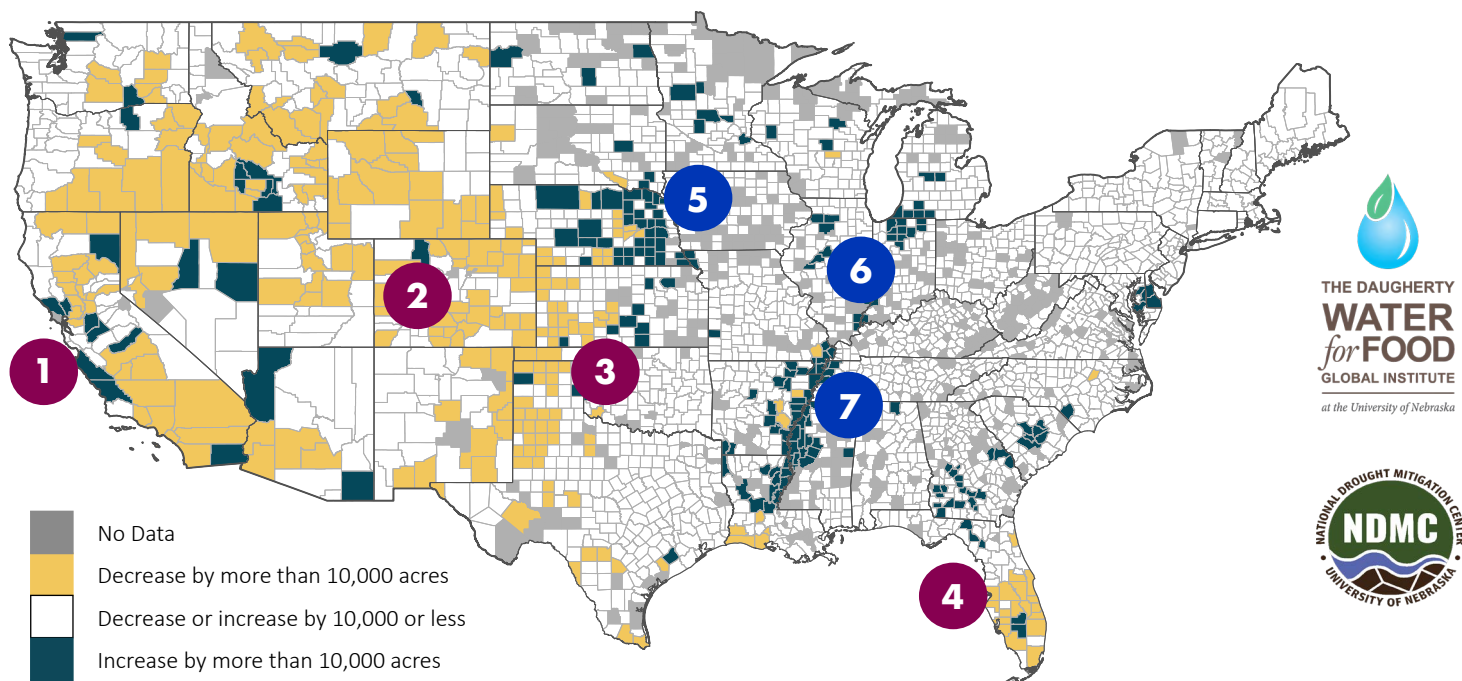


Agricultural Water Use Trends in the U.S., 1997 - 2022

Some areas in the U.S. are seeing an increase in irrigation, while others are seeing a decrease. Overall, there is a net increase of more than 3 million acres of irrigated farmland from 1997 to 2022. Factors that influence trends include weather patterns, groundwater availability, policy changes and changes in crop type.

County-level change in irrigated farmland



Trend: Decrease in irrigated farmland

1

Long-term drought and water transfers to cities have decreased California's water availability for agriculture. Further reductions are expected to occur to meet the target goals set by the 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

2

Along the Colorado Front Range, water has been reallocated from agriculture to cities to support the state's growing population.

3

In parts of the High Plains, groundwater depletion has reduced the water available to meet crop needs. As a result, there has been a decrease in irrigated farmland.

4

Residential and industrial development, including solar power, are the primary drivers for farmland conversion, reducing irrigated land in Florida.



Trend: Increase in irrigated farmland

5

In Nebraska, which generally has ample groundwater, irrigated areas increased at the start of the study period in response to drought and high crop prices at that time. Across much of the state, further expansion of irrigated acreage has become restricted through local policy.

6

Across the Midwest and Eastern U.S., areas that have historically supported rainfed crops have been adding irrigation. This is often in response to increased variability in rainfall.

7

Along the Mississippi River Valley, despite high annual rainfall, there has been an increase in irrigation to support the production of rice and other crops. This is because most rain in the region falls outside of the main growing season.

Sources used: USDA/NASS, (2024), 2023 Irrigation and Water Management Survey; USDA/NASS, (1999), 1998 Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey.

This work was supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Office of the Chief Economist (OCE). The findings shared in this infographic are those of the authors and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or U.S. Government determination or policy.

To cite this infographic: Williss R., Carrillo, R., Rimšaitė R., Melkani, A., Brozović N., 2026. "Agricultural Water Use Trends in the U.S., 1997 - 2022," Infographic. Daugherty Water for Food Global Institute, <https://go.unl.edu/irrigation-trends>.