

Who Owns America's Land?

No one knows precisely how many people own land in America.

Most of the Nation's 2.3 billion acres are in the hands of private landholders, either individuals or corporations. They own nearly three-fifths of the land.

Federal, State, and local governments own the rest, with an additional 50 million acres held in trust for Indian tribes and individuals.

This proportion of private to public land ownership has been remarkably stable for the past 50 years. The biggest change came in the 1950's when Alaska and Hawaii became States and increased Federal lands from about a fifth of the total U.S. land area to about a third.

By far, the biggest share of the Nation's land is in farms—slightly over 1 billion acres in 1969. Almost all of the cropland and most of the grazing land is owned privately.

Forest land ranks next, accounting for three-quarters of a billion acres in 1969. Well over half of the forest land is also in private ownership.

The rest—some 430,000 acres—are sites for cities, transportation, recreation, wildlife, public facilities, farmsteads and farm roads, and swamp, mountain, and desert areas.

Farmland holders. While the Nation's farmland makes up the biggest proportion of the land, ownership is concentrated in the hands of an estimated 4 million people. And ERS estimates that about 1.4 million of these owners do not themselves operate any of the agricultural land they own.

In day-to-day operations decisions about the use of farmland are in the hands of the 2.7 million farm operators. Ninety-

eight percent of all sales of farm products, however, are made by only 1.7 million operators of farms with annual sales of \$2,500 or more.

About half of the land in farms is operated by part-owners...more than a third is operated by people who own all the land they farm...and about 13 percent, by tenants, who own none of the land on which they farm.

In terms of ownership, farm operators owned about 68 percent of the farmland in 1969, or about 722 million acres.

However, they did not necessarily operate all the land they owned. For example, full owners held nearly 413 million acres of farmland in 1969, but they operated only about 375 million acres. They rented the rest to either part-owners or tenants.

On the other hand, about 13,000 tenants reported that they owned some farmland—in total, about 4.5 million acres—which they rented out to other farm operators.

In addition, about 7.2 million acres of farmland is subleased by farm operators to other operators.

Why rent? The motives for leasing and subleasing land frequently relate to an operator's desire to put together an economic operating unit. For example, a farmer may decide to rent a larger or better farm—and thus be classified as a tenant—rather than operate just land that he owns. Many full-owners rent out part of the land they own in the process of reducing their farming operation as they approach semiretirement.

Of the total cropland—some 475 million acres, just about 99 percent is privately owned.

Grassland pasture and range—over 600 million acres—are about 60 percent privately owned.

This total of some 1 billion acres has stayed just about the same for the past 30 years.

Forest land breakdown. Unlike cropland, a sizeable chunk of the Nation's more than 750 million acres of forest is owned by the public. About 316 million acres are in the hands of Federal, State, and local governments.

Forest land has a number of major uses—including timber, recreation, water, and forage for domestic and wild animals.

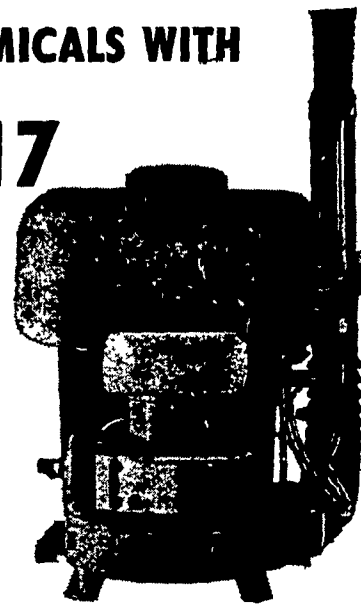
But in classifying forest land, one major criterion is its productivity for wood growth. The U.S. Forest Service classifies forest land as "commercial" if it is capable of producing 20 cubic feet of usable wood per acre each year.

By this classification, nearly 70 percent of the Nation's forest lands are "commercial." Some of this is reserved for parks and wilderness areas, but there are about 500,000 acres that could contribute to our wood needs.

Nearly 3 out of 4 acres of this commercial forest land are privately owned. Most of this privately owned land—88 percent—is east of the Great Plains.

"Commercial" ownership. The forest industry owns nearly 14 percent of the commercial forest (Continued On Page 43)

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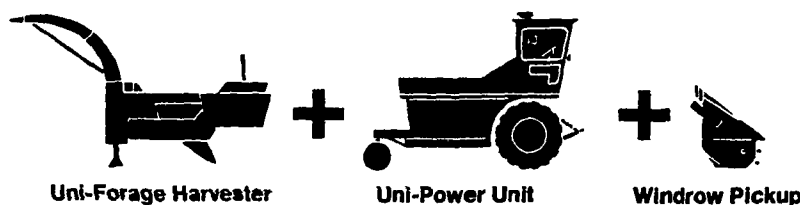
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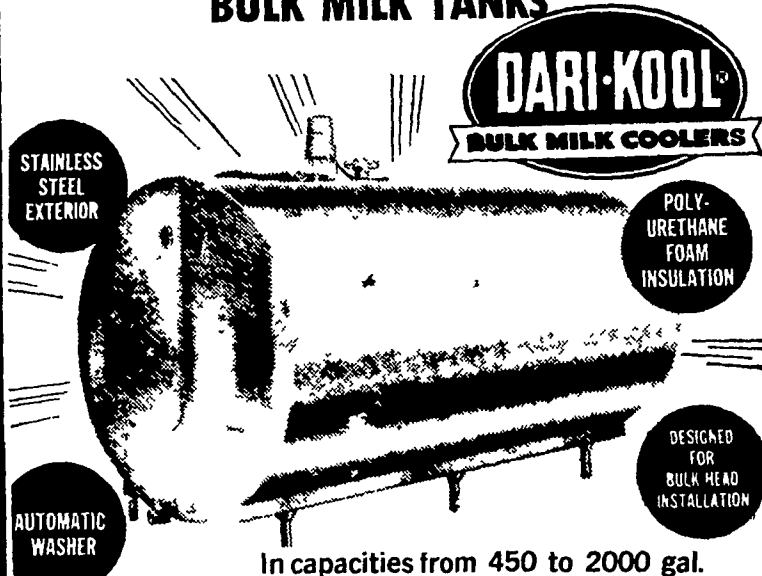
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