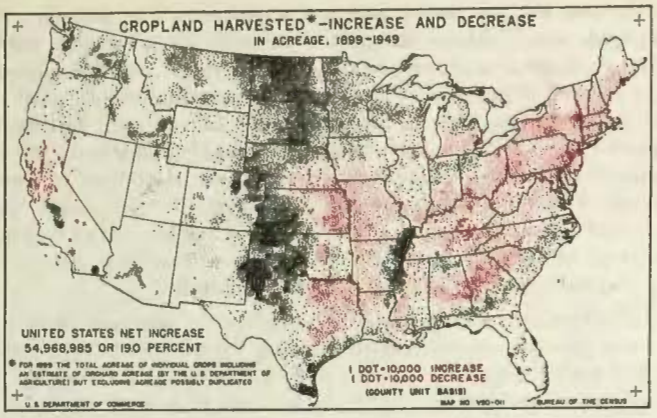

CROPLAND

Almost three-fourths of the agricultural production of our country is derived from that part of the land resources that are used to produce crops. The total area of cropland contained 460 million acres in 1954, which accounts for a fourth of the total land area. Cropland used only for pasture is included in this total cropland area.

The decrease in total acreage of cropland between 1949 and 1954 amounted to 18 million acres. Several different factors account for this change. The decrease in cropland harvested between 1949 and 1954 represents in part an actual decrease in land used for that purpose. Acreage allotments on wheat, cotton, and corn which were in effect in 1954 but not in 1949 encouraged a diversion of part of the acreage used in preceding years to grow these crops to production of nonallotment crops. But part of the acreage was diverted to pasture and part of it remained idle.

The decrease in cropland used only for pasture and in idle cropland may be due partly to the fact that cropland used only for pasture in 1949 which was not actually in rotation with crops was less frequently reported as cropland in 1954. This shift is particularly evident in parts of the South where the seeding of pastures on cropland taken out of crop production proceeded rapidly after World War II. Much of this cropland, which had been seeded for only a short time when the 1950 Census of Agriculture was taken, has remained in pasture and by 1954 it was generally considered as permanent grassland pasture.

Looking at a longer period of time, cropland used for crops or idle as reported at 5-year intervals by the 8 Censuses of Agriculture from 1920 to 1954 has averaged 403 million acres. The 1954 acreage of cropland used for crops or idle was 2 percent below this average while the 1950 acreage was about 1 percent above the average. This stability in acreage of cropland has been an important characteristic of agricultural land use since the end of World War I.

Although the overall changes in cropland area have been comparatively small, a considerable amount of change in distribution and kind of land used for crops has taken place. The distribution of total cropland and its component parts are shown by the accompanying maps along with a chart and map showing changes in cropland harvested, which is the most important part of the cropland area.

Total cropland.—The heavy concentration of cropland in the Corn Belt and in the eastern part of the Great Plains is a striking characteristic of any map showing the distribution of cropland in the United States. The 11 Corn Belt and Great Plains States have 245 million acres of cropland or more than half of the total acreage of cropland. Yet the land area of these 11 States accounts for only a fourth of the total land area of the country.

Other concentrations of cropland are less extensive but they are significant and are observable on the accompanying map. The ribbon of concentration along the lower Mississippi River and the extension of the high density cropland area of the Corn Belt into the Lake States are two other areas in the Eastern States. In the 11 Western States, cropland area is closely associated with situations in which irrigation and dry-farming are practiced. Except for parts of the Pacific Northwest, crops are not widely grown in the Western States without reliance upon either irrigation or conservation of moisture by fallowing.

Cropland harvested.—The distribution of cropland harvested is very similar to that of total cropland. Parts of the country which have very little cropland include extensive areas in the West that are too dry and areas in the East that are too rough, too wet, or have soils too poor for profitable use. Prominent among these areas are the Southern Appalachian, Adirondack, and Ozark Mountain areas, the Maine woods, the northern part of the Lake States, and the flatwoods of the Southeast.

Cropland used only for pasture.—Included in the total cropland area are 66 million acres of pasture that is for the most part in rotation with crops. Some cropland may be occupied by pasture during the transition period between its use for crops and a state of idleness, which will probably be followed by reversion to permanent pasture or to woodland. From the map it may be observed that the highest density of cropland used only for pasture is in Kentucky. There it is associated with limestone soils and moderately sloping land.