

# Ask Marilyn<sup>®</sup>



By Marilyn vos Savant

**When my husband and I drove through the Western part of the country, we noticed miles and miles of fences along the highway. This made us wonder who owns all that land. Is there any unowned land left in the United States?**

—*Debbie Schneider, Wauwatosa, Wis.*  
No, the homesteading act was abolished in 1976, and the federal government now owns the public lands. They amount to 29% of all the territory in the U.S. The public lands—mostly in the West—are dominated by Arctic tundra, mountains, forests, grasslands and deserts.

You may be surprised to learn that the government owns about 85% of Nevada, 69% of Alaska, 57% of Utah, 53% of Oregon, 50% of Idaho, 48% of Arizona, 45% of California, 42% of Wyoming, 42% of New Mexico and 37% of Colorado.

**What is "an inch of rain"?**

—*Wendy Flick, Long Beach, Calif.*

**Want to buy some public land? You're about 30 years too late.**

An inch of rain is easy to define and measure: You put out any size bucket with a one-inch marking inside. When enough rain collects to reach the mark, that's

an inch of rain. The more ground covered by the bucket, the more water it will hold, but the height of the water will remain the same. You can prove this to yourself by putting out two buckets of different sizes a few feet apart.

A simple rain gauge will give you greater accuracy, at least for your backyard. Of course, measuring rainfall accurately over a larger area in real-life weather conditions is much more difficult and complex,

but "an inch of rain" still amounts to the same thing: one inch of water in a bucket.

Days are based on the time it takes for the Earth to spin on its axis, months correspond to the phases of the Moon, and years refer to our planet revolving around the Sun. But what is the scientific basis for a