



## 2008 Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey

Cooperating with the Montana Department of Agriculture  
10 W 15<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 3100 · Helena, MT 59626  
800-835-2612 · FAX 800-915-6277 · [www.nass.usda.gov/mt](http://www.nass.usda.gov/mt)

Released: December 7, 2009

### 2008 Montana Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey Results

Results are now available from the 2008 Farm and Ranch Irrigation Survey (FRIS). FRIS is conducted every five years as a supplement to the Census of Agriculture. The 2008 FRIS is the seventh irrigation survey conducted by the USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service.

The 2008 FRIS survey indicated Montana farmers and ranchers are irrigating less farmland than in 2003. The total of cropland and pastureland acres irrigated was down 9 percent from 2003. The number of acres irrigated using gravity systems in the state was down 19 percent, while sprinkler irrigation acres increased by 14 percent from 2003. Acres irrigated with a center pivot system accounted for 66 percent of all sprinkler systems. Gravity irrigation in Montana is most commonly distributed through unlined open surface ditches using controlled flooding.

The total quantity of water applied by all irrigation methods was down 6 percent from 2003, while the average acre-feet per acre increased from 1.3 to 1.4. Average acre-feet per acre for sprinkler systems decreased from 1.3 to 1.2, and the average using gravity systems increased from 1.3 to 1.4.

Acres irrigated using water from on-farm sources increased 15 percent from 2003, while the acres using water obtained from off-farm sources decreased 18 percent. Acres irrigated using ground water from wells declined significantly by 42 percent in 2008 from 2003.

Total energy expenses for pumping increased 55 percent from 2003. Expenses per acre for acres irrigated from surface water increased from \$13.10 per acre to \$22.96 per acre in 2008. The majority of Montana farmers used electricity to power the pumps, and the total expense paid during the year was slightly over \$20 million, up 50 percent from the 2003 irrigation survey. The total cost to irrigate using pumps powered by diesel fuel was nearly \$3 million, more than double the 2003 diesel expenses.

For more detailed irrigation information on either the U.S. or state level, go to <http://www.agcensus.usda.gov>. A full publication is available online with more facts. You can also call the Montana Field Office at 1-800-835-2612 and ask for Lindsey Houska for more information.

