

Prime and Important Farmland

Prime farmland is of major importance in meeting the Nation's short- and long-range needs for food and fiber. The acreage of high-quality farmland is limited, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture recognizes that government at local, State, and Federal levels, as well as individuals, must encourage and facilitate the wise use of our Nation's prime farmland.

Prime farmland soils, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are soils that are best suited to food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops. Such soils have properties that favor the economic production of sustained high yields of crops. The soils need only to be treated and managed by acceptable farming methods. An adequate moisture supply and a sufficiently long growing season are required. Prime farmland soils produce the highest yields with minimal expenditure of energy and economic resources, and farming these soils results in the least damage to the environment.

Prime farmland soils may presently be used as cropland, pasture, or woodland or for other purposes. They either are used for food and fiber or are available for these uses. Urban or built-up land, public land, and water areas cannot be considered prime farmland. Urban or built-up land is any contiguous unit of land 10 acres or more in size that is used for such purposes as housing, industrial, and commercial sites, sites for institutions or public buildings, small parks, golf courses, cemeteries, railroad yards, airports, sanitary landfills, sewage treatment plants, and water-control structures. Public land is land not available for farming in National forests, National parks, military reservations, and State parks.

Prime farmland soils commonly receive an adequate and dependable supply of moisture from precipitation or irrigation. The temperature and growing season are favorable, and the level of acidity or alkalinity and the content of salts and sodium are acceptable. The soils have few, if any, rocks and are permeable to water and air. They are not excessively erodible or saturated with water for long periods, and they are not frequently flooded during the growing season or are protected from flooding. Slopes range mainly from 0 to 6 percent.

Soils in which a zone with a wet soil moisture status is high in the profile or soils that are subject to flooding may qualify as prime farmland where these limitations are overcome by drainage measures or flood control. Onsite evaluation is necessary to determine the effectiveness of corrective measures.

Farmland of statewide importance is land, in addition to prime farmlands, that is of statewide importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. Generally, additional farmlands of statewide importance include those that are nearly prime and that produce high yields of crops in an economic manner when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Some may produce as high a yield as prime farmland soils if conditions are favorable.

The important farmland list does not constitute a recommendation for a particular land use. On some soils included in the report, measures that overcome limitations are needed. More information about the criteria for prime and important farmland can be obtained at the local office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

To obtain a County important farmland list, click on the link **Prime and other Important Farmlands**.