



All land in farms.—The total acreage of land in farms reported in 1954 was nearly the same as that reported by the 1950 Census of Agriculture, but significant regional changes have occurred during the last 5 years. In the Northern States (including Maryland and Delaware), land in farms declined by nearly 7 million acres. Of the four farm production regions that make up the Northern States, only the Northern Plains had an increase in land in farms between 1950 and 1954.

In the Southern States, the decline in land in farms amounted to more than 6 million acres with most of the decrease taking place in the Appalachian States. A slight increase in the Southern Plains was the only regional increase among the four Southern regions.

Reversion of farmland to forest land; encroachment of urban, transportation, and other nonfarm uses of land; and discontinuation of agricultural operations on small farms in favor of industrial and other nonagricultural employment have all contributed to the decline in farmland in these regions.

Offsetting nearly all of this decrease of more than 13 million acres in the Northern and Southern States was an increase of 13 million acres in the 11 Western States, most of which occurred in the Mountain States. Inclusion of more grazing land formerly not included in farms and the irrigation of previously undeveloped land account for much of this increase in acreage of land in farms.

Especially high densities of farmland shown for some counties result from showing the total acreage of large farms in the county in which the farm headquarters is located, even though the farm acreage may extend into other counties.

Percentage of total land area in farms.—In the Great Plains, Corn Belt, and Dairy Belt, a high proportion of the counties have 90 percent or more of their total land area in farms. West of the Great Plains, inadequate rainfall and mountainous topography explain the small proportion of land area that is in farms over extensive areas. Large acreages of land have remained in public ownership in the Western States. A considerable acreage of this public land is grazed by obtaining permits from the Federal and State agencies administering the land. Land grazed under these permits rather than under a leasing arrangement is not included as land in farms. A major limitation upon the use of this western rangeland grazed under permit is the necessity of grazing much of it for only part of the year.

In some parts of the States east of the Great Plains and Corn Belt, hilly topography, infertile soils, and poor drainage extend

over sizable areas. These physical handicaps contribute to the relatively little use made of such land for farming purposes.

Land in farms, by tenure of operator.—The tenure status of land in farms is shown by the accompanying chart in terms of the four principal types of tenure as reported by the Census of Agriculture. Operators who own part of their land and rent part of it account for about two-fifths of the land in farms. Full owners have a third of the land in farms in their units. About a sixth of the land in farms is rented out to tenants who rent all of the land that they operate. Less than a tenth of the land in farms is operated by managers.

The most significant change in tenure status of land in farms since 1950 is the increase in the proportion of land in farms operated by part owners. All other tenure types have some decrease in the proportion of land in farms that was operated under these types.

Land in farms and number of farms.—While the acreage of land in farms remained nearly the same between 1950 and 1954, the number of farms reported by the 1954 Census of Agriculture was about 11 percent fewer than the number reported in 1950. This decrease represents extension of the nearly continuous decline that started in 1920. Only a brief period of increase (not shown by the accompanying chart, which is plotted at 10-year intervals) occurred between 1930 and 1935 when many persons from urban areas returned to farms. Most of the recent decrease in number of farms has been in the number of small farms. Availability of urban employment has been a major factor accounting for the decline in small farm numbers in the areas where industry is well developed. Some of the operators of these small farms have moved off their farms while others have continued to use their farmhouses as residences but have discontinued agricultural operations. In the South, the combination of small farms operated by share tenants and croppers into larger operating units has contributed to the decrease in farm numbers.

The increase in the number of farms of 500 acres or more reflects the increased use of machinery in agriculture. As more and more farm operators have increased the size of their farms the number of farms has necessarily declined, since the overall acreage of land in farms has not increased.

Land in farms and not in farms, 1850-1954.—Less change in the acreage of land in farms occurred between 1950 and 1954 than for any previous 5- or 10-year Census period since land in farms was first enumerated in 1850. Regional changes that occurred between 1950 and 1954 practically offset each other so that the total United States acreage declined by less than half million acres.

Most of the increase in land in farms since 1880 has occurred in the 17 Western States, except for an appreciable increase in Florida in recent years. New settlement, which continued until about 1920, accounts for part of the increase. Since 1920, about half of the total net increase has resulted from the addition of about 100 million acres of Federal, State, and Indian reservation land to the area reported as land in farms. Most of the remaining net increase of another 100 million acres occurred on privately owned land. Changes in methods of controlling grazing rights and modifications in Census definitions and procedures rather than the expansion of farming into undeveloped areas account for much of this increase on privately owned land since 1920.