

Basic Regional Land-Use Patterns

Land-use patterns vary greatly by region, reflecting differences in soils, climate, topography, and patterns of population settlement. For example, **cropland** accounts for 12 percent of the total land in the Northeast and 58 percent in the Corn Belt (table 4; see fig. 3 for a map of the Farm Production Regions used in this report; see Appendix for detailed descriptions of terms in **bold**).⁷ In similar fashion, there is variation among States within a region (fig. 4). Almost two-thirds of North Dakota is cropland, compared with 43 percent in South Dakota.

There are some clear regional patterns in land use. Cropland is roughly concentrated in the central regions of the contiguous United States, with the Northern Plains and Corn Belt having the majority of their land in cropland, and the Southern Plains, Lake States, and Delta States also having cropland shares above the national average. Limited precipitation in semiarid areas means that a large proportion of the land in the West is most suitable for grazing. The Mountain region and Southern Plains have the majority of their land in **grassland pasture and range**. The Northern Plains and Pacific regions also have relatively high shares of grazing acreage, with more than one-third and one-quarter of their land area, respectively, allocated to grassland and pasture and range. Forest-use land is most prevalent in the Eastern regions such as the Northeast, Appalachian, Southeast, and Delta States, which have a majority of their land in forest uses. In addition, forest-use

⁷ ERS constructed a set of Farm Resource Regions (USDA/ERS, 2000) to be used, when possible, in place of the Farm Production Regions. Farm Resource Regions require county-level data, which are not available for most land classes in the State-based Major Land Uses series.

Table 4

Major uses of land by region, 2002

| Region ¹ | Cropland ² | | Grassland pasture and range ³ | | Forest-use land ⁴ | | Special uses and misc. other land | | Urban area | | Total land area ⁵ | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--|-------------|------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|-------------------|-------------|------------------------------|-------------|
| | <i>Mil. acres</i> | <i>Pct.</i> | <i>Mil. acres</i> | <i>Pct.</i> | <i>Mil. acres</i> | <i>Pct.</i> | <i>Mil. acres</i> | <i>Pct.</i> | <i>Mil. acres</i> | <i>Pct.</i> | <i>Mil. acres</i> | <i>Pct.</i> |
| Northeast | 13.7 | 12.3 | 3.0 | 2.7 | 65.5 | 58.9 | 16.8 | 15.1 | 12.3 | 11.1 | 111.4 | 100 |
| Lake States | 42.1 | 34.5 | 5.4 | 4.4 | 49.0 | 40.2 | 21.4 | 17.5 | 4.2 | 3.4 | 122.1 | 100 |
| Corn Belt | 95.7 | 58.2 | 13.1 | 7.9 | 31.3 | 19.0 | 16.5 | 10.0 | 8.0 | 4.9 | 164.6 | 100 |
| Northern Plains | 102.0 | 52.5 | 71.0 | 36.6 | 4.3 | 2.2 | 15.9 | 8.2 | 1.0 | 0.5 | 194.3 | 100 |
| Appalachian | 26.0 | 21.0 | 6.3 | 5.1 | 71.5 | 57.8 | 13.4 | 10.8 | 6.5 | 5.3 | 123.7 | 100 |
| Southeast | 14.8 | 12.0 | 8.3 | 6.7 | 73.7 | 59.7 | 17.8 | 14.5 | 8.7 | 7.1 | 123.3 | 100 |
| Delta States | 21.0 | 23.1 | 6.2 | 6.8 | 50.7 | 55.5 | 11.0 | 12.1 | 2.3 | 2.5 | 91.2 | 100 |
| Southern Plains | 55.7 | 26.3 | 115.8 | 54.7 | 18.0 | 8.5 | 16.7 | 7.9 | 5.3 | 2.5 | 211.5 | 100 |
| Mountain | 46.3 | 8.4 | 302.8 | 55.3 | 116.8 | 21.3 | 78.3 | 14.3 | 3.7 | 0.7 | 547.9 | 100 |
| Pacific | 23.9 | 11.7 | 52.3 | 25.7 | 78.3 | 38.4 | 42.1 | 20.7 | 7.1 | 3.5 | 203.8 | 100 |
| 48 States ⁴ | 441.3 | 23.3 | 584.2 | 30.8 | 559.1 | 29.5 | 250.0 | 13.2 | 59.2 | 3.1 | 1,893.8 | 100 |
| Alaska | 0.1 | 0.0 | 1.3 | 0.4 | 90.5 | 24.7 | 274.0 | 74.9 | 0.2 | 0.0 | 366.0 | 100 |
| Hawaii | 0.2 | 4.5 | 1.0 | 24.4 | 1.6 | 37.8 | 1.1 | 27.8 | 0.2 | 5.5 | 4.1 | 100 |
| United States ⁴ | 441.6 | 19.5 | 586.5 | 25.9 | 651.2 | 28.8 | 525.1 | 23.3 | 59.6 | 2.6 | 2,264.0 | 100 |

¹ See fig. 3 for a map of the Farm Production Regions used in this report.

² Includes cropland used for crops, cropland used only for pasture, and idle cropland.

³ Open permanent pasture and range, both in farms and not in farms, excluding cropland pasture.

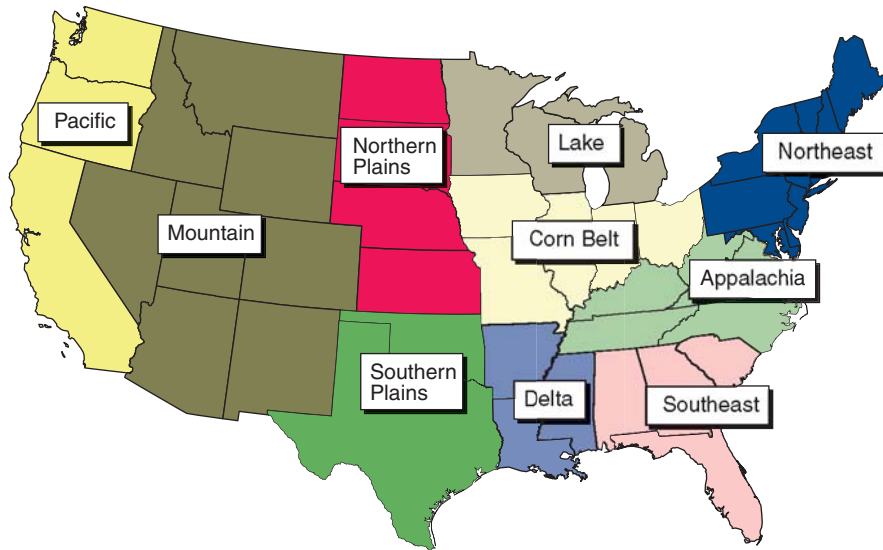
⁴ Includes forests grazed but excludes an estimated 98 million forest acres in parks and other special uses of land.

⁵ Distribution of land uses and percentages may not add to totals due to rounding.

Sources: DOI/BLM, 2003; DOT/BTS, 2004; DOT/FAA, 2002; DOT/FHWA, 2002; DOT/FRA, 2004; USDA/FS 1989, 1998; DOI/FWS, 2001; GSA, 2001; GDT, 2000; HUD/BOC, 1992, 2002, 2003; USDA/NASS, 2004a, 2004b, 2005; DOI/NPS, 2002; USDA/NRCS, 2000, 2004a; and WI, 2002.

Figure 3

USDA farm production regions

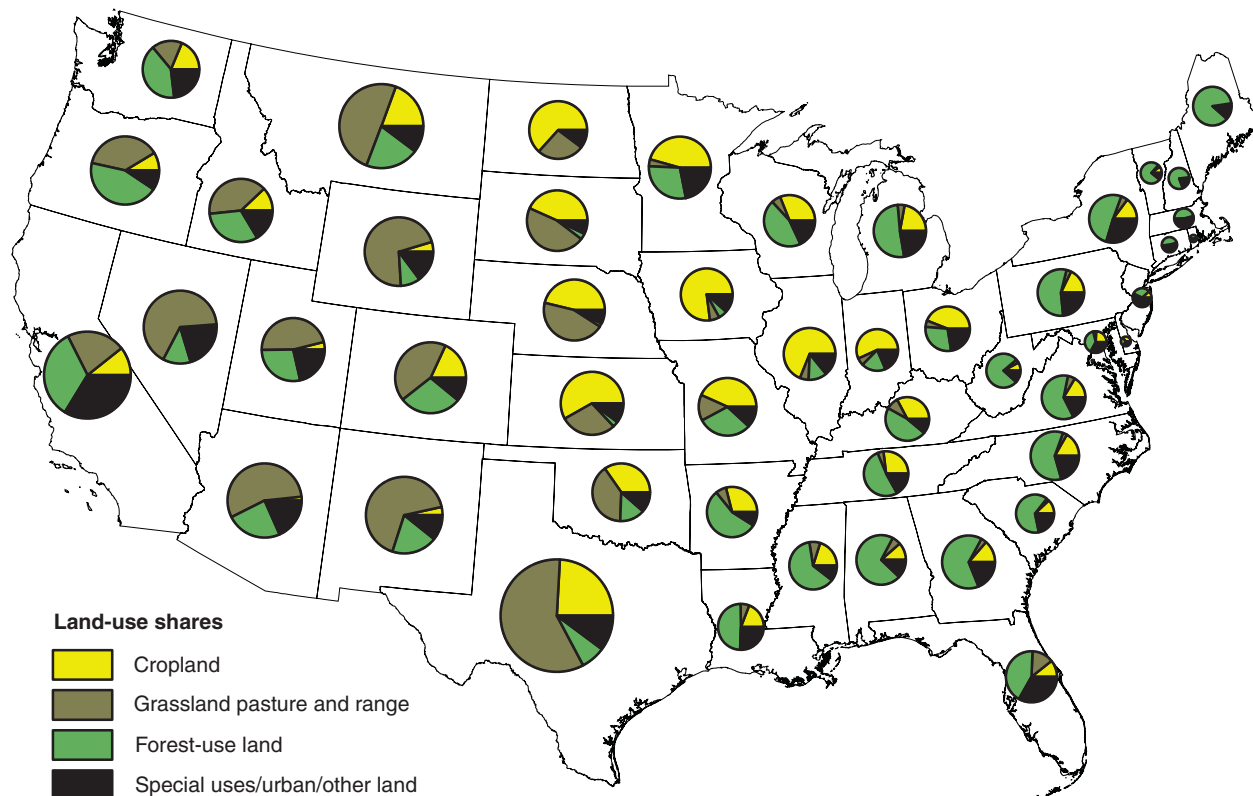


Source: Economic Research Service, USDA.

land constitutes a relatively high share of land in the Lake States and Pacific regions where the topography and precipitation patterns are also conducive to growing trees. The Northeast and Southeast have the highest shares of urban land, while the Lake States, Corn Belt, Appalachian, and Pacific regions also have urban shares above the Nation's average.

Figure 4

Shares of land in major uses, 48 contiguous United States, 2002



Note: The size of the pie charts is proportional to the land area in each State. Shares for Alaska are 25% in forest-use land, 75% in special uses/urban/other land, and less than 0.5% in all other uses. Shares for Hawaii are 5% in cropland, 24% in grassland pasture and range, 38% in forest use, and 33% in special uses/urban/other land.

Source: USDA/ERS Major Land Uses data series, 2005 (<http://www.ers.usda.gov/data/majorlanduses/>).