



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

Glossary words are in **bold**
and are defined on page 27.

Welcome to the *Natural Inquirer*
Monographs – Forests & Agriculture
Series!

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 year 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, to very large, such
as raising bison on ranches (figure
1). You may find a wide variety of
agricultural techniques in both urban
areas and rural areas (figure 2).

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



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

Photo courtesy of coramueller, via <http://www.istockphoto.com>.



Figure 2. 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, United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

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 (figure 3). Farmers can grow enough food for themselves and their communities, to sell food at grocery stores, and even trade with people across the globe.

Supporting the seven and a half 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 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.



Figure 3. New technologies, like the modern tractor, have enabled farmers to produce more food and products.

Photo courtesy of Phyllis Cooper, United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

In the United States, large amounts of agricultural land are in the Midwest (figure 4). 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?

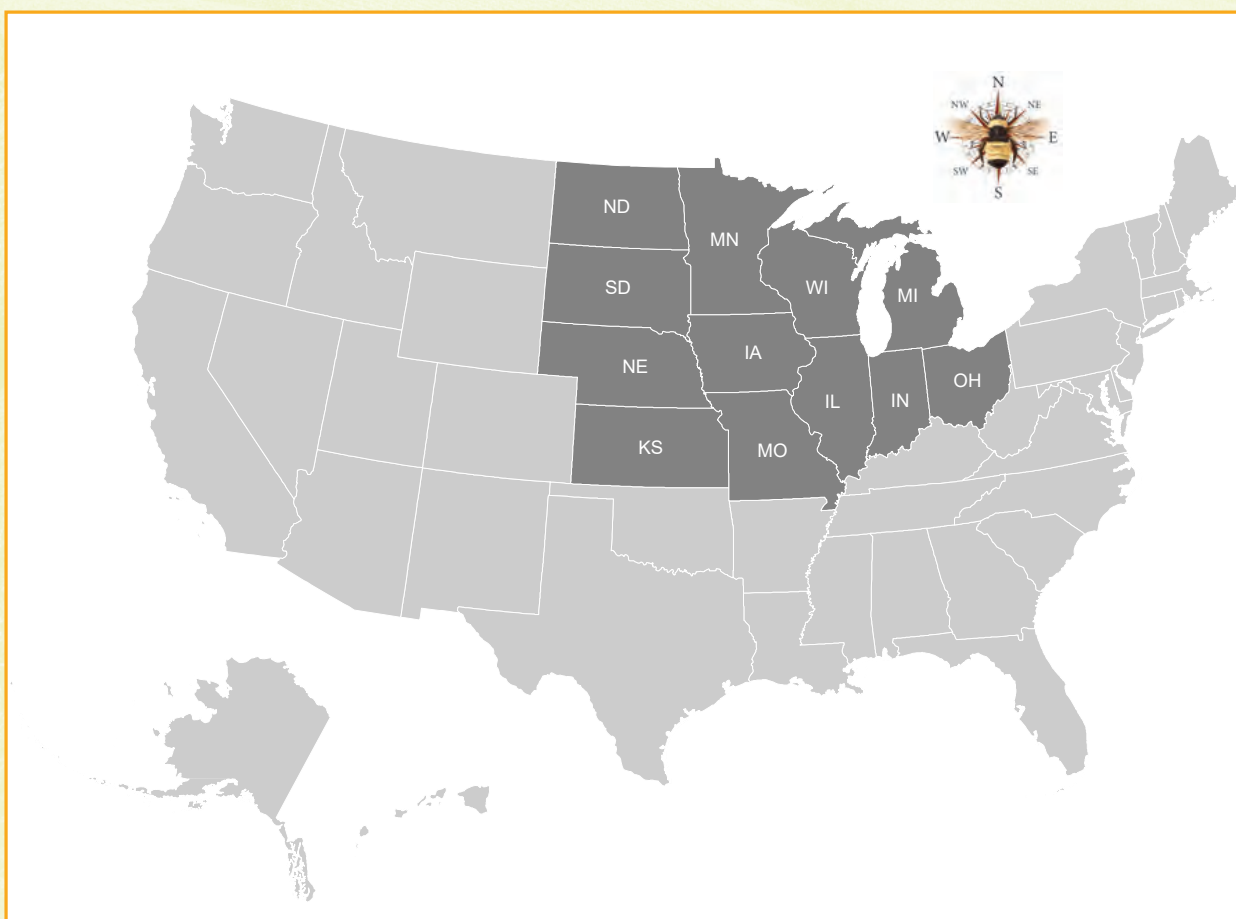


Figure 4. The Midwest is a region of the United States.

Map by Carey Burda.