

# Settling the Great Plains



# The Great Plains



- A region with defined characteristics:
  - Dry
  - Windy
  - Grasslands
  - Gold??

# Why did they move West?

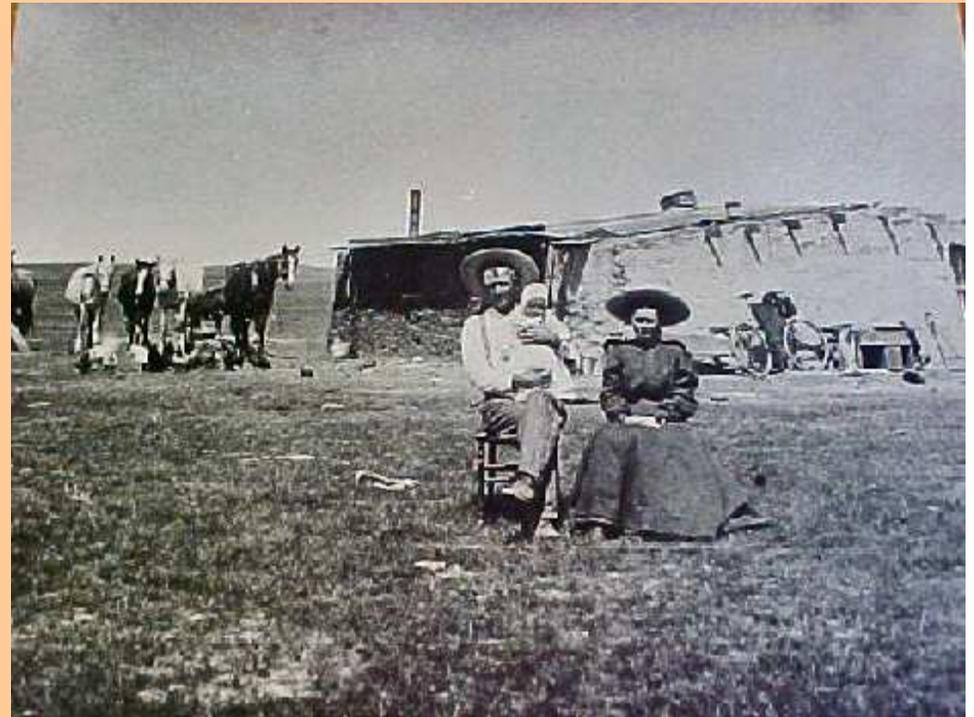
## Railroads—

- 1869-1884 **FIVE** Transcontinental RR built (connected E and W)

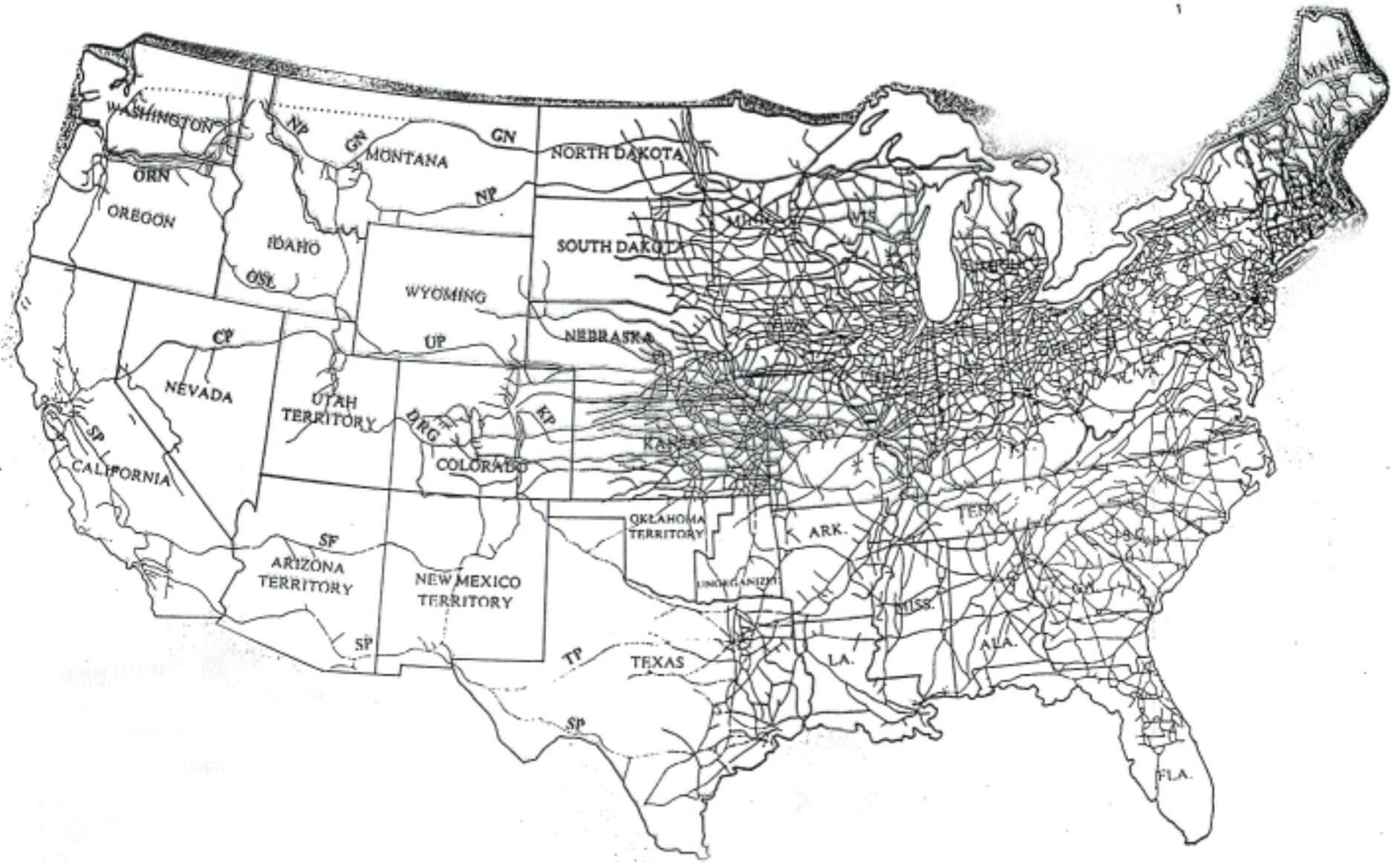
## Homestead Act—

- 1862
- 160 acres free land to any head of household

**\*\*1862-1900= 600,000 families moved west\*\***



# Railroads 1890





## Advances in farming:

- Barbed wire
- McCormick Reaper
- Steel Plow
- Wind mill



## Exodusters:



- About 6,000 Af-Am's move from post –reconstruction South to KS (40,000 in KS by 1880)

*“What's going to be a hundred years from now ain't much account to us.... The whites has the lands and the sense, an' the blacks has nothin' but their freedom, an' it's jest like a dream to them.”*

**Benjamin “Pap” Singleton**

# Cowboys

- **Demand beef**
  - Rapidly growing cities
  - Railroads in the Great Plains



**“BEEF Its What’s for dinner”**



# C O W T O W N S



**CATTLE TRAILS**

# The Job of a Cowboy

- Spring roundup
- Cattle were penned and starved to prevent runaways
- Cattle were then sorted and branded
- Long drives, the overland transport of cattle, lasted about 3 months



# Job of a Cowboy Cont.

- Worked 10 to 14 hour days
- 15 to 40 years old
- Expert rider and roper
- Typical Cowboy
  - Could handle and drive about 250 to 300 head a cattle



# Life of the Plains farmer

- **IT WAS HARD!!**
  - Had to be self-sufficient
  - Grew wheat & corn
  - Dug water wells
  - Made soap and candles
  - Fought the weather and the land constantly

# Extreme Hardships

- Droughts
- Floods
- Fires
- Blizzards
- Locust plagues

## How did they live?

- **Dugouts**: built into the side of a hill or a ravine...
- **Soddy**: built out of stacked plains turf (snakes, and insects when it rained...)
- Both were warm in the winter and cool in the summer



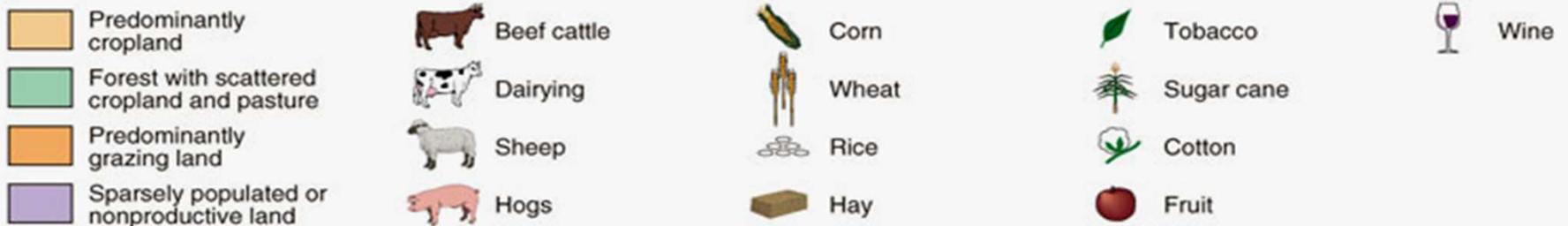
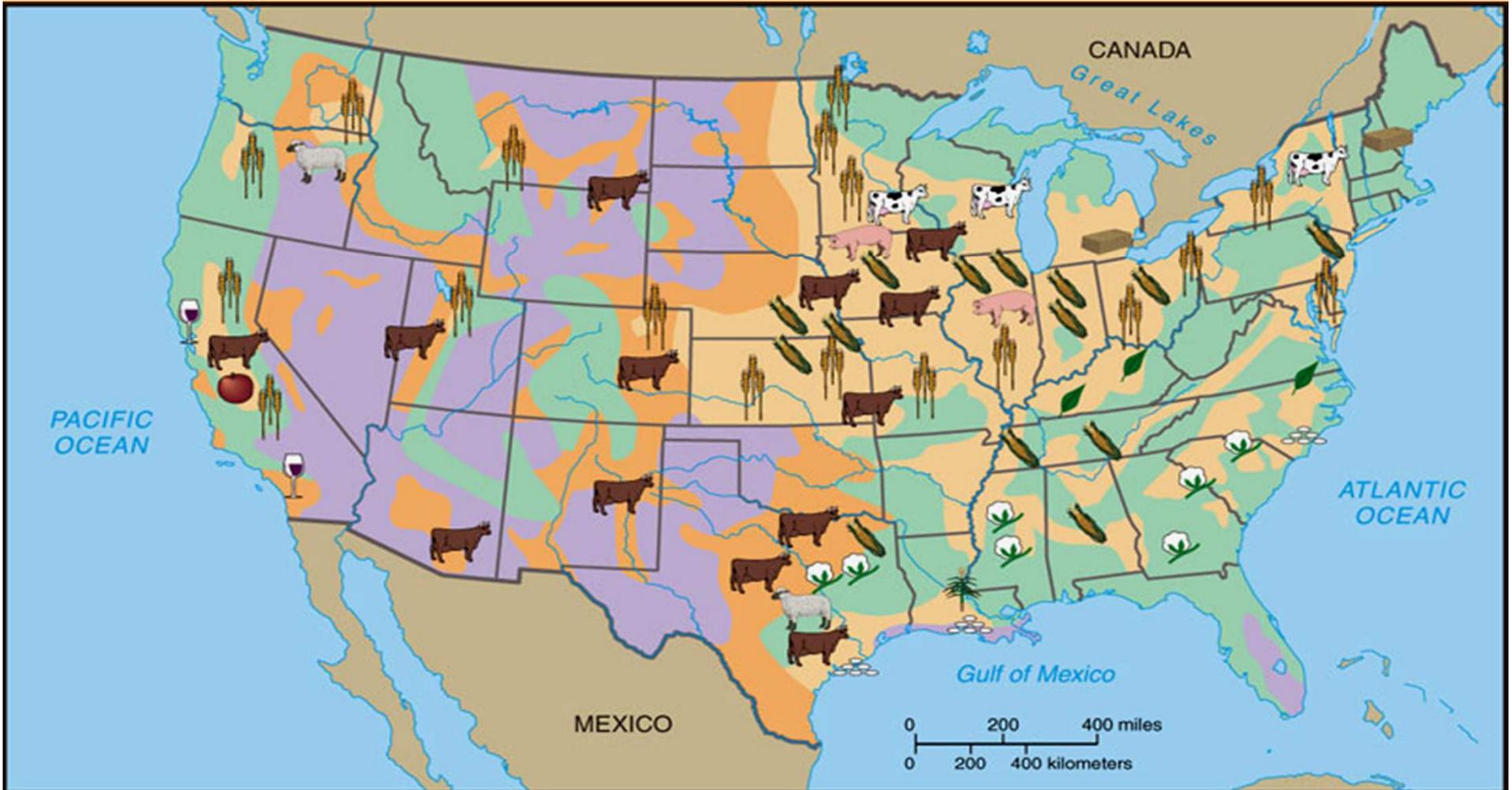




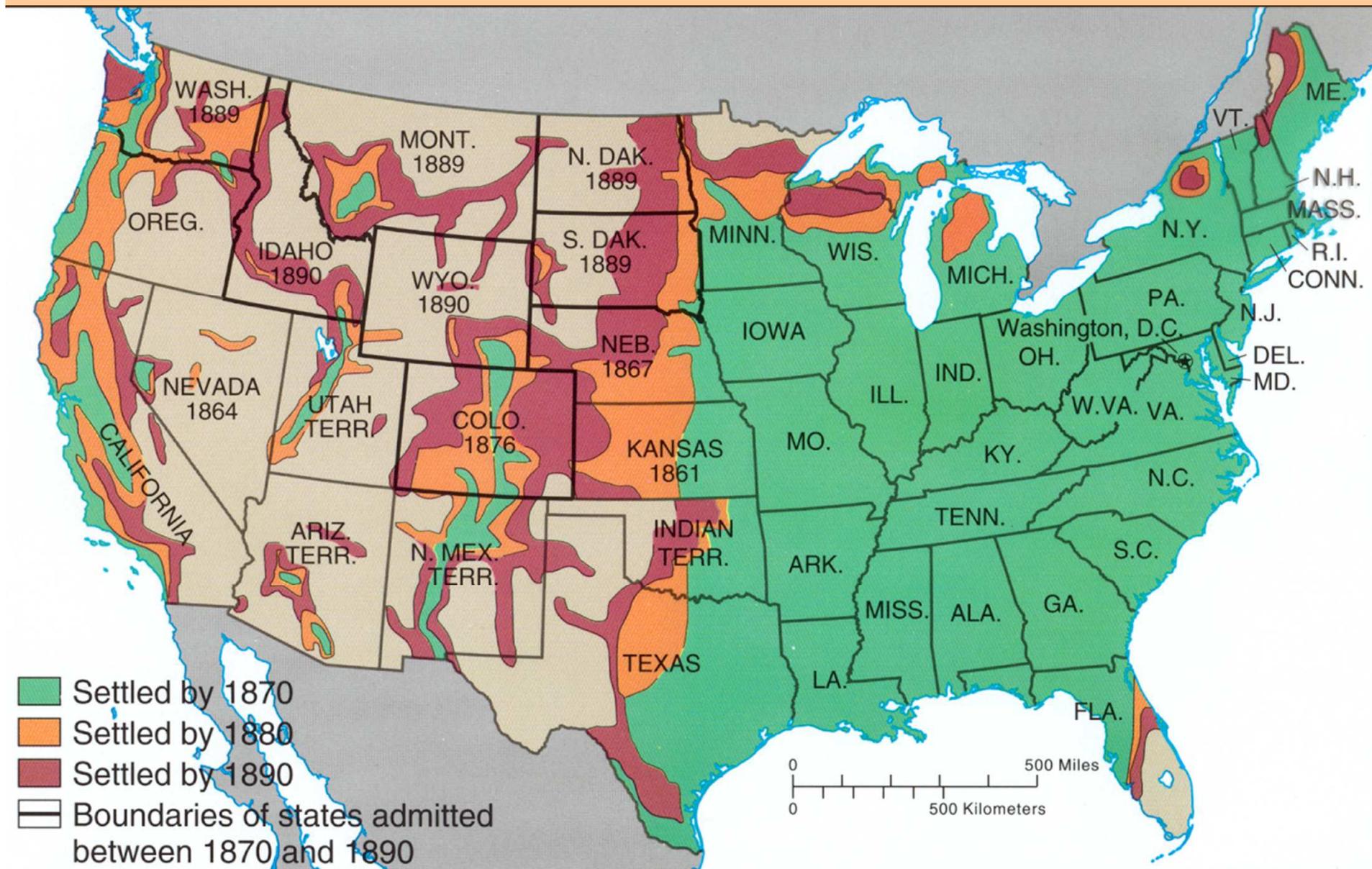
## Farmers go into debt...

1. Borrow \$ for new equipment & land
2. New technology's = increased production:
  - Wheat prices fall from 1867: \$2 a bushel to 1887: \$.68...
  - **Solution? Grow More!**
3. Lower prices mean they can't pay debts:
  - Forces them to sell out to RR's or large farms (Bonanza farms)
  - Or just lose their farm...

# Land use in 1890



# 1890 US census declares the “frontier” closed...



# The End of the Open Range

- Ended 1887
  - Harsh winters and dry summers wiped out whole herds
  - Land was also heavily over grazed
  - One invention ultimately lead to the end of the era of the wide-open west...



# End of the Era

- Many farmers fell into huge debt
  - Banks
  - Railroads
- Popularity of the Western Frontier lost its appeal
  - No one made money
  - Very hard to live on the land