

Farmland Use in Michigan

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Land Use in Michigan

Introduction

This brief analysis considers land use in the State of Michigan. The primary focus is on farmland and the different crops that are supported on that land. The amount of farmland has been slowly declining over time. Currently, about 9.7 million acres in this state are devoted to farming. This is approximately 26.6 percent of the state's land mass.

Most of the farmland is used for row crop production. Corn and soybeans are the dominant crops, followed by forage crops and wheat. However, Michigan is also a major vegetable, fruit, horticulture, and berry producer.

The state and federal governments are major landowners. Most of the land owned by the state and federal government is forested.

Non-Farmland

Most of the land in the state is forested. Approximately 20 million acres are forestland (Cook), which is approximately 55.0 percent of the state's total land mass. Slightly less than 6.7 million acres of land is used for other uses including roads, urban areas, and towns.

Michigan is unique in that it has the highest level of federal land ownership east of the Mississippi. The federal government owns 3.6 million acres. This is about 10 percent of the land in the state. Almost 80 percent of the federally owned land is possessed by the U.S. Forest Service, and another 17.4 percent is owned by the National Park Service (stacker.com). The National Forests are Hiawatha, Ottawa, and Marquette National Forests in the Upper Peninsula, and the Huron and Manistee National Forests located in the Northern Lower Peninsula. There are five National Parks, of which the most famous are Isle Royal, Pictured Rocks, and Sleeping Bear Dunes.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is also a major landowner. The DNR owns 4.6 million acres of land which is about 12.7 percent of the state's total landmass. Most of the land is state forests, parks, recreation areas, water access sites, and wildlife areas such as hunting land (DNR). Together the state and Federal Government own more than 20 percent of the land in the state. Some, if not most of the land owned by the state and federal government is not well suited to farming.

Farmland

According to the Michigan Field Office of the National Agricultural Statistics Service, approximately 9.7 million acres of land in the state is used for farming. Table 1 shows the utilization of farmland in 2017, this data comes from the 2017 Census of Agriculture. The total amount of land in Table 1 is considerably less than 9.7 million acres. This is likely due to several factors. Not all farmers submit their census forms, agricultural buildings are not included, and land used for pasture may not be captured.

Table 1: Farmland Use in Michigan

Crop	Acres Harvested	Crop	Acres Harvested
Field Crops		Fruits and Nuts	
Barley	5,750	Apples	38,563
Corn for Grain	2,168,204	Apricots	70
Corn for Silage	331,133	Sweet Cherries	7,807
Dry Edible Beans	225,334	Tart Cherries	33,381
Dry Edible Peas	267	Grapes	13,127
Oats	34,492	Nectarines	40
Popcorn	1,464	Peaches	2,863
Millet	47	Pears	699
Rye	18,238	Persimmons	6
Sorghum for Grain	1,888	Plums	456
Sorghum for Silage	2,072	Prunes	69
Soybeans	2,487,343	Chestnuts	675
Sugarbeets	145,790	Hazelnuts	60
Sunflower Seeds	1,735	Pecans	3
Wheat	487,011	English Walnuts	116
Field and Grass Seed	593	Other Nuts	275
Forage Crops	1,009,570	Total Fruits and Nuts	98,210
Total Field Crops	6,920,931		
Vegetables		Berries	
Asparagus	12,285	Aronia Berries	29
Lima Beans	9	Blackberries	152
Snap Beans	12,706	Blueberries	22,959
Beets	872	Cranberries	322
Broccoli	872	Currants	31
Brussel Sprouts	69	Elderberries	7
Chinese Cabbage	135	Loganberries	1
Head Cabbage	4,045	Raspberries	532
		Strawberries	870
Mustard Cabbage	3	Other Berries	103
Cantaloupes and Muskmelons	520	Total Berries	25,006
Carrots	3,473		
Cauliflower	228	Floriculture, Nursery and Greenhouse Crops	
Celery	2,078	Bedding/Garden Plants	1,650
Collards	155	Cut Flowers and Florist Greens	1,280
Cucumbers and Pickles	34,409	Foliage Plants	48
Daikon	32	Potted Flowering Plants	288

Table 1: Continued

Eggplant	194	Other Floriculture and Bedding Plants	58
Escarole and Endive	6	Nursery Stock Crops	1,102
Garlic	101	Aquatic Plants	5
Herbs	159	Bulbs,coms, rhizomes, and tubers	374
Horseradish	3	Cuttings, Seedlings, liners, and plugs	222
Kale	342	Flower Seeds	177
Lettuce	1,027	Vegetable Seeds	20
Mustard Greens	103	Vegetable Transplants	144
Okra	25	Sod	6,244
Onions	2,495	Greenhouse Tomatoes	19
Green Onions	60	Other Greenhouse Vegetables	30
Parsley	102	Greenhouse Fruits and Berries	7
Green Peas	3,072	Mushrooms	3
Cowpeas	11	Total Floriculture, Nursery and Greenhouse	11,671
Bell Peppers	1,876	Woodland Crops	
Other Peppers	902	Christmas Trees	36,986
Potatoes	50,511		
Pumpkins	5,123		
Radishes	1,183		
Rhubarb	126		
Spinach	43		
Squash	9,178		
Sweet Corn	8,466		
Tomatoes	5,102		
Turnip Greens	88		
Turnips	778		
Watercress	14		
Watermelons	1,340		
Other Vegetables	1,016		
Total Vegetables	165,337		

Source: USDA, 2017 Census of Agriculture

Despite these shortcomings, table 1 does reveal several points. The vast majority of the land is used for row crop production. Corn and soybeans are the dominant crops. Some years corn is the number one

crop, and some years soybeans is the number one crop. In terms of acreage forage crops ranked third at slightly more than 1 million acres. Wheat is the fourth largest crop in terms of acreage.

While other crops use far less acreage on a per acre basis they generate higher revenues. A good example of this is the land used for floriculture, greenhouses, and nurseries. While only 11,671 acres were devoted to these products in 2017, the wholesale value of these products was close to \$663 million in 2021 according to the Michigan Agricultural Field Office.

Vegetable production accounted for 165,337 acres in 2017. Of this amount, more than 50,000 acres were devoted to potato production and more than 34,000 acres were devoted to cucumber production, both for the fresh market and for pickles. Foreign competition and labor shortages may reduce the number of acres devoted to vegetable production in the future. Some vegetable producers face intense competition from foreign producers, and the lack of labor is an issue for farmers that rely on seasonal labor.

Fruit and nut production utilized 98,210 acres in 2017. Most acres are devoted to apple and cherry production. Total land in cherry orchards was in excess of 40,000 acres and apple production used more than 38,000 acres. Grape production accounted for an additional 13,000 acres. As is the case with vegetable production some fruit production is threatened by foreign competition. Increased population pressures in West Michigan and the Northwest Lower Peninsula may also reduce fruit acreage in the future.

Total acreage devoted to berry production was 25,006 acres in 2017. Blueberries were the dominant crop accounting for more than 22,000 acres. Michigan is one the largest producers of blueberries in the U.S. An additional 36,986 acres were used to produce Christmas trees in the state.

Summary

Michigan farmland is used to produce a wide range of agricultural commodities. More than 25 percent of the land in Michigan is farmland. Most of the land in Michigan is forestland. The federal and state government are major landowners; most of the government owned land is forested. The vast majority of farmland is used to produce field crops, primarily corn, soybeans, forages, and wheat.

Michigan is also a major producer of vegetables especially cucumbers and potatoes, fruits particularly cherries and apples, and blueberries. Michigan is also an important producer of ornamental horticulture crops and Christmas trees.

The amount of land devoted to farmland appears to be declining slightly over time. This is likely due to two primary reasons, the first is land some crops are facing labor shortages and competition from foreign countries that restrict profitability. This is an issue for some fruits and vegetables. The second is population pressure in certain parts of the state. This is especially true for West Michigan in areas such as Allegan and Ottawa counties, and the northwest Lower Peninsula. Despite these concerns, most of the farmland in the state is not under threat.

References

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