

Welcome to the *Natural Inquirer* Monograph Series— **FORESTS & AGRICULTURE!**

Glossary words are in **bold**
and are defined on page 31.

Agriculture is the science and practice of preparing the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock. Agriculture is the process through which humans get food and many other resources.

Societies have practiced agriculture for thousands of years. Experts have difficulty pinpointing the exact start of agriculture, but estimates range from 10,000 to 25,000 years ago. Agriculture has taken many forms over its long history. Today, it is practiced on scales from very small, such as

growing tomatoes in a pot (figure 1a), to very large, such as raising bison on ranches (figure 1b). You may find a wide variety of agricultural techniques in both urban areas and rural areas.

Historically, many people practiced agriculture on a small scale at their homes or in their communities. Over time, however, fewer and fewer people practiced agriculture at home. New techniques and technologies have become so efficient that agriculture has been able to support larger populations with fewer people farming

To learn more about monographs, read
“*About Natural Inquirer Monographs!*” on page 5.



Figure 1a. For people not living on a farm, plants can be grown in a pot, like this tomato plant. Photo courtesy of coramueller, iStock.



Figure 1b. Agricultural areas include land used to raise animals, such as cows, horses, pigs, goats, sheep, and the bison pictured here. Animals can be used on the farm to complete tasks, and they can also be raised for products, such as meat or fiber. Photo courtesy of Ryan Hagerty, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

(figure 2). Farmers can grow enough food for themselves and their communities, to sell at grocery stores, and even trade with people across the globe.

Supporting the 7 1/2 billion people on Earth requires a large amount of land to be used in agriculture. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, approximately 11 percent of land



Figure 2. New technologies, like the modern tractor, have enabled farmers to produce more food and products.

Photo courtesy of Phyllis Cooper, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

worldwide is used for agriculture. Scientists expect Earth's population to continue to grow. With population growth, scientists expect increased productivity on agriculture lands as a result of improved technologies and practices.

In the United States, large amounts of agricultural land are located in the Midwest (figure 3). The scientists in this study found that 43 percent of

midwestern land is used to grow corn and soybeans.

The scientists in this study were interested in determining the impact of harvesting wild plants on the long-term health of plant populations. As you read this article, take a moment to think about agriculture in your life. How are the items that you use daily connected to agriculture?

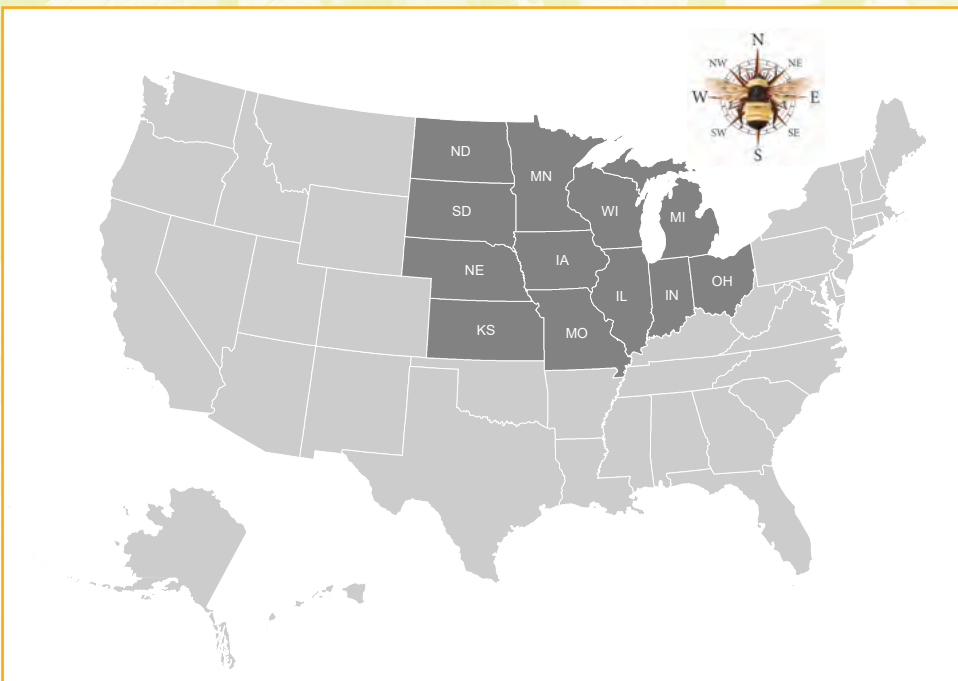


Figure 3. The Midwest is a region of the United States.

Map by Carey Burda and Stephanie Pfeiffer.