

Current Land Use Trends

Texas Land Trends

Introduction

Texas is home to over 142 million acres of private farms, ranches and forestlands, thus leading the nation in land area devoted to privately-owned working lands. These lands account for 84% of the state's entire land area and provide substantial economic, environmental, and recreational resources benefiting the state's entire population.

Statewide Trends

Ownership Size. By the end of 2007, the USDA Census of Agriculture accounted for over 247,000 farming and ranching operations in the state. This represents an 8% increase since the 1997 census. In other words, Texas gained about 1,900 new working farms and ranches annually. However, the land base for Texas agriculture has decreased by as much as 2% during the same period. Average ownership size declined from 585 acres in 1997 to 527 acres in 2007.

- By 2007, smaller operations – those less than 100 acres in size – accounted for over 50% the state's total farming & ranching operations, while occupying only 3% of the land area. This class of smaller operations increased by 22% since 1997, and was the only ownership size class showing an overall net increase in land area across the state (Figure 1).

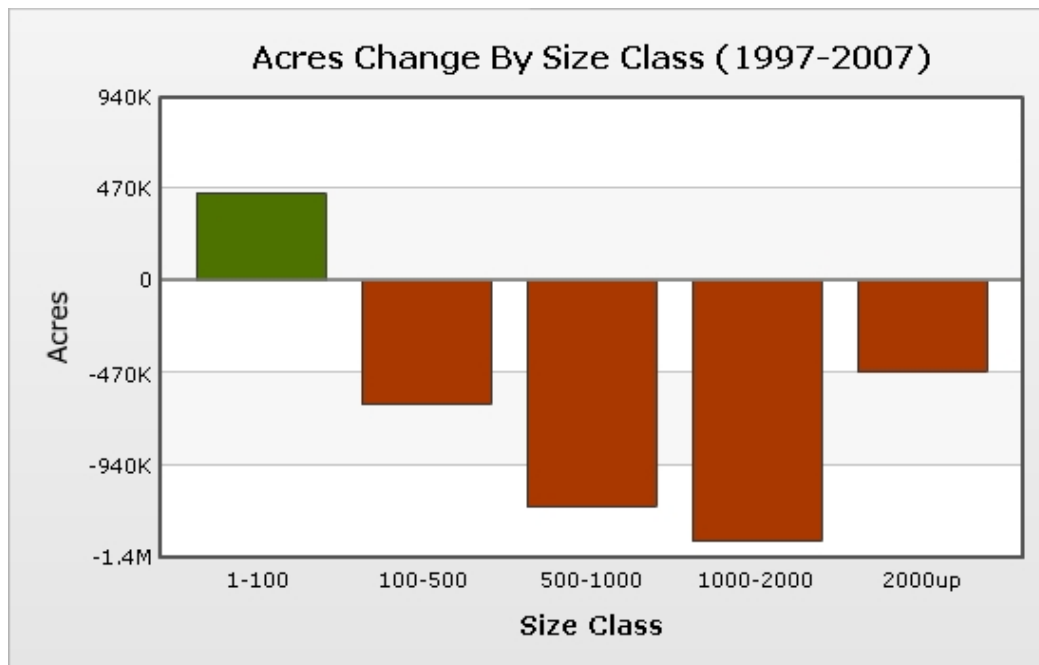


Figure 1. Change in the number of acres by farm and ranch size class from 1997-2007. Data Source: USDA Census of Agriculture.

- The amount of land in mid-sized farms and ranches (500 to 2,000 acres) has continued to decline at the rate of about 250,000 acres per year.

- Large ownerships – those greater than 2000 acres in size – account for about 4% of all farms and ranches, but occupy about 62% of the state’s total farm and ranchland. While larger operations have slightly increased in total number since 1997, they have decreased in land area by 461,000 acres.
- The loss or gain in area represented by large operations varied according to ecological region. For example, since 1997 over 2.8 million acres of larger farms and ranches in the Trans Pecos, Edwards Plateau and South Texas were fragmented into mid-sized and smaller ownerships. In other regions – the High Plains, Rolling Plains, Coastal Sand Plains, Oak Woods & Prairies, and Blackland Prairies – about 2.5 million acres of mid-sized properties were consolidated into larger operations.

Land Use. At 92.6 million acres, native rangeland continues to be the prevailing general category of land use in Texas. Since 1997, the accumulated localized losses of native rangeland have exceeded 4.8 million acres. In addition, the statewide area in dry (non-irrigated) cropland has declined by 1.57 million acres.

One of the most notable trends continues to be the conversion of native rangelands and croplands to non-native pastures. Non-native pastures now account for over 11 million acres and are the third largest land use category in the state.

A more recent trend in land use is a shift to “wildlife management” following state legislation in 1996 that created the official land use category for tax appraisal purposes. Since then, lands classified as being in wildlife management have increased to 2.37 million acres. Some of the local decline can be attributed to the shift in reporting native rangeland as wildlife management.

Land Values. In 2007, the average appraised market value of farms, ranches and forestlands in Texas was \$1,196 per acre. On average, this represents a 140% increase in appraised market value over the 10-year period. The increase in market values tended to be highest in those areas surrounding major metropolitan growth areas (Figure 2). The Edwards Plateau, Llano Uplift and areas in the east-central portion of the state have seen the steepest price inflation. The High Plains, Trans Pecos, and Coastal Sand Plains had appraised market value increases of less than 60% over the 10-year period.

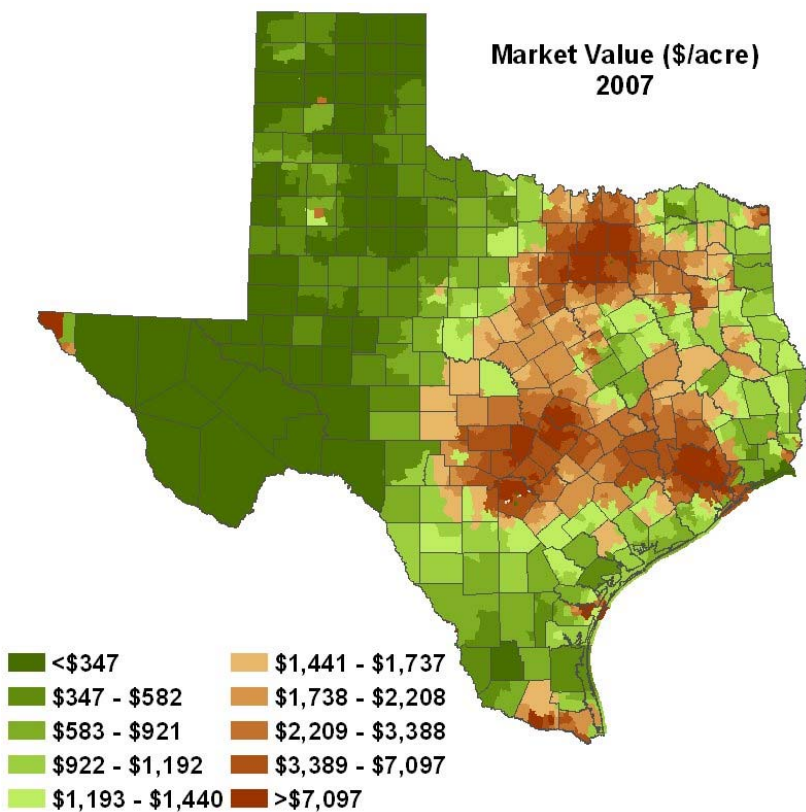


Figure 2. Market Value per acre 2007. Data Source: County Appraisal District Data.

Loss Of Agricultural Lands. According to accumulated data from Texas County Appraisal Districts, over 2.1 million acres of farms, ranches and forestlands were converted to other uses from 1997 to 2007. Over 40% of this land conversion was related to growth and development associated with population expansion in the state’s 25 highest growth counties. During this period, 861,765 acres were lost from the agricultural land base in these counties. As a function of population increase, roughly 149 acres of agricultural lands were consumed per 1,000 new residents.