REGIONAL PATTERNS OF LAND RESOURCES AND USES

Areal differences in the physical character and the uses made of land resources have always been of great significance in understanding the patterns of such major activities as agriculture and forestry in this country. Major physical characteristics of the land particularly affecting its use for agriculture and forestry are: (1) Annual amount and seasonal distribution of precipitation; (2) temperature and the length of the frost-free season; (3) land relief, including degree and direction of slope; (4) soils; and (5) vegetation.

Often the natural environment may be altered in such a way that land resources which in their original condition were not usable for agriculture may become valuable for agricultural production. Land improved by drainage and irrigation falls into this category. Increased use of fertilizer has also proved profitable on land with inherently infertile but efficiently amendable soils.

Numerous other influences also affect the regional patterns of land use. The history of land settlement often plays a very significant role in the present use of resources. Control or ownership of the land may also affect its use. The distribution of population is important too. Changes in the population distribution are occurring, and these shifts of course have a bearing on major changes in the use of land resources. Changing technology is of considerable importance. Improvement in the varieties of grain sorghum, for example, have led to a considerable expansion of land used for that crop. The increasing mechanization of the cotton harvest has played a part in shifting cotton production to more level lands and to larger farms. The presence of mineral production or of manufacturing industries may affect the labor supply and thus play a part in deemphasizing agriculture in a particular area.

Shifts in the use and productivity of land resources among regions have been taking place. The pattern of use may also change within a region. Among some of the changes that have been occurring are (1) the westward migration of cotton production to the Mississippi Delta, to Texas, and to California; (2) increased planting and sustained yield management of forest resources in areas where crop agriculture was formerly important; (3) improvement and expansion of pasture on land formerly used mainly for crop production; (4) introduction and expanded use of such crops as soybeans and grain sorghums in regions where corn or wheat had generally dominated the crop picture for so many years.

The maps in this section of the report are intended to give a general understanding of the differences in the regional distribution of land resources and how they are used. The map of "General Resource Areas" was first published in the 1958 Yearbook of Agriculture as part of a chapter entitled "Our Wealth of Land Resources." The map of "Major Types of Farming in the United States" has served for several years as an effective means of gaining an initial acquaintance with the regional differences in farming found in the several parts of the United States. The map showing the "Major Uses of All Land As Compared With Total Land Area" gives at a glance some of the striking differences in the major uses of land found among the several farm production regions in the United States.