

FACT SHEET: The Efficiency of American Agriculture

<p>General statistics:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2005, the average farm was 444 acres compared to 297 acres in 1960, according to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS). • According to USDA's Economic Research Service (ERS), 46 percent of the total U.S. land area is classified as agricultural. • In 2005, 98 percent of all U.S. farms were classified as family farms — proprietorships, partnerships or family operations that do not have hired managers, according to ERS. • In 2002, ERS reported more than 14 percent of the U.S. population was employed in farm or farm-related jobs. • According to ERS, U.S. consumers spend a smaller percent of their disposable income for food consumed at home (6.5 percent) than any country in the world. This compares to 9.1 percent spent in the United Kingdom, 9.9 percent spent in Canada, 14.4 percent spent in Japan, 24.5 percent spent in Mexico and 39.7 percent spent in India.
<p>Production Improvements:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to NASS and data from the U.S. Census Bureau, between 1960 and 2005 the number of U.S. farms declined by more than 1.8 million, yet the U.S. population increased by 61 percent. In 1960, there were 3.9 million farms feeding a U.S. population of 183 million. In 2005, there were 2.1 million farms feeding an estimated population of 296 million. • Through science-based improvements in breeding and animal nutrition, beef production per cow has increased from about 400 pounds in the mid-1960s to 585 pounds in 2005, according to Cattle-Fax industry statistics. • According to NASS, the calf crop in 1964 (43 million head) and in 2005 (37.8 million head) was roughly equal, yet the amount of beef produced increased from 18 billion pounds in 1964 to 24.7 billion pounds in 2005. • Today's American farmer feeds about 129 people worldwide. In 1960 that number was 25.8, according to the Agriculture Council of America (ACA). • According to NASS, the average yield per acre of corn in 1960 was 54.7 bushels. In 2004, this number had almost tripled to 160.4 bushels. • There are currently 29 cuts of beef that meet USDA criteria for lean in contrast to only seven categorized as lean in 1990.
<p>Scientific Advancements:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agricultural productivity in the United States has more than doubled in the past 50 years. In 2005, ERS reported the rapid adoption of new technology, improved crop varieties, improved insect and disease control and other changes have made this possible. • Today, a farmer using a combine can harvest 900 bushels of corn per hour. In the 1930s, a farmer could harvest (by hand) about 100 bushels of corn in a nine-hour day, according to ACA. • According to USDA's Cooperative State Research, Education and Extension Service (CSREES), precision farming practices, such as site-specific applications of fertilizers, pesticides, irrigation, and herbicides in agricultural crops and improved timber and non-timber management and utilization in forests, reduces costs while minimizing environmental and ecological impacts. Similarly, properly timed and detailed control of animal care and feeding minimizes expenses and maximizes animal growth and vitality.
<p>New Uses for Agricultural Products:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethanol accounts for the largest industrial use of any commodity crop, according to ACA. • Currently, 100 ethanol plants are operating in the United States, with 41 new plants or expansions under construction. The industry produced 4.7 billion gallons of ethanol in 2005, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). • Some crops are bred specifically for use in pharmaceutical production, according to ACA.
<p>References:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NASS: http://www.nass.usda.gov:8080/QuickStats/PullData_US.jsp • ERS: http://www.ers.usda.gov/ • U.S. Census Bureau: http://www.census.gov/ • Cattle-Fax: http://www.beefusa.org/uDocs/cattlenumbersandbeefproduction347.pdf • ACA: http://www.agday.org/media/agfactsheet.htm • USDA Nutrient Data Base: http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search/ • CSREES: http://www.csrees.usda.gov/ • EPA: http://www.epa.gov/

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Updated 10/2006



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