

Chapter 5 – “The West”  
Section 4 “Farming the Great Plains”

I. New Lands for Settlement

A. Homestead Act (1862)

- Receive 160 acres of land
- Pay a small registration fee
- Settle the land and live on it for 5 years

B. Morrill Act

- Federal government gave the states 17 million acres of federal land
- States were to sell the land and use profits to establish state universities
  - Agriculture
  - Engineering

II. Settling the Plains

A. Immigrants

- Scandinavians (Swedish, Norwegian, Danish)
- Germans
- Czechs
- Irish
- Mennonites

B. Exodusters (African Americans from the South)

- Many went to Kansas

C. Farmers from the East

- Could not afford the expensive land in places of New England
- In some areas, land was becoming sparse

D. Descendants of earlier pioneers of the Midwest

III. Farming on the Plains

A. Sodbusters – nickname given to the early farmers who broke up the sod

B. Dry Farming – shifted the focus from water-dependent crops (like corn) to hardier crops like a type of red wheat. Farmers also left some land unplanted each year to preserve the water in the soil.

C. Cyrus McCormick – developed the mechanical reaper. Horses pulled mechanical reaper. It allowed a few workers to perform the work once done by more men. As a result, many men lost their jobs, and moved to the cities to get factory jobs.

IV. Daily Life on the Plains

- A. Raise livestock
- B. Grew crops
- C. Till the soil
- D. Plant crops
- E. Harvest crops
- F. Make clothes

- G. Mend clothes
- H. Wash clothes
- I. Make soap
- J. Make butter
- K. Build homes (sod homes)
- L. Heating water
- M. Hauling water
- N. Plant & grow food in vegetable garden
- O. Repair machinery
- P. Educate own children
- Q. Hunt for food

V. Communities on the Great Plains

- A. Assist neighbors in times of need
- B. Community church
- C. Community Schools (one-room school)
- D. Companionship - Socialize