

Prime Farmland Soils (622.04)

- a. **Definition.** Prime farmland is 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 include land use, frequency of flooding, irrigation, water table, and wind erodibility.

Lists of prime farmland can be generated from Web Soil Survey at: <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>

- b. **Purpose.** The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is committed to the management and maintenance of the resource base that supports the productive capacity of American agriculture. This management and maintenance includes identifying of the location and extent of the most suitable land for producing food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. Prime farmland information may be supplemented with separate designations of soil map units that have state-wide, local, or unique importance as farmland capable of producing these crops.
- c. **Code of Federal Regulations.** NRCS policy and procedures on prime and unique farmlands are published in the Code of Federal Regulations 7CFR657. The content is reproduced in Exhibit 622-1 of the National Soil Survey Handbook: http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/soils/survey/publication/?cid=nrcs142p2_054226#ex1 for convenience. The website is: http://www.access.gpo.gov/nara/cfr/waisidx_00/7cfr657_00.html.
- d. **Policy.** State soil scientists prepare and maintain an up-to-date list of soil survey map units that meet the soil criteria for prime farmland. The list given in field office technical guides for users

concerned with only a single area is a subset of the state list. The list of prime farmland soils should be kept up-to-date. The state soil scientist ensures that prime farmland soil interpretations are made for all soil mapping units in that state. Mapping units continuing across state lines should be coordinated with the adjoining state. Other policy guidance is given in part 510 of the National Inventory and Monitoring Manual.

- e. **List of Prime Farmland Map Units.** Soil survey map units that meet the soil requirements for prime farmland are to be identified, coordinated, and listed. The list or its subset is to be available to users of soil survey information.

- f. **Quality Control of Prime Farmland Map Units.**
 - 1. Computer generation of prime farmland map units in each state is based on guidelines provided by the National Soil Survey Center. The guidelines provide checks to identify concerns in the classification of prime farmland based on soil properties. The computer checks can be used for guidance but do not suffice as the sole determinant for prime farmland map units.

 - 2. Each prime farmland map unit must be documented, either by the computer check or by a statement of reasons that explain the decision.

 - 3. Some soil survey map units may meet the soil criteria for prime farmland, but additional investigation is needed before a final determination is made. The measures needed to qualify the soil as prime farmland are indicated by an appropriate footnote or in a parenthetical statement of explanation that follows the map unit name on the list.