

FARMERS

How did farmers ADAPT TO THE PLAINS

Life was different from what settlers had known before. Little wood was available on the dry, nearly treeless plains, and families had to rely on other materials to build houses. At first, they used the land itself; tough sod held together by the weave of prairie-grass roots. Settlers cut bricks of sod, then arranged them into walls three feet thick. The roof was tarpaper covered with a layer of sod.



How did farmer purchase CHEAP LAND?

The **Homestead Act** was enacted on May 20, 1862, this landmark piece of legislation granted to settlers ownership of 160 acres of land merely by living on it and working it for five years. It proved one of the most important government incentives in settling the vast territory of the American West and provided economic opportunities to thousands of Americans and newly arrived immigrants. Below is an excerpt of the act.

How did TECHNOLOGY AND SCIENCE lead the way for living on the Plains?

The settlers developed new techniques or adapted old ones to farm the plains. By drilling deep water wells, farmers could reach water several hundred feet below the dry surface. A new kind of windmill harnessed the high winds of the plains to pump water.



To farm large areas, farmers used a technique called dry farming. Farmers used steel-tipped plows that loosened the topsoil and broke through the roots that broke iron or wooden plows. In this way, farmers created a blanket of dust that kept moisture below from evaporating too quickly. Dry farming made it possible to grow wheat over large areas.

Improved machinery let farmers cultivate even more land. Mechanical binders tied wheat into bundles. Threshing machines separated grain from the stalk. The time spent harvesting wheat, corn, oats and hay dropped sharply.

How does living on the Plain create A NEW LIFE?

Of course, some settlers did well. In many instances women worked alongside men. Some women even owned their own farms. Perhaps because women lived such active lives in the west, 11 western states and territories granted women the right to vote before any states east of the Mississippi River. Wyoming led the way in 1869.

Churches and schools played a key role in western settlement. Rural families depended on churches and Bible to educate their children, but gradually communities built schools. The schools were one room buildings with rows of hard benches for the students. Both churches and schools became centers of community life, where families found relief from isolation and hard work.

