

## **Activities for classroom use**

### **Individual Task Activity # 1**

#### **Tracking land use changes in your community**

Sometimes the change in land use in our community is very visible as we drive around. Fields that last year had crops growing or cattle grazing now sprout new homes. But sometimes the changes are not visible or so slow that our mind does not record them. This activity is designed to introduce you to one source of data on land use in your community.

Using the Census of Agriculture (available for all counties and states at [and](#) use Table 1 - County Summary and Table 8 - Farms, Land in Farms) for three different time periods (e.g., 1982, 1987, 1992, 1997, 2002 ) complete the following table:

	Time 1	Time 2	Time 1- Time 2 % change	Time 3	Time 2- Time 3 % change	Time
Approximate land area						
% of approximate land area in farms						
Number of farms						
Land in farms (acres)						
Average size of farm (acres)						
Total cropland (acres)						
Total woodland (acres)						
Pasture and Cropland (acres)						
Land in house lots, ponds, roads, wasteland (acres)						
Pastureland (all types) (acres)						

Note: You calculate a percent change between two time periods using the following formula:

$$\text{Acres Time 1} - \text{Acres Time 2} = \text{Change in acres} / \text{Acres Time 1} \times 100$$

After you have completed the table, develop a paragraph or two that summarizes and explains the pattern of change that you observe. Then comment on how the “statistical” picture of change compares to the “mental” picture of change that you carry with you.

Additional statistical information is available on line at The Statistical Abstract of the United States which has data on national and state trends in land use and agriculture. Check out the following:

Section on historical data (Subject - Agriculture, Topic: Farms and acreage)

Section on Geography and environment (Tables on nonfederal developed land use by state and land cover use by state)

Section on agriculture (Tables on number of farms and land in farms)

## **Individual Task Activity # 2**

### **Community perspectives on land use changes - Personal Interviews**

Each of us develop a mental map of our community and a give meaning to the place where we live. It is interesting to compare residents’ perspectives on how land is used, how it has changed over their life time and what their community means to them. In this activity you will use a set of questions to interview four people in your community, one from each of the following age groups:

Over 70

50 - 69

35 - 49

34 or younger

Take notes on each person’s answers and then prepare a summary of your interviews by stating each question and listing each person’s answer underneath the question.

Then prepare a summary of how your community has been changing through the eyes and memories of those you interviewed. In preparing this report, think about similarities and differences in their answers and note some key words that you feel capture the ideas and sentiments of each person’s comments.

*Questions:*

When you were growing up, what did this community look like?

What are two of the biggest changes that have occurred in this community during your lifetime?

Tell me about your favorite place in this community

Suppose you were describing this community to someone who has never been here. What would you say to give them a sense of what kind of community this is?

**Individual Task Activity # 3**

**Community perspectives on land use changes - Content analysis of local newspapers**

Your local newspaper maintains the written memory of life -- events and activities – in your community, and in its “letters to the editor” you find a record of people’s views on critical issues. In this activity, you will evaluate the stories and letters to the editor over a several year period to identify critical issues, key phrases or words, main topics related to land use, agriculture, the environment, and other natural resources presented in the newspaper.

When you do a content analysis, you are analyzing a sample of the newspapers published in your community over a given period of time. During the analysis you are:

- Counting how many times articles, editorials, or letters to the editor are printed on a certain topic
- Describing the content (information, story line) of these based on key ideas or key words used
- Evaluating the position expressed, the underlying values held, and/or the information presented in the articles, editorials or letters
- Drawing conclusions about community sentiment on the topic

How to do a content analysis:

- Pick 3 different years at least 2 years apart.
- For each year, examine all the issues published during the months of April, August and December.
- Develop a list of all articles, editorials, and letters to the editor related to the following topics: agriculture, farms/farming, greenways, greenbelts, development, growth, subdivisions, land use, growth management,

planning and zoning. Each of these represents one unit of analysis or observation for the purpose of this research  
Read and/or make copies of the relevant articles  
Develop a list of key phrases/words associated with each entry that you find by the type of entry (i.e., article, letter to the editor, editorial)  
Count the number of times that particular phrases or words are used in each type of entry

Summarizing the content analysis:

Based on your observations has the issue of land use/land use change been a topic of discussion in the local newspaper? If so, has there been more or less interest in this topic over the time period studied?  
What are the key phrases/words associated with the articles written on this issue? With the editorials written? With the letters to the editor?  
How would you describe community sentiment on this issue based on your analysis of the local newspaper?