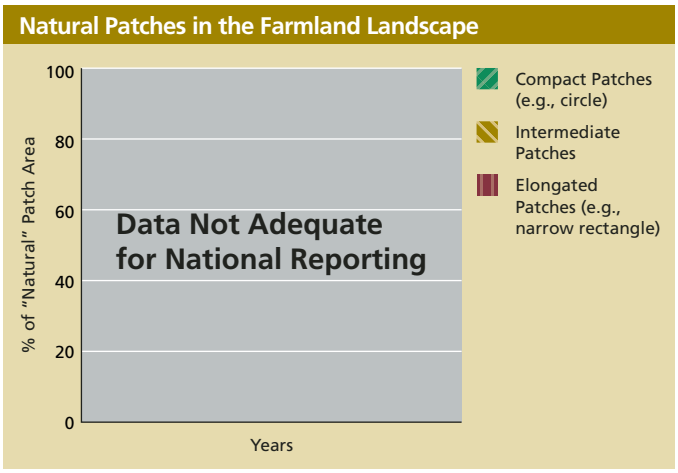
⊖ Shape of "Natural" Patches in the Farmland Landscape



What Is This Indicator, and Why Is It Important? This indicator describes the shape of patches of "natural" lands in the farmland landscape, by reporting on the percentage of patch area that is found in "compact" patches (e.g., like a circle), "elongated" patches (e.g., like a long narrow rectangle), and an intermediate class of patch shape. These classes are defined based on the ratio of the perimeter, or edge, of each patch to its area; these perimeter-to-area ratios will be divided by patch area for the sake of comparison. "Natural" areas include forest, grasslands and shrublands, wetlands, and lands enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). These data would be presented nationally and by region for the most current year.

Natural lands within the farmland landscape control erosion, facilitate groundwater recharge, provide critical habitat for wildlife, and serve other important ecological functions. The size and shape of these often small and isolated remnants, along with restored conservation areas (e.g., CRP land), directly influence the amount and type of ecosystem services provided. Habitat fragmentation may create new kinds of habitats that are colonized by generalist native species or exotic species. For example, small patches and long narrow ones may have little or no "interior" habitat. Since some species thrive only in interior habitat—where there is a relatively large and contiguous area of forest, grassland, or other natural cover (see the forest fragmentation indicator, p. 120), small narrow areas may not provide habitat for these species. On the other hand, narrow strips may function quite well for erosion and sediment control.

Why Can't This Indicator Be Reported at This Time? As is the case for the development indicator (p. 93), the land cover data necessary to report this index are available, but have not been analyzed.

The technical note for this indicator is on page 232.