

## 54.9 million acres of farmland irrigated

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USDA's 2008 Farm and Ranch Survey has found that farmers and ranchers are now irrigating 54.9 million acres farmland across the United States — an increase of nearly 5 percent since 2003.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) collected the data for the Irrigation Survey earlier this year.

"Water is the most critical, limited resource for our nation's farmers and ranchers," said Molly Jahn, USDA deputy under secretary for Research, Education, and Economics. "For farmers and ranchers who are looking for more efficient ways to irrigate their land and ways to reduce their expenses, the results of the Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey provide a valuable tool to help them make informed decisions about the future of their operations."

The irrigation survey provides the most comprehensive source of up-to-date information regarding the U.S. agriculture industry's use and stewardship of our nation's water resources. The survey results show a continuing trend towards more efficient irrigation methods as farmers reported irrigating more acres with sprinkler systems and less with gravity irrigation. During the five-year period since the last irrigation survey, the area irrigated by sprinkler systems increased 15 percent while the area with gravity irrigation decreased 5 percent.

Despite the changes in application methods, equipment in general continues to be one of the leading expenses of irrigation. In 2008, farmers and ranchers spent \$2.1 billion on expenses related to irrigation equipment, facilities, land improvements and computer technology.

In addition to looking at irrigated acres, application methods and expenses, the irrigation report provides insight into farmers' energy and water conservation practices. Between 2003 and 2008, a total of 74,846 farms implemented changes in equipment or management practices that reduced energy use and/or conserved water. Nearly 46 percent of these farms reported reduced energy cost and 59 percent reported a reduction in the amount of water applied.

For the first time NASS also gathered information on the use of recycled and reclaimed water. A total of 9,843 farms reported using recycled water and 3,205 used reclaimed water.

General results of the 2008 Irrigation Survey are available online at [www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov).