



Opening the West

Lesson 2 Ranchers and Farmers

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How does geography influence the way people live?

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. *How did ranchers get their cattle to market in the North and East?*
2. *What brought more settlers to the Great Plains?*

Terms to Know

long drive a trip of several hundred miles on which ranchers led their cattle to railroads and distant markets

vaquero a cowboy, particularly a Mexican cowboy

homestead to earn ownership of land by living on it

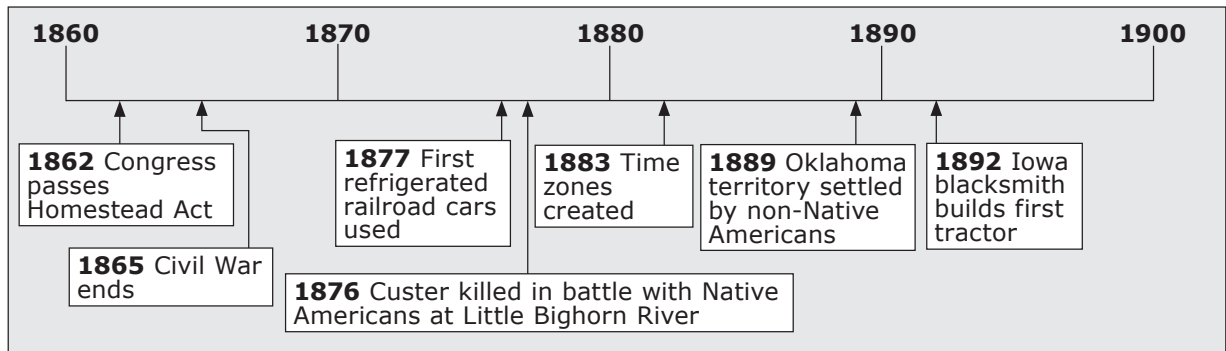
sodbuster name given to Great Plains farmers

dry farming a farming method that depends on plowing after every rain to trap moisture in the soil

Where in the world?



When did it happen?



Opening the West

Lesson 2 Ranchers and Farmers, *Continued*

Cattle on the Plains

In the 1500s, Spanish explorers first came to Texas. They brought cattle for food. Some of the cattle escaped. Over time, the cattle developed into a new breed called longhorns.

Much of Texas was open land. It was not fenced, so cattle roamed free. In the 1800s, there were thousands of cattle. Settlers in Texas rounded them up and started ranches.

There were fast-growing markets for beef in the North and the East. The value of cattle was about \$3 to \$4 each in Texas. In the North and East, cattle sold for \$40 each.

Ranchers needed a way to get their cattle to those markets. By 1865, the Missouri Pacific Railroad reached Kansas City, Missouri. Later, the railroads reached Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, and Wyoming. Texas ranchers began to herd cattle to railroad towns. From there, cattle were shipped to the North and East.

Sometimes cattle were herded hundreds of miles to the closest railroad. The trip, called the **long drive**, was worth the time and cost. The cattle drives started in spring so cattle would have food to eat on the way. The Chisholm Trail was one well-known path that ranchers followed to get to Kansas.

Herding cattle, or cattle driving, was a hard job for many reasons:

- The long drive took two or three months.
- Cowhands faced many dangers, such as violent storms and "rustlers" who tried to steal cattle.
- They had to control the herd if a stampede started.

Many cowhands had fought in the Civil War. Many were African Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanics. Hispanic ranch hands in the Spanish Southwest were known as **vaqueros**. They developed the riding, roping, and branding skills that cowhands used. They also added Spanish words to the language. For example, the word *ranch* is from the Mexican word *rancho*.

From the late 1860s to the mid-1880s, long drives had moved 5 million cattle. Ranchers became rich when cattle prices were high. Then, the market collapsed. There were several reasons. Ranchers had increased the size of herds. Prices fell. Ranchers lost much of the free grazing land because people put fences on their property. When there

Reading Check

1. How did railroads increase the value of Texas cattle?

Explaining

2. Why was the life of a cowhand hard?

Identifying

3. Who developed the special skills used by cowhands?

Opening the West

Lesson 2 Ranchers and Farmers, *Continued*



Explaining

4. Why did people who first saw the Plains think it was not good for farming?



Mark the Text

5. Underline the words that tell what a settler did to earn free land under the Homestead Act.

were too many cattle for sale, the price of beef went down. The cattle industry continued, but it was changed forever.

Farmers Settle the Plains

The people who first came to the Great Plains did not think it was good farmland. The Great Plains were known as the "Great American Desert." The land was dry and had few trees. Even so, farmers began to settle there in the late 1860s.

There were several reasons. Lots of rain, free land, and easy travel on the railroads encouraged people to move west to farm the land in the 1860s and 1870s.

Congress passed the Homestead Act in 1862. To **homestead** means to earn ownership of land by settling on it. The Homestead Act helped people to settle the Great Plains. The act gave free land to anyone who paid a \$10 fee and lived on the land for five years. A settler could get up to 160 acres (65 hectares) of land.

Thousands of new settlers moved to the Great Plains. They included immigrants and African Americans who no longer felt safe in the South.

Some of the settlers were women. A married woman could not claim land. A single woman or a widow could claim land through the Homestead Act. In Colorado and Wyoming, 12 percent of the homesteaders were women.

Immigrants could file homestead claims. Thousands of people from a part of Europe called Scandinavia settled on the Great Plains.

Some settlers bought their land. The railroad companies advertised the Great Plains as a great place to live. So did steamship companies, land sellers, and western states and territories. People were eager to get cheap land, independence, and easy profits. They moved west.

However, life on the Great Plains was not easy at all. Farming in the Great Plains was hard. There were few trees, so farmers built houses of sod—packed soil held together by grass roots.

The climate was extreme. Some years there was too much rain. This brought floods to the Great Plains. Other years there was not enough rain. Then there would be droughts and brushfires.

Winter brought deep snow. This could trap people in their homes and bury the animals. Farm families planned ahead by storing food. The whole family worked on the

Opening the West

Lesson 2 Ranchers and Farmers, *Continued*

farm. Children often had so much farm work that they did not have time to go to school.

Farmers on the Great Plains were called **sodbusters**. They came up with new tools and new ways to farm the hard sod. One way was **dry farming**. With dry farming, farmers plowed the land every time it rained. This trapped water in the soil. Farmers also dug wells.

Sodbusters had to cut through tough layers of sod. They used steel plows to plow their fields. They planted a crop called winter wheat. This crop grows well in dry climates.

Even with these new methods, farmers often could not grow large enough crops. Many farmers lost their farms.

By the 1880s, only Indian Territory in present-day Oklahoma had not been settled. The law said only Native Americans could live there. There was one part of Indian Territory that was not assigned to any of the Indian groups. The government agreed to let non-Native American homesteaders settle there.

On April 22, 1889, more than 10,000 people lined up at the edge of these lands. A signal was given. Homesteaders rushed into the land to claim a piece for themselves. They found that some people had gone over the line early. These people were called "sooners," and they got the best land.

By 1890, all of America was settled. Life in America had changed, especially for Native Americans.

//////////Glue Foldable here//////////

Check for Understanding

How did Texans earn a living from wild herds of cattle?

What role did railroads play in getting people to settle the Great Plains?

Reading Check

6. What new methods did farmers use on the Great Plains?



7. Place a three-tab Foldable along the dotted line to cover Check for Understanding. Label the tabs *Cattle*, *Cowboys*, and *Sodbusters*. Use both sides of the tabs to write three or more facts that you remember about the roles of each. Use your Foldable to help answer Check for Understanding.