Fields Across America

How land and people shaped U.S. farming regions

8.G.3 "Identify the agricultural regions of the United States. Give explanations for how the land was used and developed during the growth of the United States."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the five farming regions in the passage. Circle one land or climate clue for each region, then number actions that helped develop farming there.

Why Farms Looked Different

1 By 1900, a train crossing the United States could pass farms that looked nothing alike. In the Northeast, cool weather, hills, and nearby cities supported dairy farms that sold milk and butter. Farther west, the Midwest's deep soil and warm summers supported corn and hogs. Farmers fed much of their corn to hogs before shipping meat to growing cities. These regions were not fixed borders on a map. They were areas where climate, soil, markets, and people's choices shaped similar kinds of farming.

2 On the Great Plains, fertile grassland stretched west of the Midwest, but rainfall was less dependable. Settlers broke prairie sod to plant wheat, and windmills pumped water for livestock. The Homestead Act of 1862 offered land claims to settlers, while railroads carried grain to distant markets. This expansion took land from Native nations and replaced much of the prairie with fields. In the South, long growing seasons favored cotton. Before the Civil War, enslaved people were forced to grow and pick cotton on plantations, enriching owners through stolen labor.

3 After the Civil War, many Southern farmers grew cotton as sharecroppers, renting land and paying owners with part of their crop. Debt often kept these families tied to the same land. In California's Central Valley, dry summers made irrigation necessary for many crops. Canals brought river water to fields of grapes and other fruits, and railroads moved the harvest to faraway buyers. Irrigation expanded farmland but also changed rivers and habitats. Across these regions, farming grew through labor, transportation, and changes to the land, not climate alone.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did conditions in the Northeast and Midwest support different kinds of farming?

2. Why was farming on the Great Plains challenging, and what two changes helped settlers expand it?

3. How was Southern land used before and after the Civil War? Explain the change in who worked the cotton fields.

4. How did people expand farming in California's Central Valley, and what was one effect on the land or water?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

You are advising a new farming community in 1900. Choose the Great Plains or California's Central Valley, and write four sentences proposing a crop, a solution to a regional challenge, and a way to reach buyers. In your fourth sentence, explain one likely cost to people or the environment.

ANSWER KEY

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GRADE 8 · 8.G.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the five farming regions in the passage. Circle one land or climate clue for each region, then number actions that helped develop farming there. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did conditions in the Northeast and Midwest support different kinds of farming?	**The Northeast's cool weather, hills, and nearby cities supported dairy farming. The Midwest's deep soil and warm summers supported corn and hogs.**
2	Why was farming on the Great Plains challenging, and what two changes helped settlers expand it?	**Rainfall was less dependable. The Homestead Act offered land claims, and railroads carried grain to distant markets. Windmills also helped by pumping water for livestock.**
3	How was Southern land used before and after the Civil War? Explain the change in who worked the cotton fields.	**Cotton grew on Southern plantations through the forced labor of enslaved people before the war. Afterward, many farmers grew cotton as sharecroppers who rented land and paid owners with part of the crop.**
4	How did people expand farming in California's Central Valley, and what was one effect on the land or water?	**Canals brought river water to fields during dry summers, expanding farmland. Irrigation also changed rivers and habitats.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

I would start a wheat farm on the Great Plains in 1900. I would use a windmill to pump water when rain is scarce. I would send harvested grain by rail to buyers in distant cities. Breaking up more prairie for fields could leave less habitat for grassland animals.

Accept other passage-supported connections between a region's conditions, crops, and development. For Part 3, look for a workable plan for the chosen region and a reasonable consequence explained in exactly four sentences.