Fields of Change

Oklahoma farming before the Great Depression

OKH.C.6.5 "Examine how agricultural conditions and practices were precursors to the Great Depression by describing the boom-and-bust cycle of Oklahoma's agricultural output to meet the needs of World War I followed by post-war overproduction."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the wartime conditions and choices that expanded Oklahoma farming. Circle the postwar changes that turned high output into a problem, then number the events in the order they happened.

When More Crops Brought Less Money

1 Imagine an Oklahoma wheat farmer watching a train leave town in 1918. During World War I, armies and civilians overseas needed food, and wartime demand helped push crop prices upward. Oklahoma farmers could earn more by selling wheat and other crops. Many planted more acres, bought equipment on credit, or broke up grassland to expand fields. Banks and merchants often expected strong sales to continue. The wartime boom was not just a lucky harvest. It changed how much land farmers worked and how much money they owed. Those choices mattered after the fighting ended.

2 When the war ended in 1918, overseas demand for U.S. farm products weakened as European farms recovered. Yet Oklahoma fields did not instantly shrink. Farmers had equipment to pay for and bills coming due, so many kept planting large crops and hoped to sell enough to cover their costs. When farms produced more than buyers wanted at earlier prices, crop prices fell. A farmer might harvest plenty of wheat but receive less money for it than during the war. Growing more could even add to the surplus, putting further pressure on prices.

3 For farmers who had borrowed to expand, lower prices made loan payments harder. Some tried to make up for lost income by planting even more acres, which could keep supplies high. Plowing native grassland also left some soils more exposed to wind, increasing vulnerability to erosion in later dry years. This farm downturn began years before the stock market crash of 1929. It did not cause the Great Depression by itself, but it left many rural Oklahomans with debt and reduced income before the wider economy collapsed. The boom had created obligations that the bust made difficult to meet.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did wartime demand change both the amount of land Oklahoma farmers worked and the money some of them owed?

2. Why did many farmers keep planting large crops even after overseas demand weakened?

3. How could an Oklahoma farmer harvest plenty of wheat after the war but earn less money than during the war?

4. Describe two ways wartime expansion left Oklahoma farms vulnerable before the wider economy collapsed.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 4- to 5-sentence note from a farm adviser in 1920 to an Oklahoma farmer considering another equipment purchase on credit. Explain why wartime profits may not last, predict how continued large harvests could affect income, and recommend one choice that could lower the farmer's financial risk. Use at least two details from the passage.

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PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the wartime conditions and choices that expanded Oklahoma farming. Circle the postwar changes that turned high output into a problem, then number the events in the order they happened. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did wartime demand change both the amount of land Oklahoma farmers worked and the money some of them owed?	**Higher wartime demand and prices led farmers to plant more acres. Some borrowed to buy equipment, increasing their debt.**
2	Why did many farmers keep planting large crops even after overseas demand weakened?	**They had equipment and bills to pay for, so they hoped large sales would cover their costs.**
3	How could an Oklahoma farmer harvest plenty of wheat after the war but earn less money than during the war?	**Farmers produced more than buyers wanted at earlier prices, so wheat prices fell and a large harvest brought in less money.**
4	Describe two ways wartime expansion left Oklahoma farms vulnerable before the wider economy collapsed.	**Borrowing to expand left farmers struggling to repay loans when prices fell. Breaking up grassland also exposed some soil to wind erosion in later dry years.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Before you borrow for another plow, remember that wartime demand pushed crop prices up, but overseas demand has weakened since the war ended. Many farmers are still planting large crops to pay their bills, so the extra wheat could keep prices low. You might harvest more and still earn less than you did during the war. Consider delaying the purchase so you do not add another loan payment while crop income is uncertain.

Accept answers that connect wartime expansion to postwar overproduction and falling prices. Students may discuss debt, reduced income, or exposed soil as consequences, but should not claim that Oklahoma farming alone caused the Great Depression.