

NSSH Part 622

622.03 Farmland Classification

a. Definition. The farmland classification designates map units as prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, farmland of local importance, or farmland of unique importance. Soil map units with components of prime farmland are classified as: prime where 50 percent or more of the components in the map unit composition are prime; of statewide importance where less than 50 percent of the components in the map unit are prime but a combination of lands of prime or statewide importance is 50 percent or more of the map unit composition; of local importance where less than 50 percent of the components in the map unit are of prime or statewide importance but the total of land of prime, statewide, and/or local importance is 50 percent or more of the map unit composition. All other soil map units are shown as not farmland unless they are designated as unique.

1. Prime farmland is defined as land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and that is available for these uses. It has the combination of soil properties, growing season, and moisture supply needed to produce sustained high yields of crops in an economic manner if it is treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. In general, prime farmland has an adequate and dependable water supply from precipitation or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, an acceptable level of acidity or alkalinity, an acceptable content of salt or sodium, and few or no rocks. Its soils are permeable to water and air. Prime farmland is not excessively eroded or saturated with water for long periods of time, and it either does not flood frequently during the growing season or is protected from flooding. Users of the lists of prime farmland map units should recognize that soil properties are only one of several criteria that are necessary. Other considerations for prime farmland are the following:

i. Land use. Prime farmland is designated independently of current land use, but it cannot be areas of water or urban or built-up land as defined for the National Resource Inventories. Map units that are complexes or associations containing components of urban land or other miscellaneous areas as part of the map unit name (i.e., major components) cannot be designated as prime farmland. The soil survey memorandum of understanding determines the scale of mapping, and local land use interests should be considered in designing map units.

ii. Flooding frequency. Some map units may include both prime farmland and land not prime farmland because of variations in flooding frequency.

iii. Irrigation. Some map units have areas with a developed irrigation water supply that is dependable and of adequate quality while other areas do not have such a supply. In these map units, only the irrigated areas meet the prime farmland criteria.

iv. Water table. Most map units are drained but a few undrained areas are included. Only the drained areas meet the prime farmland criteria.

v. Wind erodibility. The product of I (soil erodibility) x C (climate factor) cannot exceed 60 to meet prime farmland criteria.

2. Unique farmland is land other than prime farmland that is used for the production of specific high-value food and fiber crops. It has the special combination of soil quality, location, growing season, and

moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high-quality and/or high yields of a specific crop when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Examples of such crops are citrus, tree nuts, olives, cranberries, fruit, and vegetables. The specific characteristics of unique farmland are the following:

- i. It is used for a specific high-value food or fiber crop;
- ii. It has a moisture supply that is adequate for the specific crop (the supply is from stored moisture, precipitation, or a developed irrigation system); and
- iii. It combines favorable factors of soil quality, growing season, temperature, humidity, air drainage, elevation, aspect, or other conditions, such as nearness to market, that favor the growth of a specific food or fiber crop.

b. Significance. Farmland classification identifies the location and extent of the most suitable land for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has national leadership for the management and maintenance of the resource base that supports the productive capacity of American agriculture. This management and maintenance includes identifying, locating, and determining the extent of the most suitable land for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. Prime farmland information is one of the four designations of farmland. An NRCS state conservationist can approve and have recorded in the field office technical guide (FOTG) soil map units that meet the criteria for farmland of statewide and local importance if the units are capable of producing crops on farmable land. Farmable land is land in a jurisdiction for which cropland productivity index has been developed in the land evaluation (LE) part of Land Evaluation and Site Assessment (LESA). Unique farmland described above is recorded in the FOTG by approval of the NRCS state conservationist.

c. Measurement. NRCS policy and procedures on farmland are published in the Code of Federal Regulations 7CFR657. This regulation is reproduced in Exhibit 622-1 for convenience. It is also available online at the following Web address: http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_99/7cfr657_99.html offsite link image.

d. Policy. State soil scientists prepare and maintain a current list of soil survey map units that meet the soil criteria for farmland. The list given in field office technical guides is for users concerned with only a single part of a subset of the State list. The state soil scientist ensures that farmland soil interpretations are made for all soil map units in the State. Prime farmland map units continuing across State lines are coordinated with the adjoining State.

e. Entries. Enter the numerical code for the classification of each map unit. Soils of unique, statewide, or local importance are not prime farmland. Allowable entries and numerical choice codes are the following:

0 – Not prime farmland.

1 – All areas are prime farmland.

2 – Prime farmland if drained.

3 – Prime farmland if protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season.

4 – Prime farmland if irrigated.

5 – Prime farmland if drained and either protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season.

6 – Prime farmland if irrigated and drained.

7 – Prime farmland if irrigated and either protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season.

8 – Prime farmland if subsoiled, completely removing the root-inhibiting soil layer.

9 – Prime farmland if irrigated and the product of I (soil erodibility) × C (climate factor) does not exceed 60.

10 – Prime farmland if irrigated and reclaimed of excess salts and sodium.

30 – Farmland of statewide importance.

32 – Farmland of statewide importance, if drained.

33 – Farmland of statewide importance, if protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season.

34 – Farmland of statewide importance, if irrigated.

35 – Farmland of statewide importance, if drained and either protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season.

36 – Farmland of statewide importance, if irrigated and drained.

37 – Farmland of statewide importance, if irrigated and either protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season.

38 – Farmland of statewide importance, if subsoiled, completely removing the root-inhibiting soil layer.

39 – Farmland of statewide importance, if irrigated and the product of I (soil erodibility) × C (climate factor) does not exceed 60.

40 – Farmland of statewide importance, if irrigated and reclaimed of excess salts and sodium.

41 – Farmland of statewide importance, if drained or either protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season.

42 – Farmland of statewide importance, if warm enough, and either drained or either protected from flooding or not frequently flooded during the growing season.

43 – Farmland of statewide importance, if warm enough.

44 – Farmland of statewide importance, if thawed.

50 – Farmland of local importance.

54 – Farmland of local importance, if irrigated.

70 – Farmland of unique importance.