From Fields to Forums

How changing markets led farmers to organize

USH.C.2.1.B "Describe the changing role of the American farmer, including the establishment of the Granger movement."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two details showing how farmers' markets changed, circle two pressures farmers faced, and number two ways Grange members acted together to respond.

When Farmers Organized

1 In the mid-1800s, many American farm families raised food for themselves and sold some surplus nearby. As railroads spread and cities grew, more farmers planted crops to sell far from home. A wheat grower on the Great Plains might buy a steel plow on credit, harvest a large crop, and ship grain hundreds of miles to buyers. That farmer depended on lenders, railroad companies, and grain elevators, which stored crops before shipment. A bigger market offered more customers, but it also meant that changes in shipping charges or crop prices could determine whether a family paid its debts.

2 After the Civil War, farmers often faced falling crop prices while still owing money for land and equipment. Some believed railroads and grain elevators charged unfair rates, especially where farmers had few other ways to ship or store a harvest. In 1867, Oliver Hudson Kelley and others founded the Patrons of Husbandry, commonly called the Grange. Its local groups brought farm families together to share farming knowledge and discuss common problems. Women could join and hold offices, unusual for many national organizations at the time. Members also formed cooperatives to purchase supplies or sell crops, hoping to gain bargaining power by acting together.

3 The Grange did more than help members trade. In the 1870s, Grangers urged several state governments to limit charges by railroads and grain elevators. These measures became known as Granger laws. Farmers were no longer only individual producers choosing what to plant; many were also organized citizens trying to shape the rules of the marketplace. Their political efforts had limits, particularly when railroad traffic crossed state lines. Still, the movement showed how dependence on distant markets could push farmers toward collective action. It also helped make the costs of moving and storing food a public issue, not just a private complaint.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did selling crops far from home change what farmers depended on?

2. Why did the pressures farmers faced after the Civil War make the Grange appealing?

3. How could a Grange cooperative change a farmer's position as a buyer or seller?

4. How did the push for Granger laws add a political role to farmers' work?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a 75- to 100-word letter to a local newspaper from the viewpoint of a Grange member in the 1870s. Explain how selling crops has changed farmers' lives, name two pressures from the passage, and propose one action farmers could take together, explaining how it could help.

ANSWER KEY

From Fields to Forums

HIGH SCHOOL · USH.C.2.1.B

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two details showing how farmers' markets changed, circle two pressures farmers faced, and number two ways Grange members acted together to respond. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did selling crops far from home change what farmers depended on?	**Farmers depended more on lenders, railroads, grain elevators, and prices in distant markets.**
2	Why did the pressures farmers faced after the Civil War make the Grange appealing?	**Falling crop prices, debts, and charges for shipping or storage were hard to handle alone. The Grange let farmers discuss these problems and act together.**
3	How could a Grange cooperative change a farmer's position as a buyer or seller?	**By purchasing supplies or selling crops together, farmers hoped to gain bargaining power they lacked individually.**
4	How did the push for Granger laws add a political role to farmers' work?	**Farmers organized to ask state governments to limit railroad and grain elevator charges, rather than only making choices on their own farms.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

To the editor: Our family now grows wheat for buyers far from our county, rather than relying mostly on what we raise for home and nearby customers. We must pay railroad shipping charges and grain elevator fees even when wheat prices fall. Alone, each farmer has little power to change those costs. Our Grange should ask the state to limit unfair charges for shipping and storage. Such a law would give farm families a fairer chance to cover their debts. We are growers, but we must also speak together as citizens.

Accept other passage-supported explanations of farmers' growing dependence on markets and their collective responses. Letters may propose a cooperative or political action if they explain how it could help.