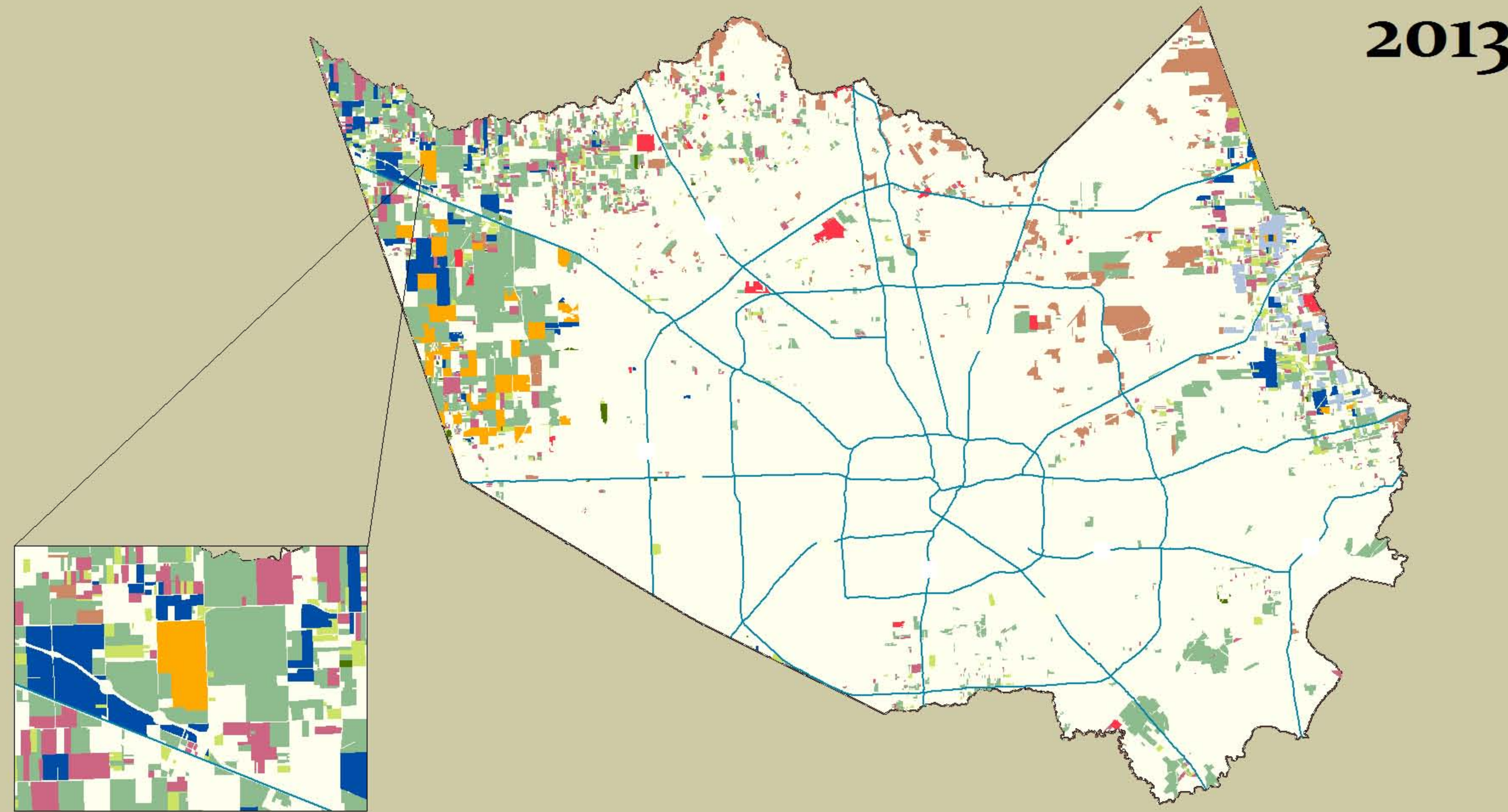
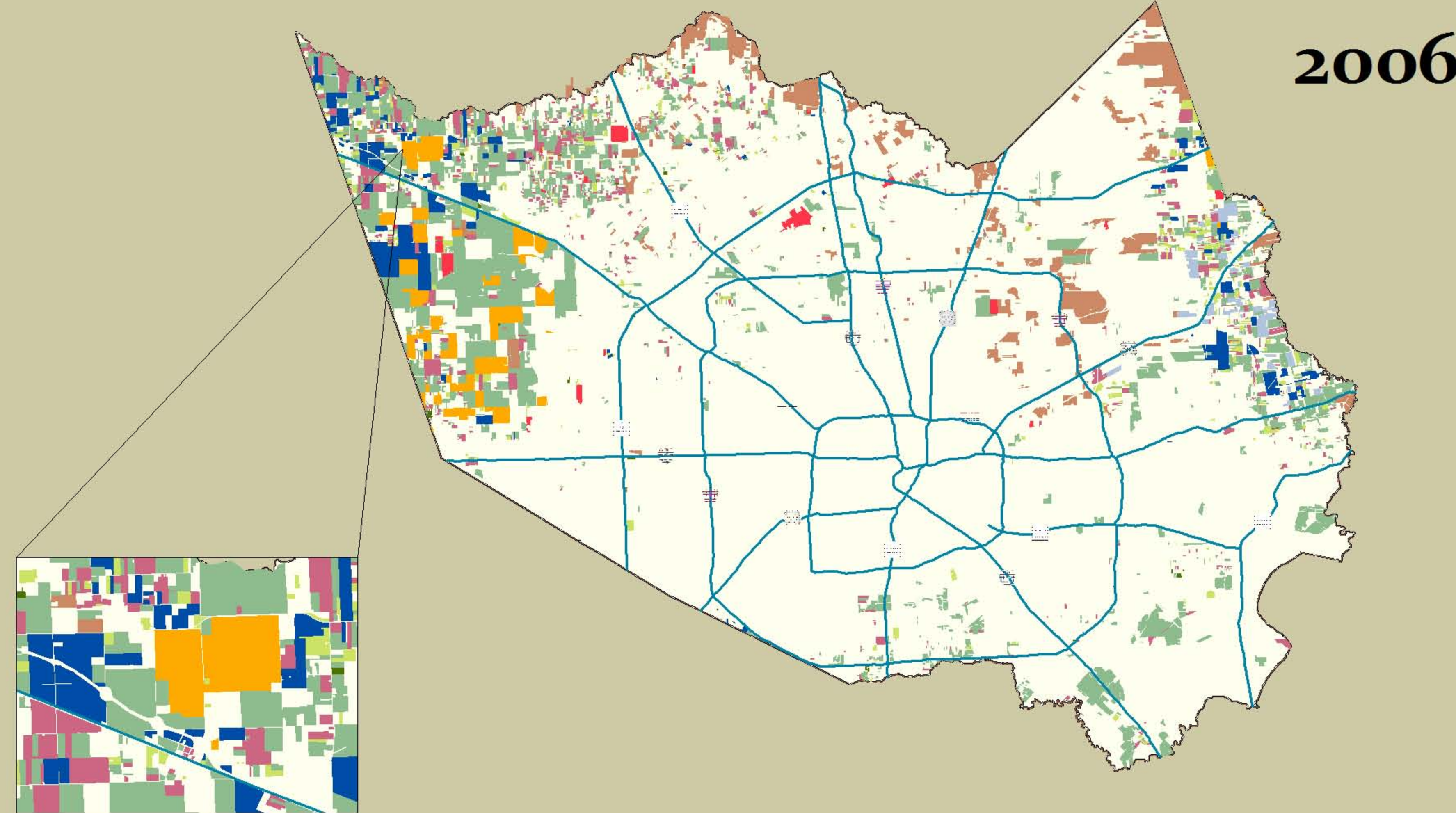
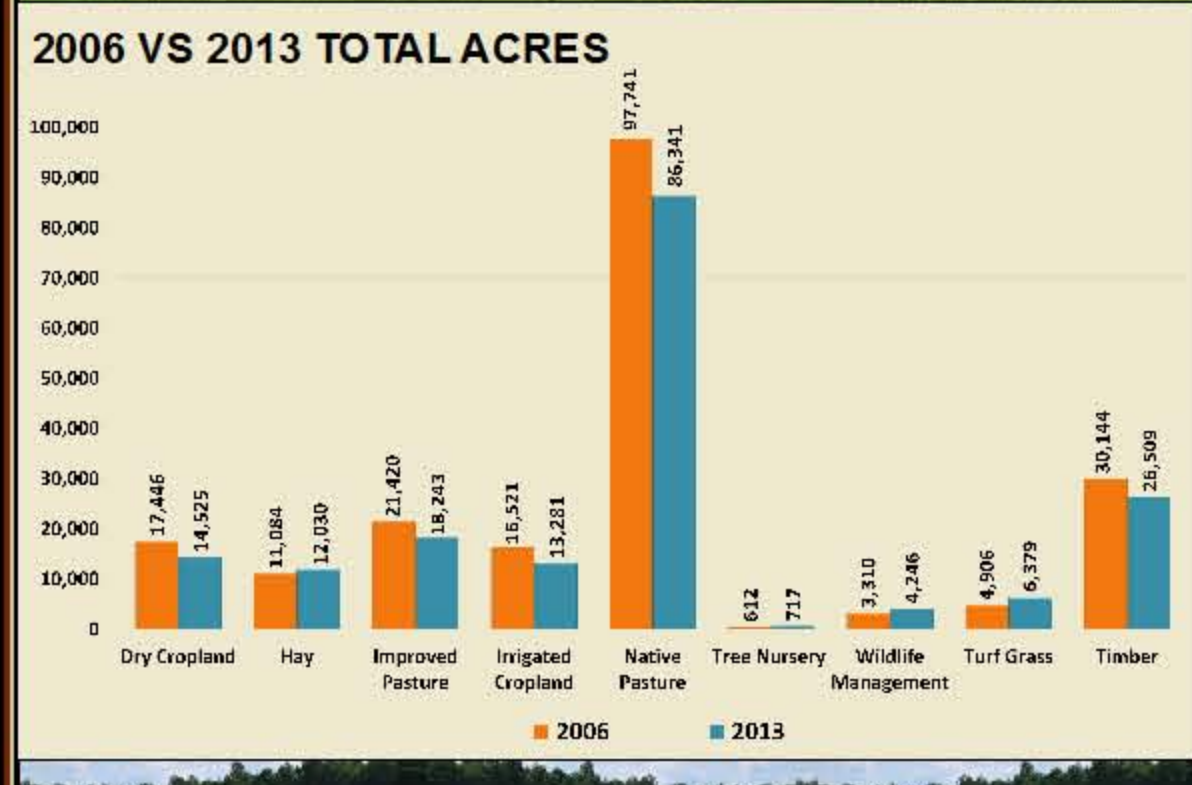
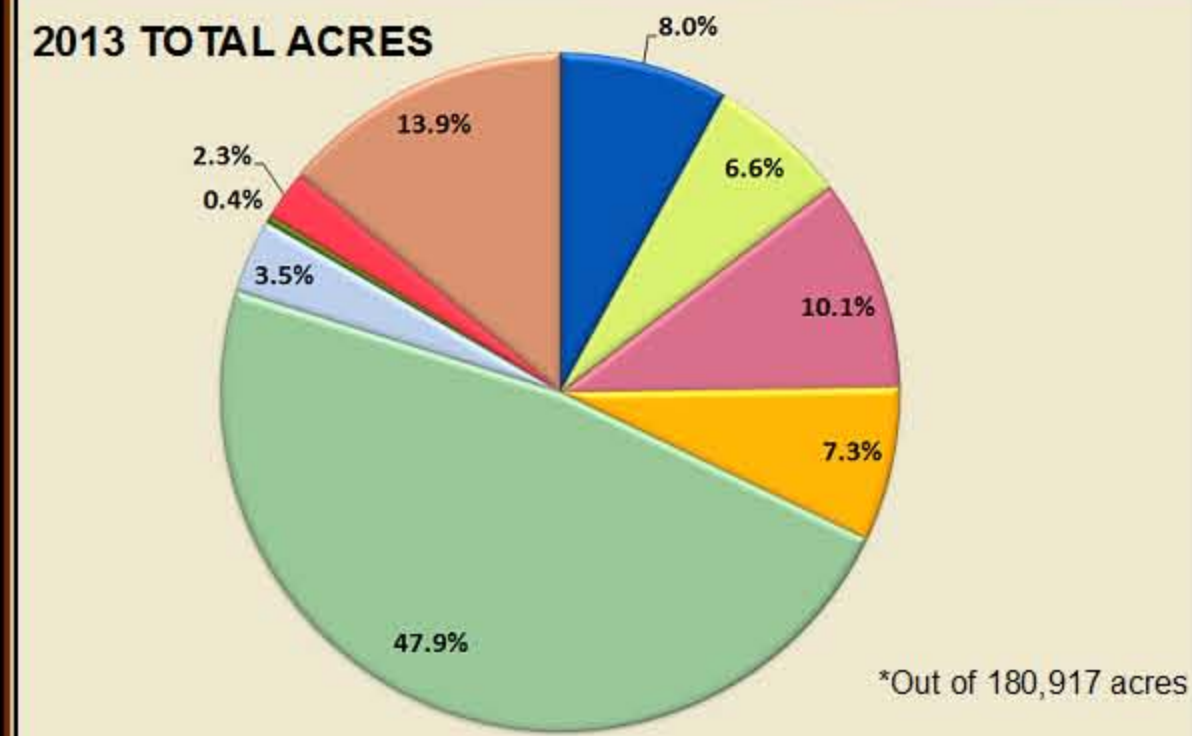
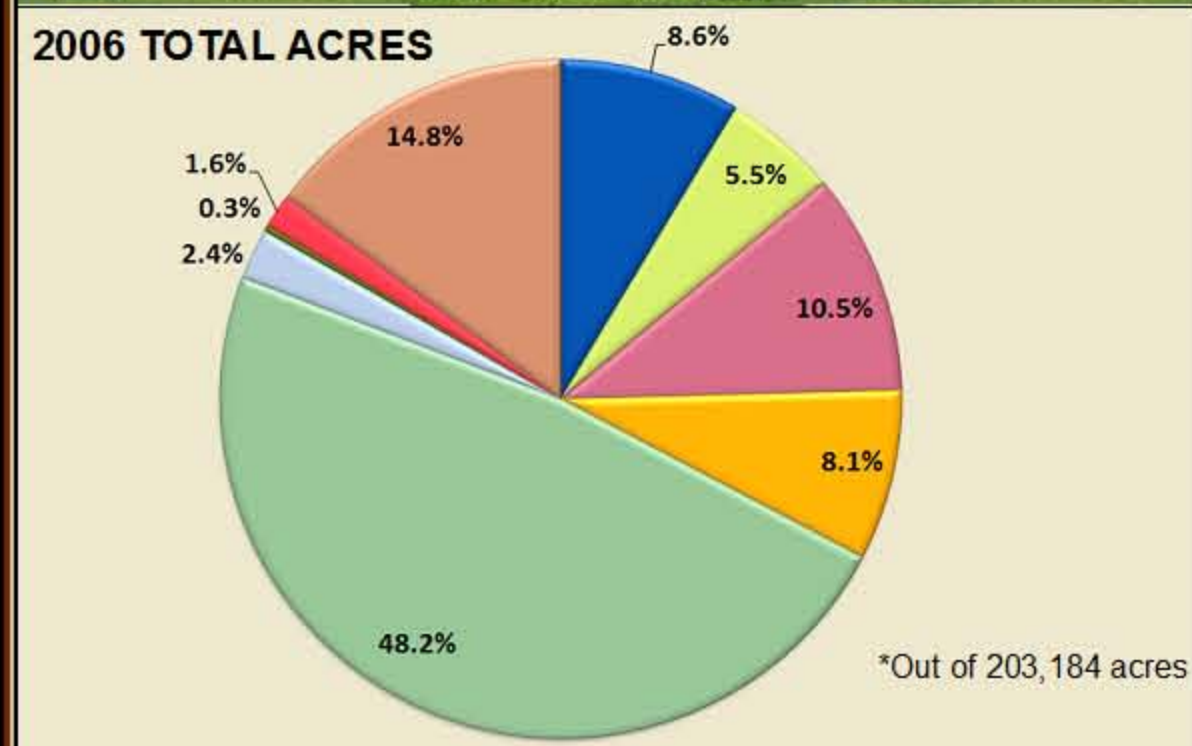


# Fragmentation of Agricultural Land In Harris County



### Study of Agricultural Land

Each year in the United States we see an increase of population and a decrease in agricultural land. In our nation, one-fifth of that land is used for crop production and one-fourth is privately owned land used for livestock.

Agriculture in Texas has decreased over the past 60 years. In 1940 there were 420,000 farms; by 2010 there were only 247,500, with an average size of 527 acres. Even though the number has drastically changed the farmers are still producing as much as in 1940. There has been an increase in small farms with part-time farmers who operate them.

With over 1.7 million parcels including real and personal properties, Harris County will have property owners of all types of agricultural land re-apply for an agriculture exemption. The reason for this is because there is such an increase in diminishing agricultural land now used for new subdivisions, buildings etc. There is about 3,000 to 4,000 acres of productive farmland that are lost each year in Harris County.

Harris County has over 20 categories of agriculture land, but only the most common were used in this map study, including dry cropland, hay, improved pasture, irrigated cropland, native pasture, tree nursery, turf grass, wildlife management, and timber. Most of the fragmentation is located in the northwest and northeast part of the county, where things have been drastically changing throughout the years. In the analysis process, due to the amount of work and manageability of cattle, we have seen that hay has increased over the last seven years. When new subdivisions are built the timber must all be cleared because of construction requirements. The builder also needs to raise the ground by 3 feet, which is why there is a decrease in timber land. Wildlife management, turf grass, and tree nurseries have all seen an increase over the past seven years. The land categories that have seen a decrease, ranging from 20% to 9% include: dry cropland, improved pasture, irrigated cropland, and native pasture.

With our findings, we predict that the fragmentation of agricultural land in Harris County and the United States will continue to decrease over the years. Eventually this will lead to a dearth of agricultural land usage, which in turn will increase our dependency on imports of all agricultural products.

(Facts were adapted in part from USDA NASS and <http://www.texasalmanac.com/topics/agriculture>)

### Agricultural Land Categories

#### Dry Cropland

Dry cropland is any land used to grow any crop depending on natural rainfall. Types of crops would be corn, soybeans, peanuts and other crops grown locally.

#### Hay

Hay is the same as improved pastures except you cut, cure and bale the grass to be used later such as in the winter when grass is dormant.

#### Improved Pasture

Is the one where you plant a species of grass such as Bermuda grass or any grass other than a native species. These types of grasses require more management than native grasses, but they also produce more forage per acre. Sometimes improved grasses are irrigated.

#### Irrigated Cropland

Rice and soybeans make up the largest amount of Irrigated Crop. Some corn could also be included. An irrigated crop is any crop where water is applied to the crop from wells or tanks. We have lost a large amount of our irrigated crops due to the high expense of pumping water.

#### Native Pasture

Native pasture is the type of land that you do very little improvement to. Over time and with succession, the plants have reverted back to what will actually grow. The types of plants you would see are Indian grass, bluestem and a wide variety of invader species of plants.

#### Tree Nursery

This operation may grow one type of tree or several varieties such as pine, oaks, elms, magnolia trees and several other tree varieties. Grown for landscape purposes.

#### Wildlife Management

This is the management of indigenous animals to promote increasing of the species numbers. May manage deer, bats, song birds or any other species native to Texas and your area.

#### Turf Grass

These farmers produce specialty grasses for landscape purposes, such as St. Augustine grass for your lawn or a specialty hybrid grass for Reliant Stadium.

#### Timber Mixed

This would be a standing timber tract that would be made up of both pine and hardwood trees. Ninety five percent of all timber in Harris County is mixed. Pine used for lumber or plywood products. Hardwood such as Oak would be used for furniture making.

