

# 2022 NATIONAL RESOURCES INVENTORY: CHANGES IN LAND COVER AND USE

## WHAT IS THE NATIONAL RESOURCES INVENTORY?

The National Resources Inventory (NRI) is an appraisal of natural resource conditions and trends authorized by the 1972 Rural Development Act. The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) conducts the NRI in collaboration with Iowa State University's Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology. NRCS collects data from more than 800,000 sample points across the contiguous U.S., Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands and releases significant updates at five-year intervals. NRCS finalized the 2022 NRI summary report in September 2025 and released it online in 2026.

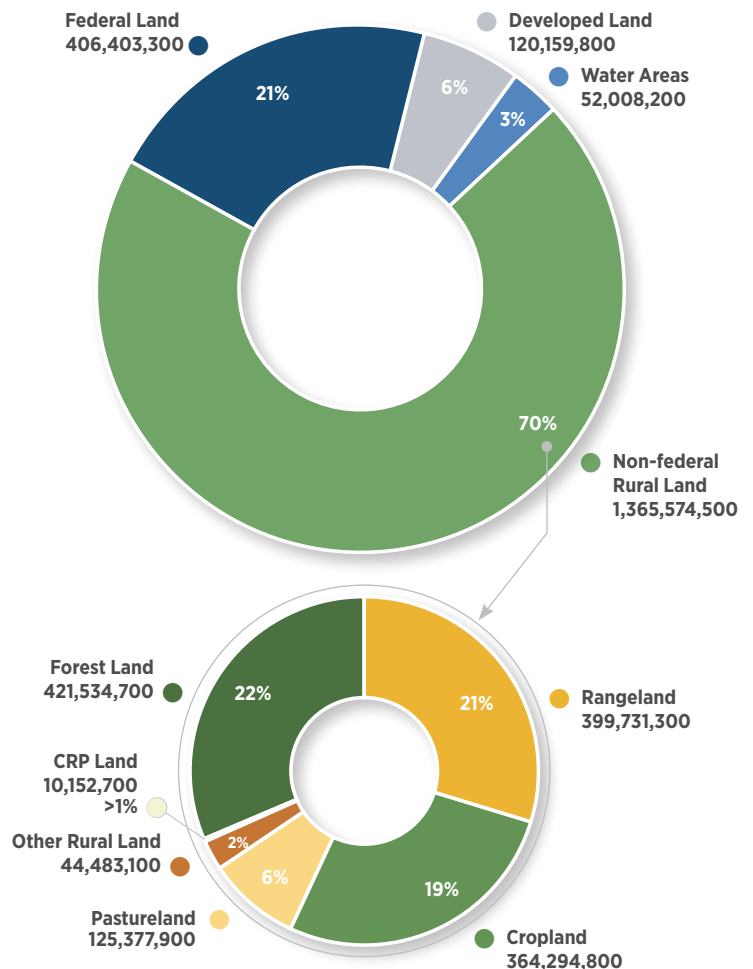
## DATA HIGHLIGHTS

The NRI includes details about land cover and use, soil, erosion, wetlands, and conservation practices. This fact sheet focuses on changes in land cover and use at the national level across seven reporting periods: 1982–1997, 1997–2002, 2002–2007, 2007–2012, 2012–2017, 2017–2022, and 1982–2022. It also presents data on total surface area and land cover and use in 2022.

## Total Surface Area

According to the 2022 NRI, the contiguous 48 states, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands cover 1.9 billion acres of land and water. Total surface area includes 52 million acres of water areas; 120 million acres of developed land; 406 million acres of federal land; and 1.4 billion acres of non-federal rural land. Non-federal rural land accounts for 70% of total surface area and comprises several land cover and use categories.

Total surface area & land cover and use categories, acres, 2022



## Between 1982 and 2022:

**Developed land**  
 ↑ up **66%**  
 from 72 to  
**120 million acres**

**Agricultural land**  
 ↓ down **7%**  
 from 967 to  
**900 million acres**

## Land Cover and Use Categories

Non-federal rural land is comprised of 422 million acres of forest land; 400 million acres of rangeland; 364 million acres of cropland; 125 million acres of pastureland; 44 million acres of other rural land, and just over 10 million acres of land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). American Farmland Trust uses the term agricultural land to refer to land cover and use categories that are readily available for agricultural production: cropland, pastureland, rangeland, and land in CRP, together comprising 900 million acres. Agricultural land accounts for 66% of this non-federal rural land.

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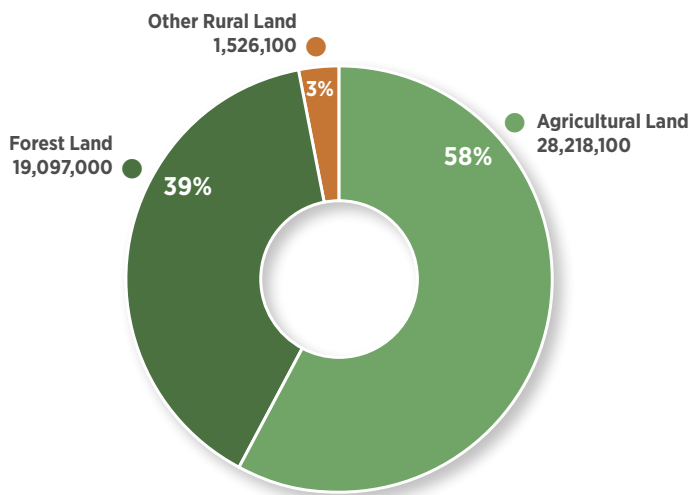
## Rural Land Lost to Development

Between 1982 and 2022, nearly 49 million acres of non-federal rural land were newly developed. During the same reporting period, there was a net increase of nearly 48 million acres of developed land, with only 1 million acres of developed land converted back to other land cover and use categories. As of 2022, total developed land amounts to more than 120 million acres; 40% of the net change in developed land has occurred since 1982.

## Agricultural Land Lost to Development

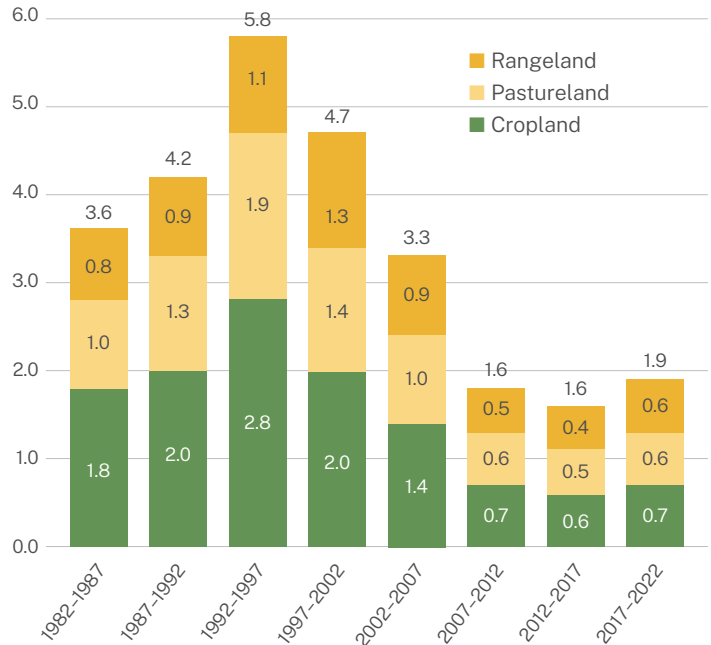
Agricultural land comprises a disproportionate amount of rural land lost to development: 58% of newly developed rural land was agricultural, amounting to more than 28 million acres developed between 1982 and 2022 – an area nearly the size of Pennsylvania. Forest land accounts for 19 million acres, or 39% of rural land developed over this forty-year span.

Sources of newly developed non-federal rural land, acres, 1982–2022



Conversion of agricultural land to development peaked between 1992 and 1997 and has continued to slow since then. Even so, the NRI reports that the U.S. converted 8.6 million acres of agricultural land to developed land between 2002 and 2022.

Sources of newly developed agricultural land, millions of acres, 1982–2022



Adapted from a chart included in the 2022 NRI Summary Report.

Data in this fact sheet, including the visuals, were created using estimates provided in the 2022 NRI Summary Report: U.S. Department of Agriculture. 2025. *Summary Report: 2022 National Resources Inventory*, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Washington, DC, and the Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa. <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/nri>

## HOW TO GET DATA FROM THE NATIONAL RESOURCES INVENTORY

For more information about the 2022 National Resources Inventory, and to access the Summary Report and LUCID Database, visit: <https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/nri>.

For data on surface area, land use/cover of non-federal rural land, and changes in land cover/use, see Tables 1–9 in the [2022 NRI Summary Report](#).

NRI data for the years 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997, and 2000 to 2022 can also be accessed via the [Land Use and Cover Inventory Database \(LUCID\)](#), which allows users to filter the data by year and location for a number of variables.

For more data and statistics and information about programs to save farm and ranch land, visit AFT's **Farmland Information Center**, a clearinghouse for information about farmland protection and stewardship developed in partnership with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service. AFT is a national membership organization working to protect agricultural land, promote sound farming practices, and help farm families stay on the land. Learn more at [farmland.org/JoinUs](https://farmland.org/JoinUs).