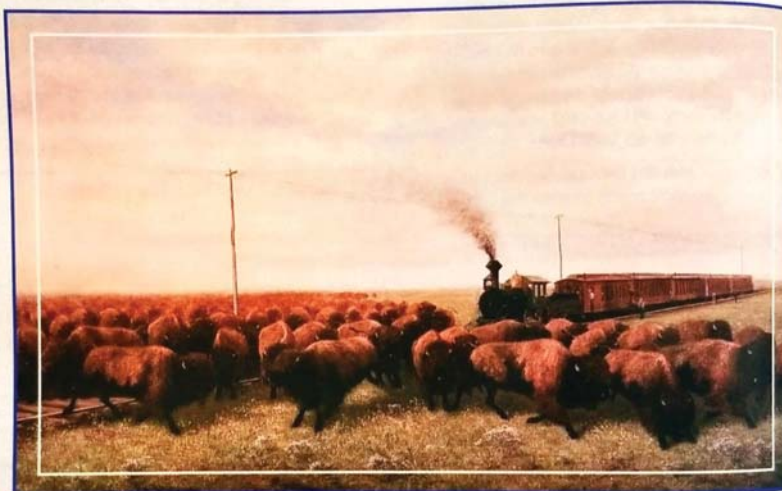


CHAPTER
14

Farming and Ranching in the Late 1800s

- 1 The End of the Open Range in Texas
- 2 Railroads, Ranches, and Farms
- 3 From Family Farms to Commercial Farming
- 4 Agricultural Products of Texas



The coming of the railroad had a dramatic impact on Texas farmers and ranchers. The railroad allowed them to ship their products to more distant markets. However, high rates charged by the railroads made life difficult for many farmers and ranchers.

EVENTS IN TEXAS

1870s

Market develops for cottonseed oil.

1872

About 100,000 immigrants settle in Texas.

1873

Texans form a branch of the Grange.

1874

Texas offers cheap public land to attract new settlers.

1878

Demonstration of barbed wire convinces Texans to buy the fencing material.



1870

1875

1880

WORLD AND UNITED STATES EVENTS

1873 ▲

United States enters a five-year economic depression.

1874 ▲

National Grange calls for railroad regulation in the American Midwest.

1877 ▲

Railroad strike cripples transportation in the United States.

The XIT Ranch

The XIT Ranch was the largest ranch in Texas. The state of Texas gave more than three million acres of land in the Panhandle to a group of Chicago investors. In exchange, the investors paid for the construction of the Texas Capitol in Austin.



1880s

Drought hits Texas.

1883

Range war erupts.

1885

Kansas bars all Texas cattle.

1885-86

"Big Die-Up" destroys entire herds of cattle.

1890s

Railhead at Fort Worth becomes a collection point for Texas cattle.

1880

1885

1890

1881 ▲
Assassin kills President James A. Garfield.

1889 ▲

Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Washington gain statehood.



1 The End of the Open Range in Texas

Reading Focus

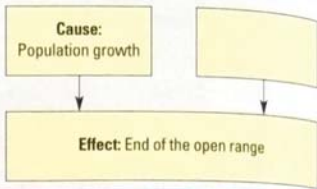
- How did Texas land policies affect the open range?
- What events led to the range wars of the late 1800s?
- What changes did ranchers make in the way they raised cattle after the Big Die-Up?

Key Terms

open range
internal improvements
strike

Taking Notes

Copy this chart. As you read this section, fill in the chart with events that caused the end of the open range. Add as many "cause" boxes as you need.



Main Idea Railroads, population growth, barbed wire, and other developments caused the end of open-range cattle ranching.

Experiencing Texas History

In the special activity that accompanies this chapter, you will explore how farming and ranching changed during the mid- and late 1800s.

Setting the Scene The 1880s were a decade of drastic change for Texas. The days of the cattle kingdoms ended as fences sprang up to enclose what had once been wide-open spaces. Cowboys mourned the loss of their traditional way of life in songs:

They say that heaven is a free range land,
Goodbye, goodbye, O fare you well;
But it's barbed wire for the devil's hat band;
And barbed wire blankets. . . .

The trail's a lane, the trail's a lane,
Dead is the branding fire.
The prairies wild are tame and mild,
All close corralled with wire.

Ranching on the Open Range

As Native Americans were pushed out of West Texas, ranchers moved in. Early Texas ranchers realized that these lands, on which huge herds of buffalo had once roamed, could feed sheep and cattle, too.

Ranching in the west West Texas ranches differed at first from the earlier ranches in South Texas in one important way. South Texas ranchers, such as Richard King, owned the land on which their herds grazed. The first West Texas ranchers generally owned little or no land. Often, only the ranch house sat on private property. Some ranchers bought land along a river or stream in order to have a reliable source of water. Most livestock grazed on the **open range**. This was a vast area of undeveloped public land held by the state government for future sale.

Open-range ranching methods In the mid-1870s, there was so much public land in West Texas that most of the early ranchers saw no need to buy any of it. They simply found a good location and "squatted" there, without a legal right to the property. If someone bought the land, the squatter simply moved his ranch to another spot.

Of course, public land was no one's property. Because no fences enclosed the land, cattle from several ranches often intermingled. Ranchers determined the owner of an animal by its brand. Every spring the ranchers held a roundup on the open range. Calves born since the last roundup received the same brand as their mothers. Cowboys cut some steers from the herd and drove them to market to sell for their meat.

Ranching on the open range worked fairly well in those early days. Not even thousands of heads of cattle could crowd the vast West Texas plains. As a result, most ranchers had little interest in controlling the riverbanks and water holes. They viewed the grasslands as a resource that all could share, and none could own. In the next few years, all that would change.

AS YOU READ Use Prior Knowledge What invention would help close the open range?

Hardy Creatures The hard hooves and long legs of Texas longhorns made them ideal animals for the trail. **Drawing Inferences** Why would cowboys closely watch cattle at a watering hole?





Light As Air and Cheap As Dirt

Barbed wire became a popular fencing material in the 1870s. It was promoted as being “light as air and cheap as dirt.” **Linking Past and Present** Why is barbed wire still in use today?

Changes on the Open Range

Several factors ended the open range in Texas. A key factor was the expansion of railroads in the state. Closely related to this were the state’s land policies, population growth, and the spread of farming. It is important to understand how these factors changed ranching on the open range.

Land policies to encourage growth In the 1850s, the state government offered free public land to encourage **internal improvements**. These are changes made by people, such as the building of roads,

which help boost a region’s economy and population. Railroads received almost 90 percent of this land. The railroads, in turn, sold much of the land to recover the costs of laying track. Few railroads could stay in business merely by hauling goods and passengers from one end of the track to the other. To make money, a railroad needed people all along the line who would ride and ship products on its trains. To encourage settlement along the rail lines, Texas launched programs to sell more public land.

In 1874, Texas offered public land near railroad lines for \$1.50 an acre. Within five years, the price fell to \$1 an acre for land next to the tracks, and 50 cents an acre for all other land. Even at these prices, however, many people still could not afford to buy land. Texas created the State Land Board to sell land to poor settlers. Buyers could take up to 40 years to pay for the land.

Land and cattle companies The land policies forced open-range ranchers to change. Many who had once shared the land with their neighbors now felt that they had to own the land—before someone else bought it. To do this, many ranchers sought help outside Texas. Reports of high ranching profits had reached investors in the eastern United States and Great Britain. They provided money for a rancher to buy or lease land on the open range. The rancher then shared the profits with his financial partners.

Huge privately owned ranches soon developed. One was the JA Ranch. Texan Charles Goodnight managed the ranch, but John Adair of Great Britain owned most of it. In 1876, Goodnight ranched on a few thousand acres of open range. A decade later, the JA Ranch covered more than 700,000 acres of private property. Adair’s money made this growth possible. Large ranches controlled by British investors came to dominate the Panhandle. The growth of these privately owned ranches pushed out most open-range ranchers.

Range wars Cattle ranchers had long complained that sheep, which ate the grass almost to the roots, destroyed the land for cattle grazing. Shepherders often needed to drive their flocks over ranchers’ property in order to move from one pasture to another. That practice had worked well when the state controlled the public lands. However, ranchers bought more and more of this land. As ranchers began fencing in their land in the 1880s, these conflicts worsened.

AS YOU READ

Predict How would the end of the open range change the way of life for cowboys and ranchers?

Some fences cut off public roads and water supplies. Angry small farmers fought back by cutting the fences. By 1883, a “range war” had developed over the issue of fences and fence cutting. Finally, the Legislature made it illegal to cut fences. People who fenced across public roads now had to provide gates and keep them in good repair.

An End and a Beginning

The end of the open range was one reason for the end of the great cattle drives. The expansion of railroads into Texas also made the cattle drives unnecessary. Ranchers now used the railroads to move their animals to market. Concern over a deadly disease, Texas fever, made drives even more difficult. Armed ranchers sometimes patrolled the trails, determined to prevent sick cattle from infecting their herds. In 1885, Kansas barred all Texas cattle from their state.

People in the East were now demanding better types of beef. Longhorns produced tough and stringy meat. Texas ranchers now had to compete with better breeds of stock being raised on ranches in Wyoming and Montana. The Texas beef market was headed into a long period of decline.

Changes for cowboys The end of the open range and cattle drives meant changes for cowboys, too. Fewer long trail drives and open-range roundups meant fewer jobs for cowboys. Thousands lost their jobs. Those who kept their jobs spent less time in the saddle and more on foot. Setting fence posts and stringing barbed wire made most cowboys feel like low-paid ranch hands.

In 1883, some Panhandle cowboys went on **strike**. A strike is a work stoppage to force an employer to meet certain demands. The strike failed. The Texas Rangers were called in to break the strike. Many cowboys lost their jobs. The failure of the strikers showed that the changes in ranching were permanent.

The Big Die-Up The final blow to the old way of ranching occurred in 1885 and 1886. Ranchers had built a series of “drift fences” that stretched from New Mexico to Indian Territory (present-day Oklahoma). These fences prevented cattle infected with Texas fever from “drifting” into the region and mingling with the healthy herds there. In 1885, a huge blizzard struck the plains. Cattle fled from the storm. The drift fences trapped them.

Thousands of cattle froze to death along the fence line. The following winter brought more blizzards and thousands more cattle deaths along the fences. The Big Die-Up, as ranchers called it, nearly wiped out the herds in the Panhandle. Many cattlemen lost everything as summer droughts followed the severe winters. Some British land and cattle companies sold their ranch lands and left the business in Texas.



Fence Cutters

During the range wars, armed men cut fences so that they could move their cattle to grazing areas.

Drawing Inferences Why did fence cutters arm themselves?

Killer Blizzard

Drift fences prevented cattle from escaping the blizzards that struck Texas in 1885 and 1886. **Identifying Cause and Effect** What caused the death of the cattle?



Modern ranching begins The Big Die-Up marked the start of the modern ranching industry in Texas. Ranchers realized that they could not leave cattle alone to graze on the range. Cattlemen who remained in business began to manage their herds. They determined how much pasture each group of cattle required. Then they fenced off that much pasture. This method enabled the ranchers to make more efficient use of the land.

The fences also enabled ranchers to improve the quality of their herds. Ranchers brought in new types of cattle to replace the lean, tough longhorns. They crossbred Angus, Herefords, and other breeds. Several new breeds of cattle resulted from these experiments. They produced more meat and could resist heat and Texas fever. From these beginnings came the scientific control that defines the Texas cattle industry today.

AS YOU READ Summarize How did the ranching industry change from open-range ranching to modern ranching?

AFTER YOU READ

Section 1 Assessment

Recall

- Define** (a) open range, (b) internal improvements.
- Identify** Explain the significance of the following: (a) strikes, (b) the Big Die-Up.

Comprehension

- What role did the State Land Board play in Texas?
- What changes did cowboys experience with the end of the open range?
- How did the Big Die-Up affect the ranching industry?

Critical Thinking and Writing

- Exploring the Main Idea** How did railroads, population growth, and barbed wire lead to the end of open-range cattle ranching?
- Contrasting** How were early ranches in West Texas different from early ranches in South Texas?
- Summarizing** Summarize the effects that barbed wire had on West Texas.

ACTIVITY

Make a Poster

You are a member of the Texas State Land Board. Design a poster that encourages settlers to purchase land near railroad lines.

2 Railroads, Ranches, and Farms

BEFORE YOU READ

Reading Focus

- How did the railroads affect the cattle drives?
- How did the railroads change farming in Texas?
- What other effects did railroads have on the Texas economy?

Key Term

commercial agriculture

Taking Notes

Copy this chart. As you read this section, fill in the chart with changes brought on by the expansion of railroads into Texas. Add as many "effect" boxes as you need.

Cause: Railroads expand into Texas

Effect: End of cattle trails

Main Idea The extension of railroads into Texas changed the lives of ranchers, farmers, and other Texans.

Setting the Scene For years, the main cash crop of Abilene wasn't cotton or corn—it was bison bones. Hunters had destroyed the herds of bison in the area in the mid-1870s. They left the bones on the prairie to dry and bleach out in the hot Abilene sun. By the 1880s, after the founding of Abilene, a booming business in bison bones grew up. Manufacturers used elements from the bones for making fertilizers, buttons, and fine bone china. Bone brokers gathered the bones and piled them at the railroad station in Abilene. At one point, the pile was 30 feet wide and about five blocks long! All in all, about half a million tons of bison bones were shipped out of West Texas by rail.

The railroads made the bison bone business possible. They also changed the business of farming and ranching. Now farmers and ranchers could ship their products farther than ever before.

A Busy Rail Yard

Railroads enabled farmers to ship their goods to distant markets. This photograph shows Houston's Grand Central Depot as it looked in 1894. **Drawing Conclusions** Are the trains in this image arriving or departing? How can you tell?



Railroads Change Ranching

For years, cowboys herded their cattle along the trails that led from Texas to the rail links in Kansas. The building of rail lines in Texas, however, changed the cattle business. Now cattle could be shipped by rail straight out of Texas.

The first railroads The first rail line in Texas opened in 1851. Over the next 10 years, tracks slowly spread across Texas. Nearly all of the early rail lines linked Houston to nearby towns. Ranchers, however, lived in rural areas, so the early trains were of no use to them. Ranchers needed rail lines to move cattle from the Texas plains to other states, where hungry customers would pay cash for beef.

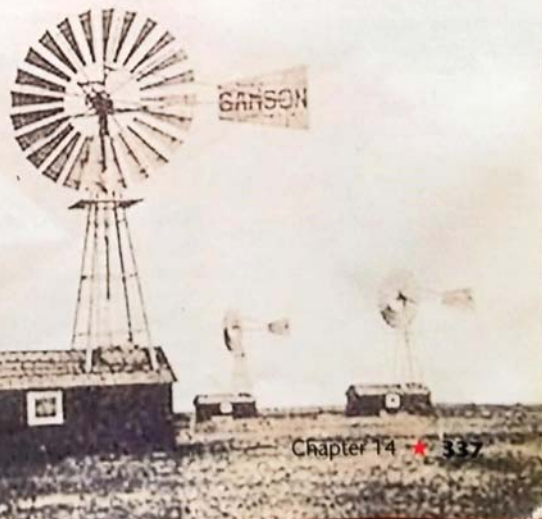
Railroads link Texas to the rest of the nation Railroad building in Texas had ceased during the Civil War. After the war, construction resumed. Yet progress was slow. Then in 1873, the Texas rail system linked to the nationwide rail network. That same year, some Texas ranchers began shipping their cattle by rail. The linking of Texas to the rest of the nation changed the ranching business in Texas.

From trails to rails Although Texas ranchers now had access to rail lines, it was still cheaper to drive the cattle over trails. Yet the quarantines and barbed wire you read about in Section 1 convinced ranchers to use the railroads to move their livestock to market. By the 1890s, the railhead at Fort Worth had become a collection point for Texas cattle.

At first, Fort Worth served as a place to gather cattle for transport. Ranchers herded the animals onto trains and shipped them elsewhere for slaughter. This changed in 1901. That year, Swift and Company and Armour and Company built meatpacking plants in Fort Worth. Within about a decade, Fort Worth had established itself as one of the nation's largest meatpacking centers. Although the days of the open range were over, the cattle business was still vital to Texas.

Railroads Change Farming

The railroads changed the way Texans farmed. With access to railroads, a farmer who grew more than his family needed could ship the surplus to market. In this way, the rail lines led to **commercial agriculture** in the state. Commercial agriculture is the growing of crops for sale in order to make a profit. Farmers could also use the railroads to bring in seeds, plows, and other items they needed.



AS YOU READ **Draw Inferences** Why would beef fetch a much lower price in Texas than it would outside the state?

Windmills Windmills enabled farmers to pump water from beneath the ground. **Drawing Inferences** Why would there be more windmills in areas that received little rainfall?

GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Skills

As industry and the population of Texas grew, the open range gradually closed.

- 1. Comprehension** Name the two factors relating directly to business and industry that led to the closing of the frontier.
- 2. Critical Thinking**
Making Predictions What do you think will happen to land in Texas once the open range is closed?

Economics

Causes of the Closing of the Open Range



Farmers ride the rails to West Texas Railroads also led people to begin farming the land in West Texas. The railroad companies wanted people to buy the land the railroads owned there. They also hoped these new settlers would become rail customers.

Growing crops in West Texas required a different method of farming. This was because there was less rainfall than in the eastern part of the state. Farmers tried to conserve water. They also tried to irrigate their land and use well water. However, stored water evaporated quickly in the West Texas heat.

Different crops and different tools Farmers found that corn and other crops that grew well in East Texas did not do as well in the western part of the state. As a result, they grew other crops. The railroads had shown Texas farmers the power of machines. More farmers began to use machines to help plant and harvest their crops. Some farmers even used steam-powered tractors. Machines helped farmers increase their harvest.

New machines and railroad rates were expensive. Indeed, farmers were producing more crops. Yet to earn a profit, those crops had to fetch a certain price in the markets. When crop prices fell in the late 1800s, many farmers went into debt. Some had to give up their land and farm on land owned by others.

Railroads Affect the Economy

Most Texans understood that the lack of a railroad could mean economic doom for their town. As a result, they did what they could to convince railroads to lay track in their region. Towns donated sites for railroad stations, storehouses, and holding pens for livestock. Some people paid money to railroad companies to get rail access. Counties and cities borrowed money to provide railroads with cash and other incentives to build tracks.

AS YOU READ **Ask Questions** Before the arrival of railroads, why did it not benefit small farmers to grow more than they needed for themselves and their families?

Many Texas cities and towns owe their success to the business created by railroads. Abilene, Amarillo, and Midland prospered as railroad towns in the 1880s. Railroads in El Paso and Laredo helped these towns to grow. Growth of border cities tied Texas more closely to the economy of Mexico, even as the railroads forged stronger links to the economy of the United States.

Railroads and trade Railroads also changed old patterns of trade in Texas. Before railroads, most trade had been local. After the railroads, Texans dealt with distant suppliers and buyers. These dealings involved people they did not know, and over whom they had no control. This was a change. Many Texans were used to face-to-face contact. Railroads put Texans in contact with more distant markets, quickly and cheaply. Overall, these new business dealings were a big boost to the state's economy.

Railroads spur business Railroads helped the Texas economy in many other ways in the late 1800s. Railroad companies needed lumber to build rail ties, bridges, stations, holding pens, and freight platforms. They also needed timber to build homes for their workers. These needs spurred the growth of the lumber industry.

The people who worked on the railroads also spurred business. People founded new towns or moved old towns in order to be closer to the rails. In addition, railroads needed coal to power their trains. As a result, Erath County and Eagle Pass on the Mexican border began mining coal.

Drawbacks of railroads Large companies from outside Texas gained control of most Texas railroads in the late 1800s. The Southern Pacific purchased some Texas lines, while others became part of the Missouri Pacific or the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe Railroad. In taking over the Texas rail lines, companies gained great influence over much of the state's economy.

A Texas Profile



Robert Justus Kleberg
1853–1932

When Richard King died in 1885, his widow asked Robert Kleberg to take control of the King ranch. Under Kleberg's care, the ranch thrived. By 1925 he had doubled the ranch's size. He even set aside a site for the town of Kingsville. In addition, he improved the quality of the herd, crossbreeding cattle to produce a tick-resistant breed called Santa Gertrudis. In 1940, Santa Gertrudis gained recognition as a distinct breed. This made it the first breed of cattle native to the Western Hemisphere.

What improvements did Kleberg make to the King Ranch?

AS YOU READ Summarize How did the railroads improve life for some Texans but not for others?

Section 2 Assessment

Recall

- Define** (a) commercial agriculture.
- Identify** Explain the significance of the following: (a) Swift and Company, (b) farm machinery.

Comprehension

- How did railroads change ranching?
- What did Texans do to encourage railroad companies to build in their state?

- How did railroads boost the Texas economy?

Critical Thinking and Writing

- Exploring the Main Idea** What changes did railroads bring to ranching and farming?
- Comparing** Compare aspects of the cattle industry before and after the growth of railroads.
- Identifying Cause and Effect** What happened to a town if it could not attract a railroad to it?

ACTIVITY

Listing Pros and Cons

Suppose you are a farmer in Texas in the late 1800s. Make a list of the positive effects of the railroads. Then list the negative effects of railroads. Overall, do you think that the railroads have brought greater benefits or greater drawbacks to your life? Why?

3 From Family Farms to Commercial Farming

BEFORE YOU READ

Reading Focus

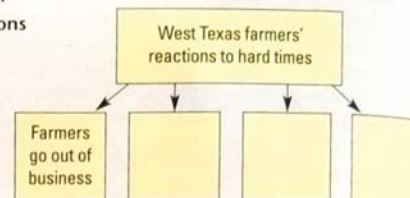
- What encouraged people to move to Texas?
- What factors made it hard for tenant farmers to prosper?
- What hardships affected Texas farmers in the late 1800s?

Key Terms

tenant farmer
interest
irrigation
depressions

Taking Notes

Copy this chart. As you read this section, fill in the chart with the effects of hard times for Texas farmers. Add as many boxes as you need.



Main Idea Many Texans who had once owned their own farms became tenant farmers. The high cost of land and low price of cotton forced many landowners into tenancy.

Setting the Scene The family ate breakfast in the dark so they could be in the field by dawn. They each carried a long sack that could hold 25 pounds of cotton. Dragging their sacks behind them, mother, father, and children worked down the rows. They stopped only to empty their sacks into the cotton wagon, and to eat lunch under the hot July sun. By afternoon the backs of the taller family members ached from bending over the plants. Yet the work was hardest on the hands. In the mornings the cotton was wet with dew. "It softened your fingers so the sharp point on the cotton burrs pricked your fingers until they might bleed," one Texan remembered of his childhood on the farm. "In a little while the sun would come up and drive the dew away. Then the burr points would get sharper, but you kept on picking." Work ended when the sun set. The next day the routine began again.

Lots for Sale

Notices such as this drew buyers to Texas towns. **Comparing How** does this notice compare to modern real estate advertisements?



Farming and Growth

Life for the average Texas farm family was not much different in 1870 than it had been before the Civil War. The plantation system and slavery were gone, of course. Thousands of small farms remained in eastern and central Texas. They still raised cotton and corn, as well as a few cattle, sheep, hogs, and chickens. Corn provided food for people and livestock. Farmers sold the cotton for cash, which was often in short supply. Farmers needed cash not only for daily use, but to pay their taxes as well.

Each fall, farmers slaughtered some of their cattle and hogs. They sold the hides and preserved the meat for food. Farmers still plowed their land with oxen or mules and planted seeds by hand. This type of agriculture, called subsistence farming, produced little more than the family farm needed to survive. Husbands still made the household furniture and most of the tools used in the home and fields. Wives still produced the family's clothing, soap, candles, and bedding. Farm men and women came together to hold house-raising and quilting parties, just as they had done for some 50 years.

Population growth By 1870, Texas was still mostly rural. Galveston, with just 14,000 people, was the state's largest city. San Antonio was slightly smaller. Houston and Austin were the only other major cities. Dallas, Fort Worth, and El Paso were all still small towns on the frontier. Some counties, such as Washington, had no large towns at all. Still the state's population was growing. Much of this growth was due to immigration.

Newcomers were encouraged to come to Texas. The state needed workers to replace the freed slaves, as well as farmers to settle the western parts of the state. To meet these needs, Texas turned to the southern states. Newspapers printed articles that said a farmer needed "no money to secure a good farm in almost any part of Texas." All that was needed to succeed were a "good character, industrious habits, and one or two boys."

More people and more farms In 1872 alone, about 100,000 people came to Texas. More people moved into the state. By 1890, some 2.2 million people lived in Texas. Most of the newcomers were from the South, mainly from Georgia and Tennessee. Many were poor and moved to Texas to escape their debts. In East Texas some arranged with local landowners to farm the land. Others headed farther west, buying public land from the state. Still others bought land from the railroads. Most new settlers were farmers.

Changes in Texas Farming

Texas plantations had long been involved in growing crops for cash. Until the Civil War, however, most rural Texans practiced subsistence agriculture. Once the railroads came, farmers could move their crops to distant markets. This gave even small farmers a good reason to grow as many cash crops as possible.

To many farmers, cotton was an ideal crop. Demand for it existed worldwide. In addition, it withstood drought better than many other crops. Growing cotton also suited the farming experience of the newcomers arriving from the South.

Tenant farming When slavery ended, few plantation owners had the money to hire workers. As a result, the number of **tenant farmers** grew. A tenant farmer is a person who rents a plot of land from its owner and pays for its use with a share of the crop. Tenant farmers provided their own mules, tools, and other necessities. They typically kept two thirds of their crop and paid the rent for the land with one third of the harvest.

Tenant farmers differed from sharecroppers. Tenant farmers owned tools and work animals. They paid rent for the land and legally owned the crops grown on that land. In contrast, sharecroppers owned nothing. They were hired hands who received wages for their labor with a portion of the harvest. Sharecroppers did not rent the land, and they did not legally own the crops grown on that land.

Although land was cheap, buying food and seeds to start a farm required money. As a result, many freedmen became tenant farmers. Freedmen were newly freed slaves. Many remained as sharecroppers on the very plantations where they had worked as slaves.

Primary Source

Life on the Farm

Albert Erwin lived during the time fences and ranching closed the range. Farming became more important, but many Texans still depended on hunting for food.

"We lived off of what was produced on the farm. Wild game was trapped or shot easily at any time we had a hankering for the meat. Wild turkey, sagehens, pheasants and ducks were some of the fowl we could go out and [bag] most anytime. We grew plenty of corn, wheat, cotton and vegetables. Arnold made corn meal in his own grinder and traded wheat for flour. I don't suppose that Arnold bought a \$100 worth of food and supplies for his family during a year's time."

—Albert Erwin,
from *American Life Histories*:
Manuscripts from the
Federal Writer's Project, 1936–1940

Analyzing Primary Sources
What kinds of crops did Erwin grow on the farm?

AS YOU READ **Use Prior Knowledge**
Why were many southerners so poor in the years following the Civil War?



Sam Ryon Sharecropper Farm

Sam Ryon was an African American sharecropper in Texas. He worked on a cotton farm in the 1890s. Today, his farmhouse is part of the George Ranch Historical Park. Visitors can tour the park in Fort Bend County. Ryon's farmhouse looks much as it did in the 1800s.



Take It to the NET

Virtual Field Trip For an interactive look at Sam Ryon's farm, visit the *Lone Star* section of www.PHSchool.com.

Most tenant farmers viewed their condition as temporary. They wished to save money and then buy their own land. Yet it was hard to succeed at tenant farming. One reason was that landowners gave tenant farmers only small plots of land. This prevented the farmers from raising enough crops to make a profit. Most tenant farmers were deeply in debt.

The cycle of debt Tenant farmers often could not produce enough food to feed their families. This was because they almost always planted cotton. Tenant farmers had to buy food from merchants or landowners. If a family had no money, the merchant or landowner would let the family buy what it needed on credit. The farmer paid for these purchases after the harvest, when he sold his share of the crop.

This arrangement was risky for all concerned. No one could predict the size of the crop in advance. A drought or a sudden flood might make the crop smaller, or even wipe it out. Also, no one knew what the price of cotton would be at harvest time. If the price was low, the farmer's share of the crop might not bring enough money to pay his bill. To buy on credit, the farmer had to pay **interest**. Interest is additional money paid by a borrower to a lender for the use of the money borrowed.

Because of these risks, interest rates were usually high. Once their bills and interest were paid, few tenant farmers had much money left after the harvest. Many even found that they owed more than they received for their share of the crop. These families started the next season already in debt from the last one. This made it even more difficult to get free of the cycle of debt and the tenant farming system.

AS YOU READ **Monitor Your Reading**
Why was it difficult to prosper as a tenant farmer?

The economics of farming For tenant farmers to succeed, the price of cotton had to be high and the amount of cotton produced had to be great. These two conditions rarely occurred together, because of the principle of supply and demand. When demand is high and supply is low, prices go up. For example, if buyers want more cotton than is available, the price of cotton will rise. On the other hand, if the supply of cotton goes up and demand stays the same or goes down, the price falls.

More farmers in the state meant bigger cotton harvests. Texas cotton production jumped from about 350,000 bales in 1869 to more than 3.5 million bales in 1900. Yet the supply grew faster than the demand. Soon, the price of cotton fell. Cotton that had sold for 16.5 cents per pound in 1869 brought only 5.7 cents per pound in 1898.

Farming New Lands

The railroads wanted to increase settlement in West Texas. They hoped new settlers would ship and receive products by train. The rail lines also wanted to sell their land to new settlers. In this way, they hoped to recover the cost of laying the tracks.

The state still sold public land. As ranches failed in the mid-1880s, many ranchers sold their land. To meet this competition, railroads offered land from their land grants at very low prices. Sometimes farmers were able to buy railroad land for just a few cents an acre.

Farming West Texas Much of West Texas could not support farming without **irrigation**. Irrigation supplies water to land by artificial means. Most railroad companies knew this. Yet they wanted to sell their land. The railroads did their best to lure farmers to places that were unsuitable for farming. They hid the truth about West Texas from outsiders. Texas newspapers rarely wrote about dry conditions in the state. Even geography books described the region as “less humid” than other areas.

A period of greater than average rainfall convinced farmers that they could prosper on the western plains. Yet settlers had not been there long enough to know that years of drought often followed such rains. A stream of immigrants poured into the land.

Hard times for farmers From the 1870s through the 1890s the United States experienced three economic **depressions**. A depression is a period during which business activity and prices drop and many workers lose their jobs. Demand for many cash crops fell. Crop prices fell, too. Many farmers had borrowed money to buy their land and tools. Across the nation, thousands of farms failed.



Field Hands

After slavery ended, many former slaves took jobs as hired field hands. This 1907 photograph shows a group of workers in a cotton field near Dallas. **Drawing Inferences** Why might a former slave continue to work on cotton plantations?



Advocates of Agriculture

The Grange worked to improve the lives of farmers. This mural for the Grange emphasizes the value of farm work. **Analyzing Images** What activities does this mural depict?

AS YOU READ Summarize What challenges did farmers face in the years after the Civil War?

AFTER YOU READ

Section 3 Assessment

Recall

- Define** (a) tenant farmer, (b) interest, (c) irrigation, (d) depressions.
- Identify** Explain the significance of the following: (a) railroads, (b) cycle of debt.

Comprehension

- How did population growth affect Texas farms?
- Why did railroad companies want to sell land to settlers?

- What were the goals and accomplishments of the National Grange?

Critical Thinking and Writing

- Exploring the Main Idea** What conditions led some Texans to become tenant farmers?
- Making Generalizations** Based on the section, how would you generalize the life of a tenant farmer?

ACTIVITY

Writing a Journal

Suppose you are a farmer from East Texas who has moved to West Texas with your family. Write a journal entry describing farm life in the west. Describe the land and your experiences farming.

By 1885, Texas farmers were starting to recover. Then, the wet years ended in West Texas. Two years of severe drought followed. More depression and droughts hit the state in the 1890s. Low crop prices drove many West Texas farmers out of business. Some sold their farms to wealthy men and then stayed on as hired hands. Others became tenant farmers. Still others headed for East Texas where they joined other tenant farmers on plantations or took jobs in towns. By 1900, half of all farmers in Texas were tenant farmers.

Farmers help themselves Farmers throughout the nation experienced the same hardships as those in Texas. In 1867, farmers in Minnesota founded the National Grange to help farmers and their families. Six years later, Texans formed a branch of the Grange.

The National Grange helped farmers by sharing knowledge about the latest farming techniques. It also set up stores where farmers could buy goods at lower prices than those charged by other merchants. These stores failed, however, when the depression and droughts of the 1880s left many farmers unable to pay their bills.

Farmers met with one another, listened to speakers, and used the library at Grange halls. Grangers demanded better schools and free textbooks. In 1876 they helped create an agricultural college in Texas. This was the Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Texas A&M University). Grangers also called for the regulation of railroads.

Membership in the Texas Grange declined in the 1880s. Hard times caused many farmers to join a group called the Farmers' Alliance. This group was small at first, in part because it called for drastic changes in the state. Within a few years, though, it had about 100,000 members.