



# DatelineERS

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Economic Research Service

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U.S. Department of Agriculture

ERS is the main source of research and analysis from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, providing timely information on economic and policy issues related to agriculture, food, the environment, and rural America.

## New on the Web Coming in July

### A special issue of *Amber Waves*

This issue showcases a collection of articles on conservation and the environment.

View it at:

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## Commodity Markets and Trade

ERS Outlook reports provide timely analysis of major commodity markets and trade, including special reports on hot topics. All reports, along with a calendar of future releases, are available at: [www.ers.usda.gov/  
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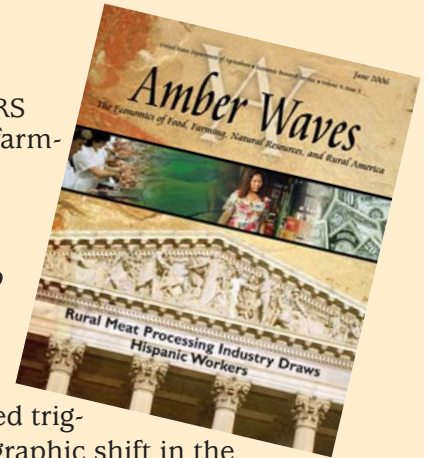
## *Amber Waves* June 2006

*Amber Waves* magazine covers the full range of ERS research and analysis, including articles on food, farming, natural resources, and rural America.

[www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves](http://www.ers.usda.gov/AmberWaves)

### *Meat-Processing Firms Attract Hispanic Workers to Rural America*

Over the past 40 years, the U.S. meat-processing industry has been transformed by changing consumer preferences for meat products, which helped trigger a consolidation within the industry and a geographic shift in the location of meat-processing plants to rural areas. Bucking trends in the manufacturing sector, meat-processing employment has risen during the period. The rapid population growth and geographic dispersion of Hispanics since the 1990s has helped meet the labor needs of rural-based meat-processing plants while altering rural communities.



### *Where Should the Money Go? Aligning Policies with Preferences*

Budget constraints force policymakers to choose which programs to fund, even when human health and safety are at risk. The principle of weighing costs and benefits can help policymakers determine which programs will save the most lives or lead to the largest improvements in health and well-being. This *Amber Waves* feature article examines different ways economists (and others) measure the potential costs and benefits of policy affecting health.

### *Land Retirement and Working-land Conservation Structures: A Look at Farmers' Choices*

All sizes and types of farms have adopted conservation practices and installed conservation structures. Programs that support a wide range of alternative conservation practices are more likely to match the wide range of interests of farmers. Recent ERS research suggests that farms and farm households that install working-land conservation structures—such as contour strips or grass waterways—often differ from those that retire farmland.

### *A Revolution in Food Retailing Underway in the Asia-Pacific Region*

This article assesses the causes and impacts of the rapid spread of modern retail outlets in the developing Asia-Pacific region. These modern outlets are contributing to food-system modernization and efficiency, lower food costs, and higher food quality and safety standards. Enhanced food-system distribution chains needed to support these supermarkets also overcome the logistical challenges arising from rapid urbanization. Specialized suppliers are emerging to help modern supermarkets do business with small-scale producers and traditional market channels, thus being an important force for food-system modernization.

## Balancing Conservation Program Objectives

[www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR19](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/ERR19)



Many of the Nation's conservation programs use an index approach to prioritize environmental and cost objectives. In an index, objectives are weighted by relative importance. *Balancing the Multiple Objectives of Conservation Programs* provides empirical evidence on the cost and environmental benefit tradeoffs of different weighting schemes in USDA's Conservation Reserve Program and considers how different weighting schemes encourage different sets of landowners to offer land for enrollment. The report finds that while small changes in index weights do not markedly affect levels of environmental benefits that can be achieved at a national level, larger changes can have a moderate impact.

## Tracking Land Uses in the United States

[www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EIB14](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/EIB14)

*Major Uses of Land in the United States, 2002* presents results of the latest inventory of U.S. major land uses, drawing on data from the Census, public land management and conservation agencies, and other sources. The data are synthesized by State to calculate the use of several broad classes and subclasses of agricultural and nonagricultural land over time. The United States has a total land area of nearly 2.3 billion acres. Major uses in 2002 were forest-use land, 651 million acres (28.8 percent); grassland pasture and range land, 587 million acres (25.9 percent); cropland, 442 million acres (19.5 percent); special uses (primarily parks and wildlife areas), 297 million acres (13.1 percent); miscellaneous other uses, 228 million acres (10.1 percent); and urban land, 60 million acres (2.6 percent). National and regional trends in land use are discussed in comparison with earlier major land-use estimates.



## Food Security Assessment, 2005

[www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/GFA17](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/GFA17)

In 2005, 777 million people were food insecure in 70 lower income countries studied in this report. On average, there has been a slight decline in the number of hungry people from 688 million in 1992-94 to 639 million in 2002-04. Both Asia and the Commonwealth of Independent States experienced a 30-percent drop in the number of hungry people. The number in Latin America and the Caribbean has varied slightly over time, but there has been no discernible trend across the region as a whole. Despite strong growth in food production, Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region where the number of hungry people has risen—over 19 percent—during the last decade.

## BSE: An Economic Chronology

[www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/LDP/2006/06Jun/LDPM14301](http://www.ers.usda.gov/Publications/LDP/2006/06Jun/LDPM14301)

The first confirmed cases of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in Canada and the United States had significant effects on trade and prices of U.S. cattle and beef. However, these incidents occurred during a period of low U.S. beef supplies, near-record beef prices, and strong domestic demand for beef that was largely unshaken by the BSE announcement. Also, U.S. reliance on beef and cattle exports, roughly 10 percent of production, was not so great as to cause burdensome increases in domestic supplies. Increased regulations, however, imposed additional costs on beef production and processing sectors.

### How to get more information . . .

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