

# FARMLAND

## BY THE NUMBERS

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You may have noticed a change in your own community over the past few decades. Traffic that slows to a crawl, along congested roads, past McMansions sprouting from former farm fields. It wasn't always like this, but over the past 30 years much of America's most fertile farmland has been lost to wasteful development.

Data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's 2007 National Resources Inventory tells the story in numbers. During the 25-year period from 1982 to 2007, more than 23 million acres of America's agricultural land were lost to development—an area the size of Indiana. Every state lost agricultural land. In Texas, the loss was a staggering 2.9 million acres, while in New Jersey more than a quarter of the state's agricultural land was lost.

Despite the bad news, there were some positive signs in the data. Despite a booming housing market during portions of the 25-year reporting period, the nationwide rate of farmland loss actually declined over time, thanks to growing awareness and smart growth policies that encourage more efficient development. And some states launched ambitious efforts to counter land development with permanent protection.

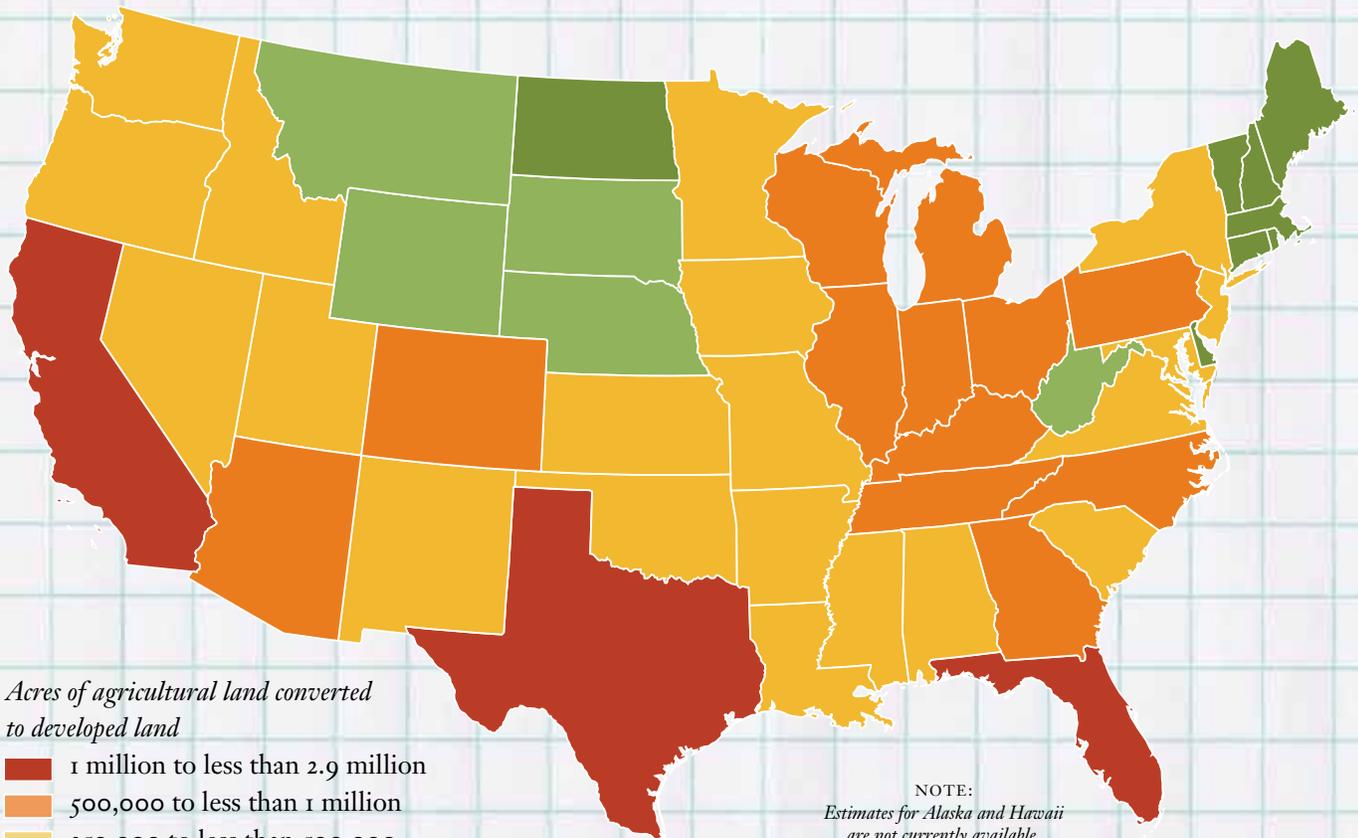
Read on for a “by the numbers” look at what's happening to our nation's farm and ranch land.

Left: A housing development borders farmland in Richmond, Virginia.

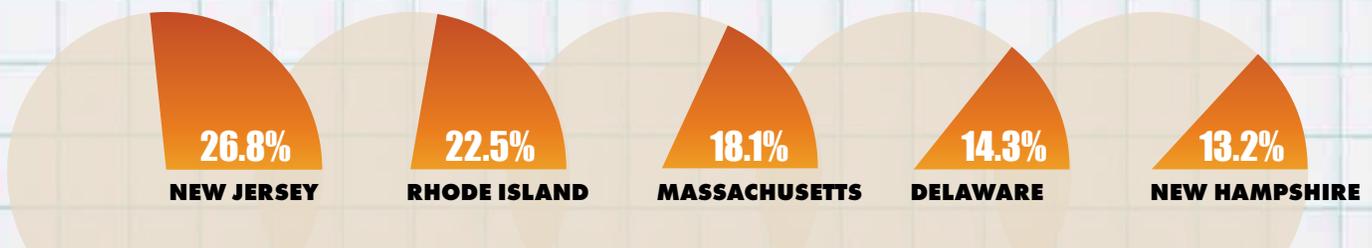
**Between  
1982 and  
2007**

# 23,163,500

**Every state lost agricultural land.**

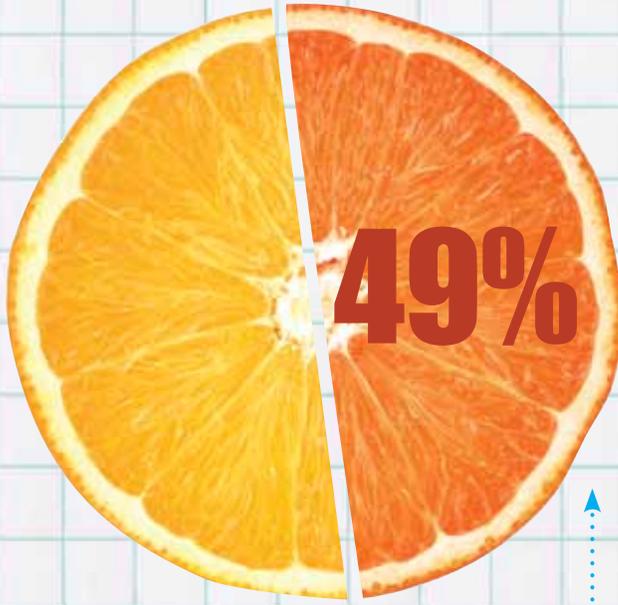


**States that developed the largest percentage of their agricultural land:**



# acres

of agricultural land were converted to developed land. *{That's an area the size of Indiana.}*



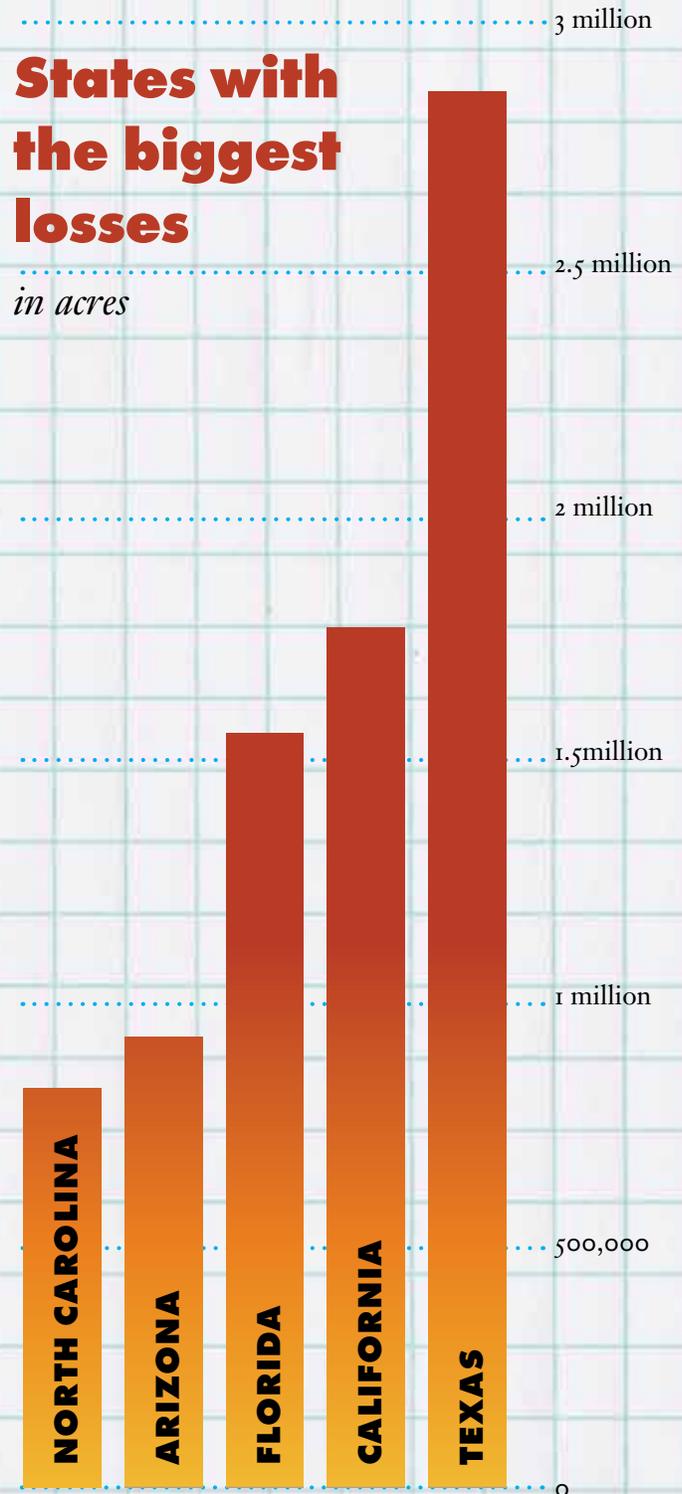
**California and Florida**, two of the three states that lost the most agricultural land, account for nearly half of the acreage devoted to growing fruit and vegetables nationwide.

## BRIGHT SPOTS

These states protected the most agricultural land in comparison to the acreage they converted to development.

### ACRES PROTECTED FOR EVERY ACRE DEVELOPED

<b>Vermont</b>	<b>3.04</b>
<b>Maryland</b>	<b>1.42</b>
<b>Delaware</b>	<b>1.06</b>
<b>Connecticut</b>	<b>0.71</b>
<b>Massachusetts</b>	<b>0.70</b>



# BEHIND THE NUMBERS

{Six Conclusions from American Farmland Trust's Analysis of the NRI}

From 1982 to 2007:

## 1. Every state in the continental United States lost agricultural land to development.

Texas lost a staggering 2.9 million acres, and Florida and California each lost more than 1.5 million acres. Thirty-five states lost more than 250,000 acres each. Massachusetts, Rhode Island and New Jersey lost the largest proportion of their agricultural land.

## 2. The United States developed more of its best land.

The most fertile land was developed at a disproportionately higher rate. Thirty-eight percent of the agricultural land developed nationwide was prime—the land best suited to grow food, feed, forage and fiber—although prime land accounted for less than 30 percent of agricultural land in 1982. And 21 percent more cropland was developed on a proportional basis than other types of agricultural land.

## 3. Farmland development puts domestic fruit and vegetable production at risk.

Development is having a disproportionate impact on the states that produce the bulk of fruits and vegetables for the United States. Two of the three states experiencing the largest acre losses of agricultural land—Florida and California—currently account for 47 percent of the nation's vegetables and 71 percent of its fruit production based on market value. The combination of soils, unique micro-climates and extended growing seasons makes the cropland in these states an irreplaceable agricultural resource.

## What Is the NRI?

The National Resources Inventory (NRI) is conducted by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in cooperation with Iowa State University's Center for Survey Statistics and Methodology. The NRI is the best source for farmland conversion data. It tracks all changes in land cover/use on non-federal land at the national and state level.

## Want to Know More? Visit AFT's Farmland Information Center

The Farmland Information Center (FIC), a partnership between American Farmland Trust and the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, is a clearinghouse for information about farmland protection and stewardship. The FIC maintains an ever-growing collection of federal, state and local laws; literature; sample documents and technical resources. It also offers an answer service to provide direct, free assistance. Visit [www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org) or call (800) 370-4879.

## 4. In the face of growth, some states developed relatively less land.

Nearly all of the contiguous states—45 out of 48—experienced net increases in population. When we compared the development of agricultural land to changes in population, we found that 13 states had developed less than a quarter acre of agricultural land for each new person added: New Hampshire, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, California, Washington, Georgia, Nevada, Florida, Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey and Oregon. Only two states—Iowa and Wyoming—developed more than two and a half acres of agricultural land for each new person. Louisiana, North Dakota and West Virginia continued to develop land despite net declines in population.

## 5. More efficient development helped to slow farmland loss.

The most intense period of agricultural land development occurred from 1992 to 1997, and then slowed 29 percent from 2002 to 2007. The slowdown occurred despite a housing boom at the time. Houses built on smaller-sized lots may help account for the apparent contradiction, with the number of suburban and rural houses built on relatively large acreage declining from 1997 to 2007.

The decline in agricultural land development that occurred from 1997 to 2007 appears linked to more

compact housing development—indicating that smart growth policies help save farmland.

#### **6. Protection saves land for the future.**

In addition to enacting smart growth policies, many states embarked on efforts to permanently protect agricultural land in the 1980s and '90s. Programs that purchase agricultural conservation easements from farmers—essentially paying them to not develop their land—do not impact the rate of development.

Instead, they help ensure that, in the face of development, there will be a supply of agricultural land in the future.

Three states are doing especially well in their farmland protection efforts. Delaware, Maryland and Vermont have each saved more than one acre for each acre of agricultural land developed from 1982 to 2007. Five additional states had protected more than a half acre for each acre lost: Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Colorado, Massachusetts and Connecticut.

## Help Protect Our Farm and Ranch Land

To save our farmland we must build upon successful planning and smart growth policies that steer development away from farmland. We also must support state, local and federal farmland protection efforts that keep land conserved for the future.

We can't protect our farmland without you. Here's how you can help:

**1. Get involved and make a difference.** Contact your elected officials, zoning board, planning commission—make sure they know you support local agriculture and want your farmland protected. Contact your legislators and decision makers through AFT's online Action Center at [www.farmland.org/action](http://www.farmland.org/action) to show your support for policies that protect the land, the environment and local food.

**2. Support local farms.** Keep your food dollars local by shopping at farmers markets, farm stands and stores that stock local food. Dine at restaurants featuring foods from local farms or join a CSA farm that allows you to buy "shares" of produce. Share your commitment by becoming a fan of AFT on facebook ([www.facebook.com/AmericanFarmland](http://www.facebook.com/AmericanFarmland)) and follow us on twitter (<http://twitter.com/farmland>).

**3. Learn more.** Sign up for AFT's free e-newsletters at [www.farmland.org/newsletters](http://www.farmland.org/newsletters) to learn more about the challenges facing farms and find out what you can do to help. Use AFT's Farmland Information Center website at [www.farmlandinfo.org](http://www.farmlandinfo.org) or call (800) 370-4879 for free assistance in finding the resources you need to help farmers stay on the land.

**4. Spread the word.** Write an editorial for your local paper about the importance of farms to your community.



Tell your local officials that farm-fresh food, open space, a healthy environment and wildlife all depend on local farms and ranches. Visit [www.nofarmsnofood.org](http://www.nofarmsnofood.org) to order a free No Farms No Food® bumper sticker.

**5. Donate to American Farmland Trust.** Your donations now will help us support smart growth, farmland protection, local food and environmental stewardship on farms and ranches. To learn how you can make a donation to AFT, please visit [www.farmland.org/support](http://www.farmland.org/support) or call (800) 431-1499.