

Prime and Other Important Farmlands

Essex County, Massachusetts, Southern Part

Map symbol	Map unit name	Farmland classification
220A	Boxford silt loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
220B	Boxford silt loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
225B	Belgrade very fine sandy loam, 0 to 8 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
250B	Pollux fine sandy loam, 0 to 8 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
254A	Merrimac fine sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
254B	Merrimac fine sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
260A	Sudbury fine sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
260B	Sudbury fine sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
276A	Ninigret fine sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
276B	Ninigret fine sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
300B	Montauk fine sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
305B	Paxton fine sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
310B	Woodbridge fine sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
315B	Scituate fine sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
420B	Canton fine sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
714A	Melrose fine sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
714B	Melrose fine sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
723A	Elmridge fine sandy loam, 0 to 3 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
723B	Elmridge fine sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	All areas are prime farmland
220C	Boxford silt loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
242A	Hinckley loamy sand, 0 to 3 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
242B	Hinckley gravelly fine sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
254C	Merrimac fine sandy loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
255A	Windsor loamy sand, 0 to 3 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
255B	Windsor loamy sand, 3 to 8 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
256A	Deerfield loamy fine sand, 0 to 3 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
300C	Montauk fine sandy loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
301B	Montauk fine sandy loam, 0 to 8 percent slopes, very stony	Farmland of statewide importance
301C	Montauk fine sandy loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes, very stony	Farmland of statewide importance
305C	Paxton fine sandy loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
306B	Paxton fine sandy loam, 0 to 8 percent slopes, very stony	Farmland of statewide importance
306C	Paxton fine sandy loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes, very stony	Farmland of statewide importance
310C	Woodbridge fine sandy loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
311B	Woodbridge fine sandy loam, 0 to 8 percent slopes, very stony	Farmland of statewide importance
311C	Woodbridge fine sandy loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes, very stony	Farmland of statewide importance
316B	Scituate fine sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes, very stony	Farmland of statewide importance
316C	Scituate fine sandy loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes, very stony	Farmland of statewide importance
323B	Poquonock loamy sand, 3 to 8 percent slopes, very stony	Farmland of statewide importance
323C	Poquonock loamy sand, 8 to 15 percent slopes, very stony	Farmland of statewide importance
420C	Canton fine sandy loam, 8 to 20 percent slopes	Farmland of statewide importance
421B	Canton fine sandy loam, 3 to 8 percent slopes, very stony	Farmland of statewide importance
421C	Canton fine sandy loam, 8 to 15 percent slopes, very stony	Farmland of statewide importance
51A	Swansea muck, 0 to 1 percent slopes	Farmland of unique importance
52A	Freetown muck, 0 to 1 percent slopes	Farmland of unique importance
53A	Freetown muck, ponded, 0 to 1 percent slopes	Farmland of unique importance
712A	Ipswich and Westbrook mucky peats, 0 to 2 percent slopes, very frequently flooded	Farmland of unique importance

Prime and Other Important Farmlands

This table lists the map units in the survey area that are considered important farmlands. Important farmlands consist of prime farmland, unique farmland, and farmland of statewide or local importance. This list does not constitute a recommendation for a particular land use.

In an effort to identify the extent and location of important farmlands, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, in cooperation with other interested Federal, State, and local government organizations, has inventoried land that can be used for the production of the Nation's food supply.

"Prime farmland" is of major importance in meeting the Nation's short- and long-range needs for food and fiber. Because the supply of high-quality farmland is limited, the U.S. Department of Agriculture recognizes that responsible levels of government, as well as individuals, should encourage and facilitate the wise use of our Nation's prime farmland.

Prime farmland, as defined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops and is available for these uses. It could be cultivated land, pastureland, forestland, or other land, but it is not urban or built-up land or water areas. The soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply are those needed for the soil to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when proper management, including water management, and acceptable farming methods are applied. In general, prime farmland has an adequate and dependable supply of moisture from precipitation or irrigation, a favorable temperature and growing season, acceptable acidity or alkalinity, an acceptable salt and sodium content, and few or no rocks. The water supply is dependable and of adequate quality. Prime farmland is permeable to water and air. It is not excessively erodible or saturated with water for long periods, and it either is not frequently flooded during the growing season or is protected from flooding. Slope ranges mainly from 0 to 6 percent. More detailed information about the criteria for prime farmland is available at the local office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service.

For some of the soils identified in the table as prime farmland, measures that overcome a hazard or limitation, such as flooding, wetness, and droughtiness, are needed. Onsite evaluation is needed to determine whether or not the hazard or limitation has been overcome by corrective measures.

A recent trend in land use in some areas has been the loss of some prime farmland to industrial and urban uses. The loss of prime farmland to other uses puts pressure on marginal lands, which generally are more erodible, droughty, and less productive and cannot be easily cultivated.

"Unique farmland" is land other than prime farmland that is used for the production of specific high-value food and fiber crops, such as citrus, tree nuts, olives, cranberries, and other fruits and vegetables. It has the special combination of soil quality, growing season, moisture supply, temperature, humidity, air drainage, elevation, and aspect needed for the soil to economically produce sustainable high yields of these crops when properly managed. The water supply is dependable and of adequate quality. Nearness to markets is an additional consideration. Unique farmland is not based on national criteria. It commonly is in areas where there is a special microclimate, such as the wine country in California.

In some areas, land that does not meet the criteria for prime or unique farmland is considered to be "farmland of statewide importance" for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. The criteria for defining and delineating farmland of statewide importance are determined by the appropriate State agencies. Generally, this land includes areas of soils that nearly meet the requirements for prime farmland and that economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Some areas may produce as high a yield as prime farmland if conditions are favorable. Farmland of statewide importance may include tracts of land that have been designated for agriculture by State law.

In some areas that are not identified as having national or statewide importance, land is considered to be "farmland of local importance" for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops. This farmland is identified by the appropriate local agencies. Farmland of local importance may include tracts of land that have been designated for agriculture by local ordinance.