

THE ACRE TAKERS

From our Nation's 2,264 million acres of land we feed, clothe, and house some 212 million people—and produce still more items for export. Just how our land area is divided up and the changing uses of agricultural land are detailed in this story.

Our Nation's cropland resources cover 472 million acres—but not all of that total is actually devoted to crop production in a given year. In fact, at the time of the last agricultural census, the acreage used for crop production amounted to only 71 percent of the land available; about 18 percent of the land was used for temporary pasture and the rest was idle or in soil improvement crops.

Housing our population doesn't take much room. All the cities, towns, and suburban developments put together occupy only 35 million acres—or less than 2 percent of the country's total land area. Feeding and clothing our population requires at least 30 times more land than housing.

Cropland use isn't static. From 1950 to 1962, the acreage of cropland used for crops declined 15 percent as a result of Federal programs aimed at shifting cropland from production to soil conserving uses. Since 1962 crop acreage has fluctuated by several million acres, more or less in balance with crop demand.

Although cropland acreages generally have been trending down since 1950, numerous localities have enjoyed gains. The biggest acreage gains occurred in the lower Mississippi Valley, central and southern High Plains, central California, and northern Montana. Not quite as large but nevertheless substantial increases also occurred in the Corn Belt, the Dakotas, Florida, and several areas of the West. In general, cropland development in the East is associated with wetland drainage and in the West with more irrigation and improved dryland farming.

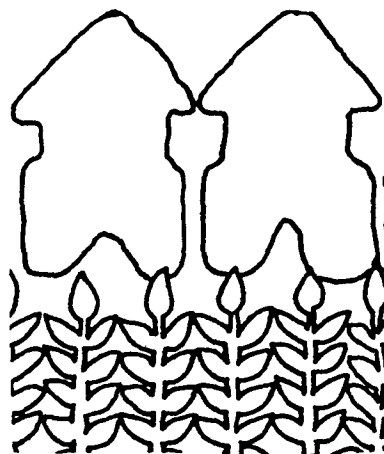
inputs of fertilizer, pesticides, and herbicides; and improved plants, machinery, and equipment.

Livestock graze on about 890 million U.S. acres—roughly two-fifths of the total national land area. The amount of cropland and grassland used for pasture has dipped slightly since 1950—but there's been close to a 40-percent falloff in the forested grazing area. The result has been a 130-million acre decline in grazing space over the past two decades. However, remaining grazing acreage has been significantly upgraded by gradual substitution of better land, brush clearing, fertilization, and other means.

It takes water to make land produce. Approximately 4,700 million acre-feet of water (rain, snow, sleet, or hail) fall on the United States each year. About 70 percent of this water evaporates or is used by plants through transpiration. Out of this comes the largest agricultural water use—nonirrigated crop, pasture, and forest production. Only about 1,350 million acre-feet of this water that falls each year is available for diversion from streams and for replenishing ground water supplies. We withdrew about 370 million acre-feet of this total in 1970, roughly a third of which was for irrigation.

Irrigated acreage has grown from less than 8 million acres at the turn of the century to more than 39 million in 1969. Nearly 90 percent of our irrigated acreage is in the 17 Western States. California alone has over 7.2 million acres—or roughly a fifth the national total.

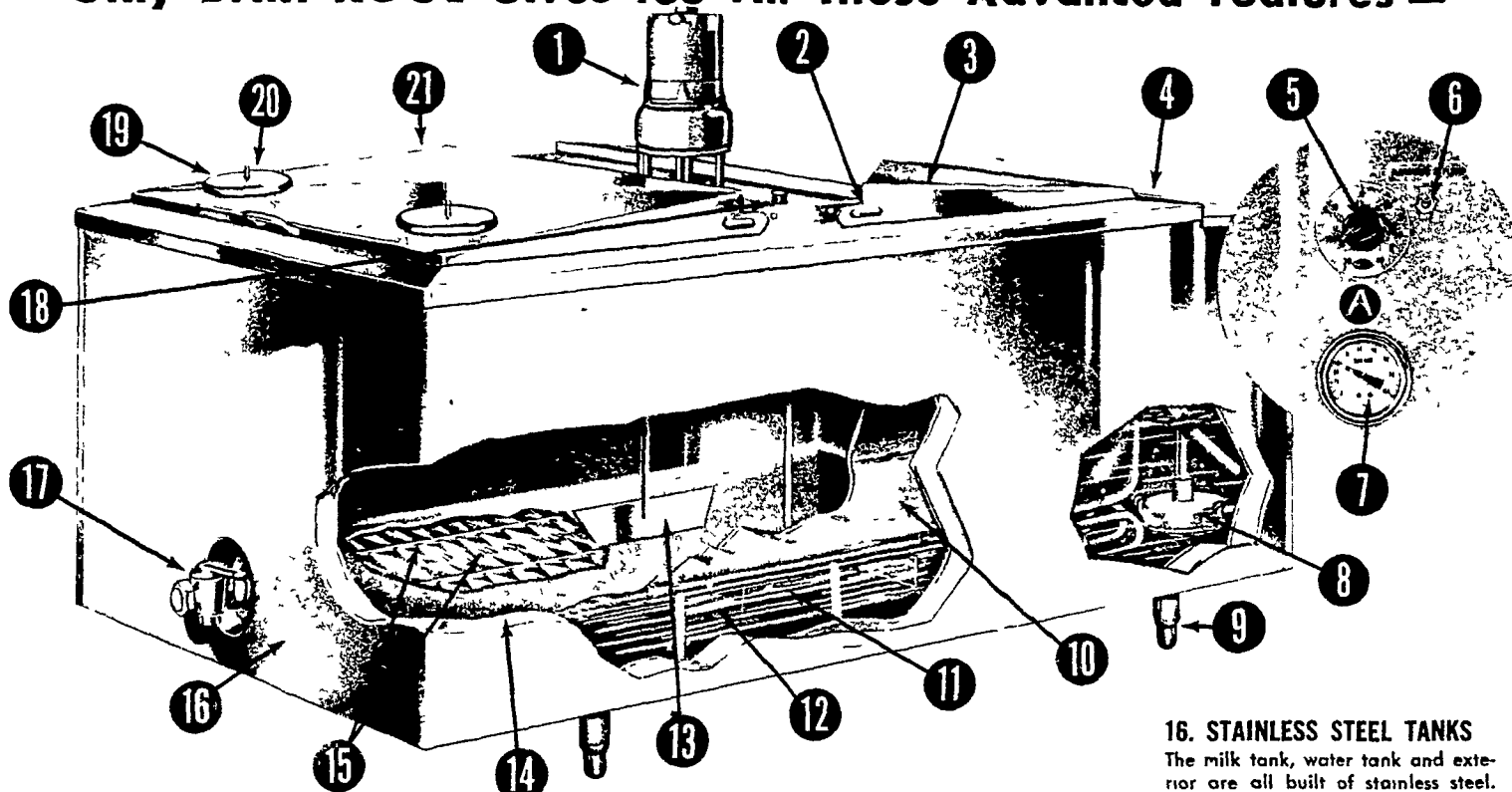
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Productivity per acre of cropland used for crops has increased more than 50 percent in the past two decades—the result of a combination of factors. In general, the adjustments in the acreage used for crops have resulted in increasingly concentrated cropping of the most productive land, both on individual farms and by areas and regions. The substitution of new cropland and improvement of existing cropland by such means as land forming, drainage, and irrigation have also upgraded the acreage used for crops. To these improvements in basic land capability have been added larger

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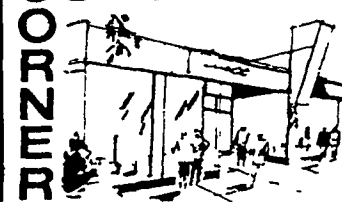
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CONSUMER



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