

Current Land Use Trends¹

I-35 Corridor

Introduction

The I-35 Corridor of Texas is comprised of six counties: Bexar, Comal, Hays, Kendall, Travis, and Williamson. These counties account for 1.85 million of the 142 million acres of private farms, ranches and forestlands in Texas and are approximately 1.3% of the state's private land use area. This area of Texas provides substantial economic, environmental, and recreational benefits to the state's entire population.

I-35 Corridor Trends

Ownership Size. By the end of 2007, the USDA Census of Agriculture reported 9,677 farming and ranching operations in the I-35 Corridor. This represents a 9% increase since 1997 or an approximate gain of 81 new working farms and ranches annually. Although there has been a gain in the number of farms and ranches in this region, the land base for agriculture has decreased by as much as 14% and the average ownership size has declined from 262 acres in 1997 to 207 acres in 2007.

- By 2007, smaller operations (<100 acres) accounted for 67% of the I-35 Corridor's total farming and ranching operations, while occupying only 10% of the total land area. Furthermore, the number of large operations (>2000 acres) accounted for about 1.5% of the Corridor's total farming and ranching operations, but occupied 33% of the total land area.

This class of smaller operations (<100 acres) has increased by almost 27% between 1997 and 2007, while adding 13% total land area in the Corridor. Meanwhile, the number of large operations (>2,000 acres), decreased by about 7% and showed a 13.5% decrease in total acres (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Change in the number of acres by farm and ranch size class from 1997-2007 for the I-35 Corridor. Data Source: USDA Census of Agriculture.

- The amount of land in mid-sized farms and ranches (500 to 2,000 acres) located in the I-35 Corridor has continued to decline at the rate of about 14,000 acres per year, following the statewide trend.
- Large ownerships (>2,000 acres) within the I-35 Corridor have declined by 7% since 1997. These large operations experienced a 104,143 acre or 13.5% decrease in land area.

Land Use. The prevailing category of land use in the I-35 Corridor continues to be native rangeland at over 1.13 million acres. However, since 1997, the accumulated localized losses of native rangeland in the Corridor have exceeded 245,000 acres.

The most notable trend in the I-35 Corridor is the loss of non-native pasture. There are now 229,832 acres of non-native pasture, a decrease of 162,500 acres since 1997. Each land use category within the Corridor experienced declines in acreage. However, losses of non-native pasture exceeded all other land use losses, except for the “wildlife management” category which saw a gain.

Land in the I-35 Corridor classified as being in wildlife management increased from just over 3,000 acres to 137,514 acres following state legislation, promulgated in 1996, that created this official land use category for tax appraisal purposes.

Land Values. In 2007, the average appraised market value of farms, ranches and forestlands in Texas was \$1,196 per acre. However, in the I-35 Corridor the average appraised market value exceeded \$6,400 per acre. On average, this represents a 238% increase in appraised market value over the 10-year period for this region. As expected, this increase in market values exists throughout the I-35 Corridor, a major metropolitan growth area (Figure 2).

Loss Of Agricultural Lands. According to accumulated data from Texas County Appraisal Districts, over 257,000 acres of farms and ranches in the I-35 Corridor were converted to other uses from 1997 to 2007. Over 44% of this land conversion was related to growth and development associated with population expansion in the Corridor’s three highest growth counties—Hays, Williamson, and Kendall. During this period, 113,698 acres were lost from the agricultural land base surrounding Austin, Antonio, and San Marcos.

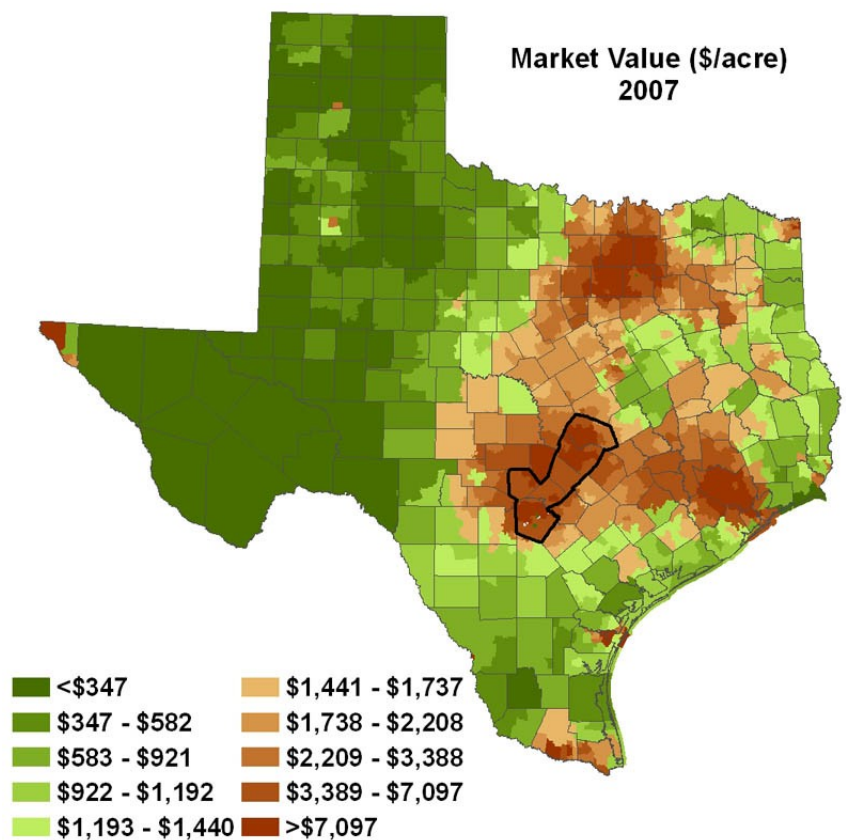


Figure 2. Market Value per acre 2007. Data Source: County Appraisal District Data.

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¹Wilkins, R. Neal, Amy G. Snelgrove, Blair C. Fitzsimons, Brent M. Stevener, Kevin L. Skow, Ross E. Anderson, Amanda M. Dube, Debbie Danford. Current Land Use Trends, *Texas Land Trends*. Texas A&M Institute of Renewable Natural Resources. 2009. Texas AgriLife Extension.