Cropland not harvested and not pastured.—This category of cropland, which totaled 61 million acres in 1954, includes cultivated summer fallow, cropland on which crops failed, cropland used for soil-improvement crops, and idle cropland. As most of the cultivated summer fallow and much of the crop failure is reported in the 17 Western States, the major concentrations of cropland not harvested and not pastured are nearly all in these States. Cropland used for soil-improvement crops and idle cropland account for most of the cropland not harvested and not pastured in the 31 Eastern States. In 1954, less than a third of the crop failure occurred in the 31 Eastern States.

Cultivated summer fallow.—The practice of summer fallowing land is closely associated with growing wheat in the drier parts of the major wheat belts. By letting the land lie fallow for a crop season and by cultivating it to keep it free of weeds, the accumulation of soil moisture is sufficient to result in higher yields per acre. Cultivated summer fallow is widely used in the drier parts of both the spring and winter wheat belts.

Cropland harvested—increase and decrease, 1949–54.—Changes in the acreage of cropland harvested were widespread between 1949 and 1954. Counties in which a decrease in acreage occurred are most heavily concentrated in the Southern States. Most of the change that took place in the Northeastern States was a decline in acreage. Counties in which increases occurred were located principally in the spring wheat-producing area of North Dakota, South Dakota, and Montana; in the central valley of California; the Columbia Basin; the rice-producing area of northeastern Arkansas; and the Corn Belt.

All land in farms and cropland harvested, 1850–1954.—The long-run trend in cropland harvested is compared with that for land in farms in the accompanying chart. Fluctuation rather than progressive change has characterized the acreage of cropland harvested since about 1920. Before that time the acreage steadily increased during the period of settlement. The high proportion of land in farms that is not used for growing crops is also emphasized by this chart.

Cropland harvested—increase and decrease, 1899–1949.—Decreases in cropland harvested that occurred over a 50-year period between 1899 and 1949 are found mainly east of the Great Plains. The decline is associated chiefly with hilly areas in which soil erosion and depletion have taken place. The most extensive areas of decrease are located in the Northeastern States, southern Piedmont, hill-land fringe of the Ohio Valley, eastern Texas, and the Ozark-Ouachita Highlands and adjacent hilly areas. Several small areas of sharp decline are largely associated with the growth of cities, as in northeastern Illinois and parts of southern Michigan.

The most widespread and heaviest increase occurred in the Great Plains. In the South, acreage in cropland harvested has expanded mainly in the Mississippi Delta, Coastal Plain, and in the Lower Rio Grande Valley. The Mississippi Delta, with its improved flood protection and drainage, greatly expanded acreage in cotton and other crops. In the Coastal Plain, use of fertilizers; drainage of land; suitability of soils for producing bright tobacco in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia; expansion of peanut acreage in Alabama and Georgia; increased production of citrus fruits and vegetables; and additional acreages devoted to rice in Louisiana and Texas, have contributed to the increase in cropland. In the Lower Rio Grande Valley the acreage of cropland has been greatly expanded through irrigation. In the Corn Belt and Lake States, cropland has been added largely through drainage of wet lands on existing farms. In the 11 Western States, the increase in acreage of cropland harvested is associated chiefly with the development of irrigation and dry-farming.