# **Glossary**

Definitions, sources of data, and estimation techniques have varied little over time in the Major Land Uses (MLU) series. The following definitions and explanations of the data are for the most recent year, but generally apply to all previous years as well.

Estimates of major land uses for 2012 are the latest in a series of land use inventories based on available statistics conducted by the Economic Research Service (ERS) and its predecessor agencies within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). This series, which began in 1945, is comparable in categories and area coverage. Part of the series, *Cropland used for crops*, is consistent back to 1910 on a yearly basis. These periodic inventories are useful because even though numerous public agencies develop land use data, no other single agency, except ERS, accounts for the use of all land (public and private for all 50 States) in the United States. The inventories provide benchmarks for understanding changes in the supply and demand for land in different uses.

The estimates, with few exceptions, were constructed from available data rather than used exactly as developed by source agencies. The latter is not possible because the source agencies develop land-use data gleaned from censuses and surveys that differ greatly in scope, methods, definitions, and other characteristics. Individual sources account for only few uses and for only a limited part of the total land area. The available data contain conflicts and overlaps that must be reconciled or removed.

### **Definitions**

* Cropland
  + Cropland used for crops
    - Cropland harvested
    - Crop failure
    - Cultivated summer fallow
  + Cropland used only for pasture
  + Idle cropland
* Grassland pasture and range
* Forest-use land
  + Forest-use land grazed
  + Forest-use land not grazed
* Special uses
  + Rural transportation
  + Rural parks and wildlife
  + National defense and industrial
  + Farmsteads and miscellaneous farmland
* Urban areas
* Other or miscellaneous land

**Cropland**—Total cropland includes five components: cropland harvested, crop failure, cultivated summer fallow, cropland used only for pasture, and idle cropland. The estimate of total cropland in 2012 included total cropland as reported by the 2012 Census of Agriculture (USDA, NASS, 2014a), plus an upward adjustment to conform to data on principal crops harvested in each State as reported by USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) for 2012 (USDA, NASS, 2014b). In 2012, the census’s estimate of total principal crops harvested was about 95 percent of the estimate for the same crops from NASS.

The Census of Agriculture data are derived from a census of all farm operations that produce, or normally would produce and sell, $1,000 or more of agricultural products annually. NASS undertakes extensive procedures to include all eligible farms in the census. The census is conducted through mailings and, to a lesser extent, telephone or personal enumeration with a goal of achieving at least a 75-percent response rate in all counties. Missing data are calculated from responses to other surveys or imputed from reporting farms of a like type. The response rate for the 2012 Census of Agriculture was 80.1 percent, compared with 85.2 and 88.0 percent for the 2007 and 2002 Censuses, respectively. Details on the methodology and reliability of estimates are contained in Appendix A of the 2012 Census of Agriculture (USDA, NASS, 2014a).

**The components of cropland are as follows:**

**Cropland used for crops**—Three of the cropland acreage components—cropland harvested, crop failure, and cultivated summer fallow—are collectively termed cropland used for crops, or the land used as an input to crop production. Annual estimates of cropland harvested are based on both census data and the series on principal crops harvested as maintained by NASS. Annual estimates of crop failure are based on differences in planted and harvested acreage of principal crops from the NASS data series. Annual estimates of cultivated summer fallow historically have been based on fragmentary data from a variety of sources. Since the late 1970s, the estimates have been based on data from the Census of Agriculture and unpublished NASS data.

**Cropland pasture**—Generally is considered to be in long-term crop rotation. This category includes acres of crops hogged or grazed but not harvested and some land used for pasture that could have been cropped without additional improvement. Cropland pastured before or after crops were harvested was included as harvested cropland and not cropland pasture. Estimates in this land-use category are derived from the Census of Agriculture (USDA, NASS, 2014a).

**Idle cropland**—Includes land in cover and soil-improvement crops and cropland on which no crops were planted. Some cropland is idle each year for various physical and economic reasons. Acreage diverted from crops to soil-conserving uses (if not eligible for and used as cropland pasture) under Federal farm programs is included in this category. Cropland enrolled in USDA’s Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP) is included in idle cropland.

**Grassland pasture and range**—Grassland pasture and range encompass all open land used primarily for pasture and grazing, including shrub and brush­land types of pasture, grazing land with sagebrush and scattered mesquite, and all tame and native grasses, legumes, and other forage used for pasture or grazing—regardless of ownership. Because of the diversity in vegetative composition, grassland pasture and range are not always clearly distinguish­able from other types of pasture and range. At one extreme, permanent grassland may merge with cropland pasture, or grassland may often be found in transitional areas with forested grazing land. The estimates in this report are composites of data from the National Resources Inventory (NRI), Census of Agriculture, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, and several other Federal agencies. (See definitions for cropland, forested land, special uses, and NRI for details on the data from these sources.) The 655 million acres classed as grassland pasture and range in 2012 included 415 million acres in farms (USDA, NASS, 2014a). Also included are estimates of private grazing land not in farms and public, nonforested grazing land.

**Forest-use land**—An MLU category defined to account for how forestland is used. The forest-use category includes both grazed and ungrazed forests but excludes forest­land in parks, wildlife areas, and similar special-purpose uses from the U.S. Forest Service’s inventory of total forestland. While it is impossible to eliminate overlap with other uses, this refined area represents an approximation of the amount of land that serves commercial forest uses, as opposed to land that has forest cover but is used for other purposes. These alternative objectives may be related to recreation and amenity values (e.g., Butler et al., 2016). There are two components of forest-use land:

**Forest land grazed**—Forested pasture and range consisting mainly of forest, brush-grown pasture, arid woodlands, and other areas within forested areas that have grass or other forage growth. The total acreage of forested grazing land includes woodland pasture in farms plus estimates of forested grazing land not in farms. For many States, the estimates include significant areas grazed only lightly or sporadically. The Census of Agriculture, the NRI, and the U.S. Forest Service data on active grazing allotments are the prin­cipal sources of data used to develop the MLU estimate (USDA, NASS, 2014a; USDA, NRCS, 2014a; USDA, U.S. Forest Service, 2012a; USDA, U.S. Forest Service, 2016). Historical data from these sources were used to develop the 130-million-acre estimate for 2012.

**Forest land not grazed**—Forest-use land not used for grazing.

**Special uses**—Includes highways, roads, and railroad rights-of-way and airports; Federal and State parks, wilderness areas, and wildlife refuges; national defense and industrial areas; and farmsteads and farm roads. Estimates are based on reports and administrative records of the Census Bureau and Federal and State land management and conservation agencies.

**Rural transportation** uses include highways, roads, railroads, transportation rights-of-way, and airport facilities outside Census-defined urban areas.

**Rural parks and wildlife** areas include Federal and State parks, wilderness areas, and wildlife refuges outside Census-defined urban areas.

**National defense and industrial** areas include land owned by Department of Defense and Department of Energy and used for airfields, research and development, housing, and miscellaneous military uses.

**Farmsteads**, farm roads, lanes, and other miscellaneous farmland are included in special uses.

**Urban areas**—Urban areas in the MLU series follow the Census Bureau urban-area definition. The Census Bureau compiles urban area every 10 years, coincident with the Census of Population. Census urban areas include densely populated areas with at least 50,000 people (“urbanized areas”) and densely populated areas with 2,500 to 50,000 people (“urban clusters”). Densely populated areas include census blocks with a population density of at least 1,000 people per square mile, surrounding blocks with a density of at least 500 people per square mile, and “less densely settled blocks that form enclaves or indentations or are used to disconnect discontinuous areas with qualifying densities” (USDOC, CB, 2010). In the 2000 census, urban clusters replaced previous designations that were based on the boundaries of census-designated places. The census’s urban-area definition includes residential areas and concentrations of nonresidential urban areas, such as commercial, industrial, and institutional land; office areas; urban streets and roads; major airports; urban parks and recreational areas, and other land within urban-defined areas. The definition allows for exceptions and special cases. Portions of extended cities that are essentially rural in character are excluded.

**Other or miscellaneous land uses**—Includes miscellaneous other uses, such as industrial and commercial sites in rural areas, cemeteries, golf courses, mining areas, quarry sites, marshes, swamps, sand dunes, bare rocks, deserts, tundra, rural residential, and other unclassified land. In this report, urban land is reported as a separate category.