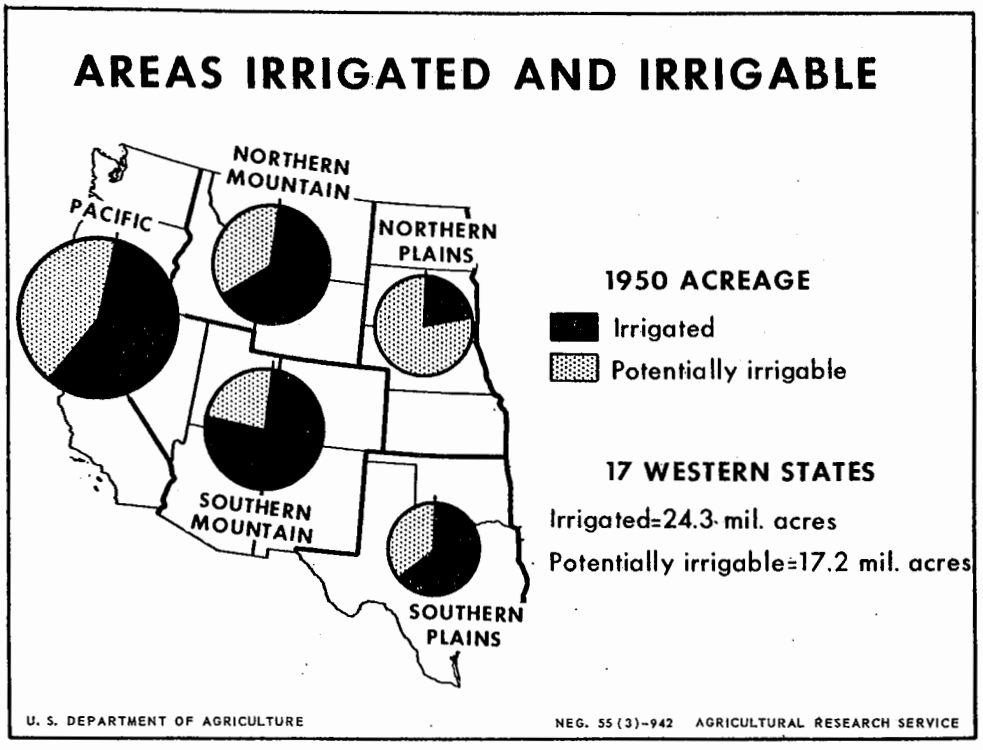
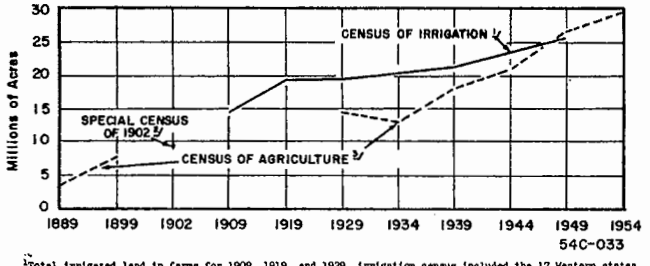


ACREAGE OF IRRIGATED LAND IN THE UNITED STATES: 1889-1954



[1]Total irrigated land in farms for 1909, 1919, and 1929, irrigation census included the 17 Western states Arkansas, and Louisiana; for 1939 and 1949, Florida also included.
[2]Total irrigated land, all states.
[3]For 1889 and 1899, census total for irrigated land in farms included the 17 Western States, Arkansas and Louisiana; for 1929, irrigated land from which crops were harvested, same 19 States; for 1934, irrigated crops, same 19 States; for 1939, irrigated cropland harvested plus irrigated pasture, 48 States. For 1944, 1949, and 1954, total irrigated land 48 States. Data for 1909 and 1919 not available.

In the 17 Western States the most pronounced increases occurred in the High Plains of Texas, where ground water supplies are being used for irrigation; in the Central Valley of California; in southern Arizona; in the Willamette and Klamath Valleys of Oregon; in the Columbia Basin of Washington; along the Snake River in Idaho; in south-central Nebraska; and in western Kansas. Increases were also pronounced in the rice growing areas of Arkansas, Louisiana, and Texas. In the Delta of Mississippi, irrigated acreage expanded rapidly as rice production increased in that area. The expansion of irrigation between 1949 and 1954 in the Eastern States was much greater and more widespread than the increases in these States between 1944 and 1949.

Areas irrigated and irrigable.—In the above map, the 1950 irrigated acreage is compared with the potentially irrigable area by regions for the 17 Western States. Among the 5 regions shown, the 3 Pacific States have both the largest irrigated acreage and the greatest potentially irrigable area. The Northern Plains States have irrigated the smallest proportion of their total irrigable area.

With the available water supply and with present conservation practices and distribution methods only about 3 in each 100 acres in the West can be irrigated for crop production. Nearly a third of the 24 million acres irrigated in the 17 Western States in 1949 needs additional water in order to have a full season's supply for crop production.

Acreage of irrigated land in the United States, 1889 to 1954.—The acreage of land irrigated in 1954 totaled 29.6 million acres. This total is 3.8 million acres more than the acreage reported irrigated in 1949 and 9 million acres more than was irrigated in 1944. The regional distribution of the net increase between 1949 and 1954 is as follows:

11 Western States	0.5 million acres.
6 Great Plains States	2.2 million acres.
31 Eastern States	1.1 million acres.

Decreases were reported for only 6 States; and of these the amount was significant only in Colorado, Wyoming, and Nevada. The largest increase was reported in Texas. In the Eastern States where the total acreage of land presently irrigated is comparatively small, large percentage gains in land irrigated were generally characteristic.

Some of the gain in the humid States took place in the rice-producing areas of Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and southeastern Texas; but an increasing number of farmers in the East were using irrigation to supplement rainfall, which may be deficient in some years.

Supplemental irrigation is being used on a wide variety of crops and on improved pastures. For intensively grown vegetables and fruits, irrigation in the East is generally accepted as profitable if other conditions are favorable. Tobacco is also a high-value crop for which many growers have successfully used irrigation. For field crops and pastures, fewer data are available on the returns from irrigation in humid areas.

The recent widespread interest in irrigation in the humid Eastern States stems from several conditions. For one thing, new lightweight portable equipment for sprinkler irrigation has been developed. This eliminates ditches and leveling and makes it possible to control the application of water. Recent droughts in parts of the Eastern States, which have coincided with periods of higher prices for farm products, have encouraged many farmers to make an investment in irrigation equipment. During the years following World War II, farmers were financially able to make this substantial investment necessary to install an irrigation system.