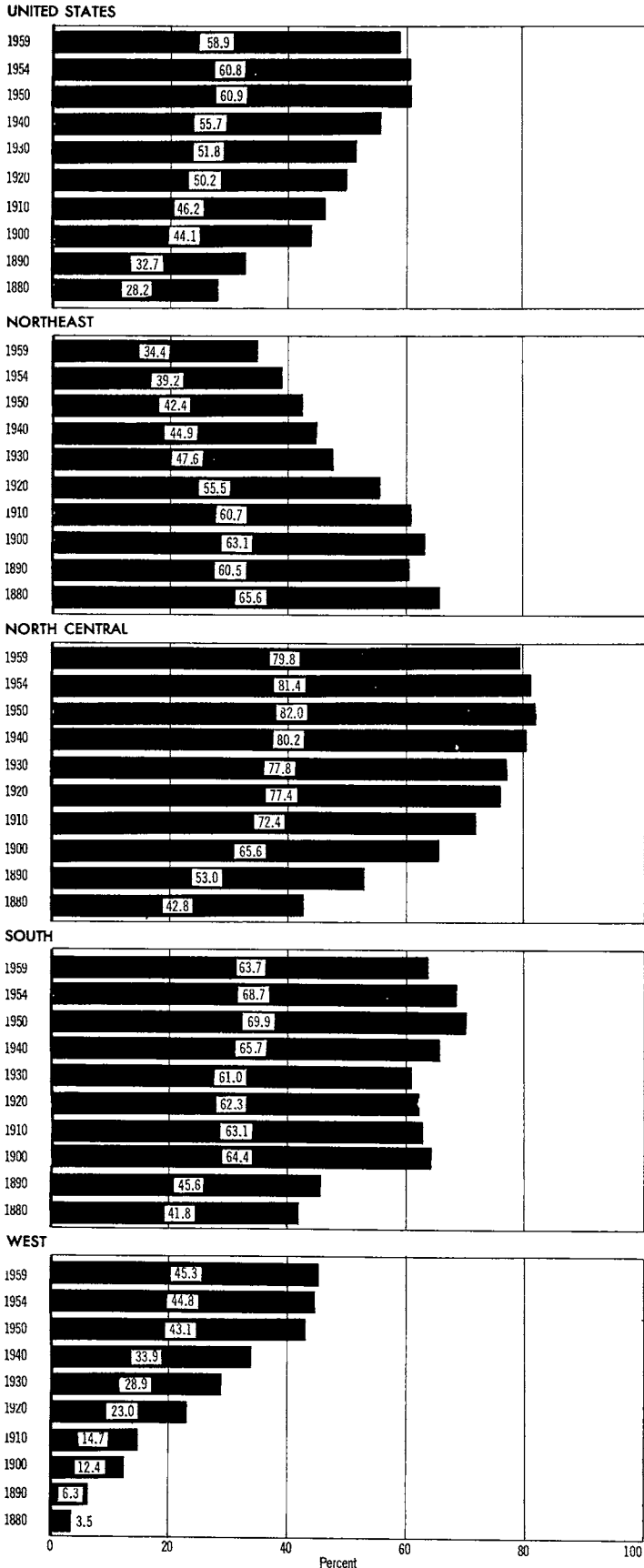


LAND IN FARMS AS A PERCENT OF TOTAL LAND AREA, FOR THE UNITED STATES AND REGIONS: 1880 TO 1959



In 1959, 63.7 percent of the total land area in the South was in farms. Primary reasons for the decline include the reversion of farmland to woodland, abandonment of farmland and its subsequent overgrowth of brush and scrub timber, and the conversion of farmland into urban and forest uses.

Within the conterminous West, farmland expansion was continuous at a fairly even rate from 1880 to 1950, with about 5.7 percent of the total land area added to land in farms in each decade. Since 1950, however, only 2.2 percent of the total area has shifted to farmland, and most of this change took place before 1954. Thus, the West was the only region to show an increase in the proportion of total land area devoted to land in farms in the last decade.

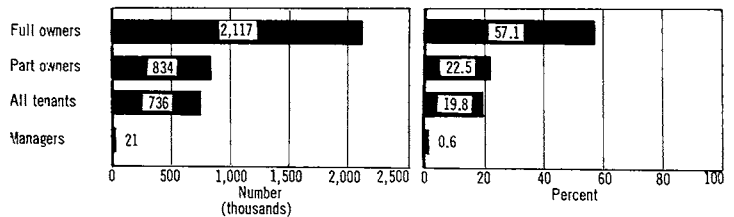
A similar pattern of farmland expansion has taken place in the entire western region, but the percentage of the total area added to farmland is smaller owing to the low proportion of land in farms in Alaska.

Large grazing areas of the West are held in the public domain and are grazed under a permit system. When these permit lands have multiple users they are excluded from enumeration as land in farms, but in recent years, more of the public land has been leased to single users, and this land is included in the farmland area. Thus, much of the increase in the proportion of land in farms is not really new land for agricultural production. About 17 million acres of land were leased to single users under the Taylor Grazing Act in 1959 compared with 13 million in 1950 and 7.4 million in 1940.

TENURE OF FARM OPERATORS

Opportunities for farm operation.—Total farming opportunities, as indicated by number of farms, increased in the United States until 1920. During the last four decades, farm numbers have declined continuously with the exception of the depression years from 1930 to 1935. Farm numbers reached an all-time peak of 6.8 million in 1935. The decline has been progressively greater since 1940, as more labor-saving equipment and techniques have been used, permitting farmers to operate larger tracts of land. In 1959 there were 3,707,973 farms in the entire Nation, or nearly 50 percent less than the peak number of farms in 1935. This is the least number of farms since 1880. Number of farms in the conterminous United States decreased by 1,081,657 between 1954 and 1959, and less than a fourth of this decrease can be ascribed to the more restrictive definition of a farm used in the 1959 census. Most of the places that were excluded by the change in farm definition were owner occupied.

NUMBER OF FARMS, BY TENURE OF OPERATOR, FOR THE UNITED STATES: 1959



All regions have experienced a sharp decline in number of farms since 1935. The South and the Northeast, in particular, have undergone substantial off-farm migration. In the Northeast, number of farms decreased 54 percent between 1935 and 1959; in the South the decrease was 52 percent. The decline was less rapid in the conterminous West and the North Central region, where number of farms decreased 40 percent and 35 percent, respectively.