Dryland Farming Encyclopedia Article

Dryland Farming

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Dryland Farming

Dryland farming is the practice cultivating crops without **irrigation** (rainfed agriculture). In the United States, the term usually refers to crop production in low-rainfall areas without irrigation, using moisture-conserving techniques such as mulches and fallowing. Non-irrigated farming is practiced in the Great Plains, inter-mountain, and Pacific regions of the country, or areas west of the 23.5 in (600 mm) annual precipitation line, where native vegetation was short **prairie** grass. In some parts of the world dryland farming means all rainfed agriculture.

In the western United States, dryland farming has often resulted in severe or moderate wind **erosion**. Alternating seasons of fallow and planting has left the land susceptible to both wind and water erosion. High demand for a crop sometimes resulted in cultivating lands not suitable for longtime farming, degrading the **soil** measurably.

Conservation tillage, leaving all or most of the previous crop residues on the surface, decreases erosion and conserves water. Methods used are stubble **mulch**, mulch, and ecofallow. In the wetter parts of the Great Plains, fallowing land has given over to annual cropping, or three-year rotations with one year of fallow.

See Also

Arable Land; Desertification; Erosion; Soil; Tilth

Resources

Books

Anderson, J. R. *Risk Analysis in Dryland Farming Systems*. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 1992.