

CROP PRODUCTION

CROPS GROWN

Soils and climate of the Corn Belt are favorable for the production of a wide variety of crops. With the exception of cotton, tobacco, citrus fruits, and other crops which require a milder climate and a longer growing season, almost any temperate-zone crop can be grown successfully here. The principal crops that have been adopted by the farmers are corn, soybeans, oats, wheat, barley, rye, and a wide variety of hay and pasture crops. These crops have generally shown the relatively greatest advantage in terms of contribution of farm income.

On almost every farm at least 2 or 3 kinds of crops are produced every year. The combination of crops, or the principal crops, grown on a farm vary somewhat from one part of the Corn Belt to another. On some farms, there are fields where corn is grown for several years in succession without alternating with other crops; but most farmers try to follow some system of crop sequence or crop rotation in which a number of crops will be grown successively on the land over a series of years. Some of the typical cropping systems or crop rotations are the following: Corn, oats, meadow; corn, corn, oats, meadow; corn, corn, oats (with sweetclover); corn, soybeans, oats, meadow; corn, soybeans, wheat, meadow; corn, soybeans, wheat or oats. The meadow crop is used for pasture or hay. In frequent cases the meadow crop (which may be clover, alfalfa, or combinations of clovers and grasses) will occupy the land for 2 or 3 years. Sweetclover seeded with oats or with other small grain is grown primarily for plowing under for soil improvement.

Farms reporting specified crops.—Corn is the most widely grown crop in the Corn Belt. It was reported on 91 percent of all the commercial farms in 1954. About 92 percent of the corn acreage for all purposes was harvested for grain. The remainder was harvested for silage or fodder, or was hogged down or grazed. The acreages harvested for silage or fodder were generally largest relative to the total corn acreage near the fringes of the Corn Belt. For example, along the northern fringe, where dairy farms are relatively numerous, the percentage of the crop harvested for silage is relatively high.

Corn harvested for grain was reported on 87.6 percent of all the commercial farms in the Corn Belt in 1954 (table 51). The crop was produced for grain on 95.2 percent of the cash-grain farms and on 85.8 percent of the livestock farms. The proportion of farmers producing corn for grain was highest on cash-grain farms in the Central Corn Belt (98.9 percent), and lowest on livestock farms in the Southern Corn Belt (71.5 percent).

Soybeans have become a major crop in the Corn Belt during the last 20 years. The expansion of this crop has been tremendous (4, 8). Soybeans for beans now rank second only to corn in total value of production among crops in the Corn Belt. Soybeans harvested for beans were reported on 41.2 percent of all the commercial farms and on 65.5 percent of the cash-grain farms in 1954. In the Central Corn Belt, the area of heaviest concentration, 82.2 percent of the cash-grain farmers grew soybeans. They were grown by a considerably larger proportion of the cash-grain farmers than of the livestock farmers in all regions of the Corn Belt. This reflects the fact that soybeans are rather strictly a cash crop; practically the entire quantity is sold by the farmers. The Western Corn Belt had the smallest percentage of farmers reporting soybeans for beans. This part of the Corn Belt includes the western fringe of the area to which soybeans are adapted. The crop was reported on only 22.7 percent of the cash-grain farms and 12.4 percent of the livestock farms in this region. Only 2 percent of all the commercial farms reported soybeans cut for hay. The proportion was highest in the Southern Corn Belt and lowest in the Western Corn Belt.

Oats were harvested for grain on about 3 out of every 4 commercial farms in the Corn Belt in 1954. Oats are the most popular small grain used as a companion crop (sometimes referred to as nurse crop) for new seedings of clover, alfalfa, or of other legumes and grasses grown for forage or soil improvement. The oat crop is harvested in late June or early July, leaving the young legume and grass plants to grow and develop for later use as forage or for plowing under. In the Northern Corn Belt, oats for grain (threshed or combined) were reported by almost as many farmers as reported corn for grain. In other regions of the Corn Belt also oats were a leading crop, being found on 2 to 3 out of every 4 farms.

TABLE 51.—PERCENT OF FARMS REPORTING SPECIFIED CROPS, BY TYPE OF FARM, IN THE CORN BELT AND COMPONENT REGIONS:1954

Region and type of farm	Corn harvested for grain	Soybeans harvested for beans	Wheat threshed or combined	Oats threshed or combined	Barley threshed or combined	Rye threshed or combined	Soybeans cut for hay	Red clover seed harvested	Irish potatoes harvested	Vegetables harvested for sale	Land in fruit orchards, etc. ¹
	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
Total Corn Belt:											
All commercial farms.....	87.6	41.2	35.6	72.4	5.6	4.3	2.0	4.1	20.0	2.1	5.2
Cash-grain farms.....	95.2	65.5	50.1	72.2	5.4	5.1	1.8	4.8	15.0	2.1	3.6
Livestock farms ²	85.8	26.8	24.9	74.8	5.2	3.8	1.4	3.5	21.4	1.0	5.5
Eastern Corn Belt:											
All commercial farms.....	89.0	50.1	63.2	61.3	5.2	8.2	2.0	7.5	13.1	3.8	4.3
Cash-grain farms.....	97.3	74.7	73.1	62.1	3.9	9.3	2.3	9.0	10.6	3.1	3.1
Livestock farms ²	85.2	35.7	57.9	61.3	7.2	8.4	2.6	5.5	12.6	1.8	3.5
Central Corn Belt:											
All commercial farms.....	94.3	55.8	13.9	85.7	1.4	1.9	0.9	3.6	12.6	2.5	5.2
Cash-grain farms.....	98.9	82.2	23.9	85.6	1.5	2.4	1.1	3.6	9.1	2.6	4.0
Livestock farms ²	93.0	34.2	6.5	88.5	1.5	1.4	0.5	3.8	14.7	1.3	5.7
Northern Corn Belt:											
All commercial farms.....	94.2	39.8	7.5	90.8	7.6	1.4	0.5	2.7	18.0	3.2	2.9
Cash-grain farms.....	96.5	72.1	13.5	90.6	13.2	2.8	0.3	2.6	14.2	3.6	2.1
Livestock farms ²	94.4	25.2	4.6	92.0	5.4	0.9	0.4	3.0	17.1	1.7	3.1
Western Corn Belt:											
All commercial farms.....	89.2	15.7	37.2	72.6	4.8	3.6	0.3	1.6	23.2	0.6	4.8
Cash-grain farms.....	95.0	22.7	59.5	71.0	5.1	3.4	0.2	1.5	19.4	0.5	3.5
Livestock farms ²	87.7	12.4	23.1	75.3	4.5	3.6	0.3	1.9	24.4	0.3	5.1
Southern Corn Belt:											
All commercial farms.....	72.6	46.8	45.4	57.6	10.0	5.6	5.4	4.7	33.0	1.0	8.4
Cash-grain farms.....	84.5	79.1	66.8	55.0	9.6	7.0	5.4	6.4	28.5	0.8	4.8
Livestock farms ²	71.5	32.1	33.5	60.0	8.4	4.9	3.6	3.9	33.1	0.4	8.8

¹ Land in bearing and nonbearing fruit orchards, groves, vineyards, and planted nut trees.² Livestock other than dairy and poultry farms.