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Land Tenure and the Adoption of Conservation Practices

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“Land Tenure and the
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Conservation Practices”

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Does land tenure affect a farmer's adoption of conservation practices? This is a classic question in economics, and it remains important today. Agricultural Census data show that agricultural land leasing declined from

45 percent of U.S. farmland in 1935 to 35 percent in 1950, but subsequently increased to 41 percent by 1997. The authors use a logit adoption model with data on 941 U.S. corn producers from the 1996 Agricultural Resource Management Study to analyze the influence of land tenure on the adoption of conservation practices. The authors extend previous analyses by distinguishing renters according to lease type and by distinguishing conservation practices according to the timing of costs and benefits. They find that cash-renters are less likely than owner-operators to use conservation tillage (which may offer short-term cost savings as well as long-term benefits), but share-renters are not. Both cash-renters and share-renters are less likely than owner-operators to adopt practices (like grassed waterways, stripcropping, and contour farming) that provide benefits only over the longer term. Given that leasing has increased in recent decades and now accounts for half of farmland in the Corn Belt, these results suggest the importance of recognizing land tenure differences in the development of appropriate conservation policies.