



Figure 2.

LAND IN FARMS

The principal agricultural uses of land are for crops and for pasture; however, not all of the land used for agricultural purposes is classed as farmland. Although almost all land in crops is considered farmland, millions of acres of land are used for grazing but are not enumerated as "land in farms." Thus, of the 1,903,824,640 acres of land surface in the United States, 79.4 percent was used for agricultural purposes in 1954, although only 60.8 percent was classified as land in farms. Land not in farms was not used in the tenure classification.

The proportion of the land area in farms showed an upward trend to 1950. The farm area in 1954 was almost the same as in 1950. The relatively stable farm area, for the country as a whole, fails to reveal the differences which have been occurring in the States and in larger geographic regions. Decreases in land in farms, between the 1950 and 1954 enumerations, occurred in all States east of the Mississippi River, except Florida. Although decreases also were reported in five States west of the Mississippi River, the combined loss—nearly 18 million acres—was almost offset by increases in the western half of the country and in Florida.

In the Northeast the downward trend in the land area devoted to agriculture has been almost continuous since 1880. By 1900, this area had 2½ million fewer acres of farmland than at the peak in 1880. From 1900 to 1954 the Northeastern States, collectively, lost another 24 million acres of farmland, or about 3 out of every 8 acres.

The North Central Region comprises one-fourth (25.4 percent) of the total land surface in the continental United States and one-third (34.0 percent) of the farmland. The farm area in this region apparently reached its peak about 1945. At that time,

82.5 percent of the land area was within farm boundaries. Relatively small declines in the acreage in farms have been reported in the two intercensal periods since that time. In the period 1945-54, this region lost more than 5 million acres from its farms so that by 1954 the proportion of land in farms had dropped to 81.4 percent.

The South, which has 29.5 percent of the total land area in the United States, had, in 1954, only slightly more than two-thirds (68.7 percent) of its area in farms. The other third of the area, representing nonagricultural land, is largely ungrazed wooded tracts held by timber or paper companies or in other private holdings; swamps and tidal marshes; rugged terrain some of which is in parks; eroded, abandoned lands once in farms but now overgrown with brush and trees; and, of course, land required by roads, cities, and industrial uses. Although economic forces could bring thousands of acres of these nonagricultural lands into a higher agricultural use through clearing and draining, forestry is the presently preferred use for much of the area.

Following the Civil War, acreage of land in farms in the South increased until 1900, after which date each successive Census through 1925 registered a decline. Thereafter, the trend was upward through 1950. Between 1950 and 1954, this region recorded a loss of nearly 7 million acres from the farm area. This decrease would have been even greater if it had not been for a 1,634,000 increase recorded in Florida. Abandonment of some of the poorer agricultural lands in the South, particularly in the Southern Piedmont and in the more mountainous and hilly areas, has been brought about in part by more attractive opportunities for earning a living through nonfarm employment in industry.

The West has continued the expansion of its farmland area, without interruption, since the first Census of land in farms was