

A Timeline of Agriculture in Oklahoma History

Objective

Students will use maps to trace historical migrations of different people coming to Oklahoma and leaving Oklahoma. Students will discuss economic cycles of prosperity and hard times for Oklahoma agriculture. Students will examine the impact of government on Oklahoma agriculture. Students will identify cause and effect in events in the history of Oklahoma agriculture.

Procedures

1. On a map of the US, trace the following historical migrations. As you trace the migrations, students will name the direction of the movement (N, S, E, W)
 - The movement of the Plains Indians through present day Oklahoma from Canada to Mexico and back again;
 - The movement of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Creek, Seminole and Choctaw from east of the Mississippi River to Indian Territory;
 - The movement of settlers into Oklahoma from Kansas, Arkansas and Texas;
 - The Okie migration from Oklahoma to California.
2. Divide your classroom or space on the playground to represent the migrations listed above. Use signs to designate the cardinal directions.
 - Students will simulate the migrations to show how Oklahoma was settled. Assign students to each migration, and have them move as you read about the event. Use the cardinal directions to tell students which way to move. Some students should represent the people who were already here by pretending to work in a garden (hoeing motion).
3. Provide each student with a copy of the historical chart included with this lesson, “Agriculture in Oklahoma History.” Read and discuss the chart as a class.
4. Oklahoma agriculture has been through many cycles of prosperity followed by periods of difficulty. Students will track those periods (boom and bust) through the list of events included with this lesson and discuss the causes both of prosperity and hard times. (Producing too much leads to lower prices for farmers. Debt acquired during prosperous 80s forced many farmers from the farm during less prosperous times.)
5. What is a desert? Why were explorers Pike and Long wrong to call Oklahoma a desert? Students will use online or library resources to research the definition of desert and write papers showing how Oklahoma is like a desert and different from a desert?
6. Find examples in the chart of government actions that impacted the history of agriculture in Oklahoma. (e.g., removal of tribes to Indian Territory; conservation efforts following Dust Bowl; demonstration

Oklahoma Academic Standards

GRADE 3

Economics: 1,2,3.

Geography: 1A;2A,B,C.

Oklahoma History: 1,3,5,6,7,9

GRADE 4

Geography: 2DE, 3, 4,5.

Exploration and Settlement:

1,4

agents)

7. Assign each student one or more of the following events. Students will look at the chart to find the cause(s) AND/OR effect(s) of the assigned event:
 - Indian Removal Act (Effect: Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek and Seminole tribes move to Oklahoma.)
 - Civil War (Effects:Freed slaves came to start all-Black towns; Soldiers and freed slaves joined cattle drives and drove cattle through Oklahoma.)
 - End of Cattle Drives (Cause: Settlers put up barbed wire fences; Railroads provided better transportation to markets.)
 - 4-H Clubs (Cause: Researchers thought youth could get their parents to accept new farm practices.)
 - More tractors on farms (Effect: Fewer horses.)
 - Dust Bowl (Causes: Drought and poor farming practices; Effect: Conservation efforts)
 - World War II (Effect: Oklahoma farmers encouraged to produce more food; Many people leave farms for higher paying jobs in the defense industries; Returning GIs choose not to return to the farm; peanuts introduced as a commercial crop.)
 - Irrigation (Effect: crops can be grown in dry areas.)
 - Wheat to the Soviet Union (Effect: higher prices for farmers.)
8. Divide students into groups, and have them act out one or more of the events in the “Agriculture in Oklahoma History” chart.

Agriculture in Oklahoma History

AD 600–1500: Spiro Culture and Beyond

Centered in what is now Spiro, Oklahoma, people of the Caddoan/Mississippian culture grow maize (corn) in fields surrounding the mounds along the Arkansas River in eastern Oklahoma.

No one knows what happened to the Spiro people, but by 1500, when the first Europeans arrived, there were Osage, Caddo, Quapaw and Wichita people growing maize and other crops along rivers in Oklahoma. The nomadic Kiowa, Kiowa-Apache and Comanche moved through, following bison herds and other game.

In 1541, the Spanish explorers Francisco Vasquez de Coronado and Hernando de Soto were the first Europeans in Oklahoma, arriving from opposite directions.

1800s

In 1803, the US government purchased 830,000 square miles from France. Known as the LOUISIANA PURCHASE, this included the area that would become Oklahoma.

That same year Zebulon Pike explored the Great Plains, including Oklahoma, and incorrectly labeled it a “GREAT AMERICAN DESERT.” Stephen Long followed in 1819 and concluded the Great Plains was unfit for agriculture, even though people had been farming here for over 1,000 years. Later farmers decided to give it a try anyway and found it was suitable for agriculture after all.

The INDIAN REMOVAL ACT of 1830 brought the Choctaw, Chickasaw, Cherokee, Creek and Seminole to Indian Territory from their land east of the Mississippi River. All brought agricultural practices, with maize as the principal crop. At that time there were already many American Indians, whites and escaped slaves living and farming in the territory. The Delaware, Cheyenne, and Apache were also forced to relocate here around that time.

Oklahoma was a haven to freed and escaped slaves before and after the CIVIL WAR. Many were farmers and came here to establish towns just for African Americans. They created more ALL-BLACK TOWNS in Oklahoma than in all the rest of the country.

Returning Civil War soldiers and freed slaves learned cowboy skills from Mexican caballeros (cowboys). They joined CATTLE DRIVES, herding longhorn cattle north from Texas and Mexico through Oklahoma to graze on land in Nebraska, Kansas, the Dakotas, Wyoming and Montana. The cattle were then driven to railroad towns in Kansas and shipped east to St. Louis, Chicago or Cincinnati.

The first RAILROADS crossed Oklahoma from 1870-72, bringing more white settlers. Settlers put an end to the cattle drives when they put up BARBED WIRE FENCES around their farms. Large herds of cattle could no longer move freely through the territory, and the railroads provided a safer and less expensive method of moving cattle.

In 1887, THE GENERAL ALLOTMENT ACT divided all tribal lands into allotments of 40-160 acres for individual tribal members. All the land that remained was open to homesteaders.

The first LAND RUN was in 1889. These were UNASSIGNED LANDS purchased by the US government from the Creeks and Seminoles. Some of the people in the land run were running to establish farms. Others wanted to set up towns.

The Organic Act created OKLAHOMA TERRITORY in 1890, and the OKLAHOMA AGRICULTURAL & MECHANICAL COLLEGE (now OSU) was established the same year in Stillwater. The college included an Agricultural Experiment Station on the college farm.

In 1897, Langston University was established as the COLORED OKLAHOMA AGRICULTURAL AND NORMAL UNIVERSITY.

1900s

In 1903, the FIRST OKLAHOMA 4-H CLUB, known as the Corn Club, was established in Johnston County with 50 members. Researchers at agricultural colleges found that youth were more likely to experiment with new agricultural discoveries than adults in the farming community. The youth would then share their experiences and successes with the adults.

From the 1900s to the mid 1920s, as many as 250,000 men moved from field to field every year, following the ripening wheat crop all over the Great Plains. The starting point for the GREAT WHEAT MIGRATION was the Enid railway station in Oklahoma.

In 1905, the Oklahoma Legislature passed a law requiring the teaching of agriculture in the public schools. This was the beginning of VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE.

1907, Statehood

1907 also saw the first STATE FAIR OF OKLAHOMA, a showcase for agricultural innovations and Oklahoma’s agricultural products.

In 1908 the first COOPERATIVE DEMONSTRATION AGENTS began their work in Oklahoma. The average farmer did not readily change farming practices but modified them primarily through observing the agricultural practices of successful neighbors. Agents signed up successful and well-respected farmers in each county to demonstrate new agricultural techniques. Eventually this program grew into the COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE, which was established in Oklahoma in 1914. The first Extension agents conducted moveable schools and emphasized learning by doing.

1920s

TRACTORS, TRUCKS AND OTHER MACHINERY begin replacing horses on Oklahoma farms. SOIL EROSION became a concern, and CONSERVATION EFFORTS began.

WKY, Oklahoma first RADIO station, went on the air in 1921. Radio ended farmers’ isolation from the outside world. Besides providing entertainment, radio was a source of information and helped agricultural agents reach their audiences.

DROUGHT

To make up for food shortages caused by WORLD WAR I the US government in 1924 encouraged farmers all over the United States to PLANT “FROM FENCE TO FENCE.” The shortages also caused the price of WHEAT to go up, so planting wheat became a very profitable business. Landowners in the

Oklahoma Panhandle and all over the Southern Plains plowed the ground cover and planted winter wheat. The destruction of the delicate grassy cover on the prairie was one of the major causes for the Dust Bowl.

1930s

DROUGHT

DUST BOWL, 1934-38.

Drought and poor farming practices caused much of the topsoil in the Oklahoma Panhandle to blow away. The worst dust storm of them all rolled across the plains of Oklahoma on April 24, 1935. It was called BLACK SUNDAY because the clouds of dust turned the sky black. As a result of the Dust Bowl, the government introduced greater conservation measures and farmers learned better farming practices.

Depressed prices for farm products and an increase in the use of tractors forced tenant farmers (farmers who did not own their own land) from farms in eastern Oklahoma during the 1930s. Many MIGRATED TO CALIFORNIA, where they had heard there were jobs.

1940s

WORLD WAR II, in 1942, affected Oklahoma agriculture in several ways:

- Oklahoma farmers were encouraged to produce more food.
- Many people left farms for higher paying jobs in the defense industries.
- Returning GIs chose not to return to the farm. Veterans who wanted to return found it difficult because the cost of land was higher and equipment was expensive.
- PEANUTS were first grown commercially (for peanut oil) in Oklahoma during WWII.

In 1947, many rural one-room schools were closed and consolidated into CONSOLIDATED RURAL SCHOOLS.

Oklahoma's first TV station, WKY, went on the air in 1949. As with radio, TV brought agricultural programs into farm homes.

1950s

CHEMICAL PESTICIDES developed for war use were introduced to Oklahoma farms in the 1950s.

DROUGHT

IRRIGATION alternatives were developed (dams, irrigation wells), making it possible to raise crops in dry areas, like the Oklahoma Panhandle.

Eroded land formerly used for cotton was planted to Bermuda for GRAZING CATTLE in eastern Oklahoma.

PECAN production began to increase in Oklahoma in the

1950s.

The SIZE OF OKLAHOMA FARMS BEGAN TO GROW while the number of farms began to shrink.

1960s

MORE TRUCKS AND TRACTORS

FEWER MILK COWS AND CHICKENS

More CONVENIENCES such as electrical appliances and telephones.

More FARMERS MOVED INTO TOWN and commuted to the farm.

More chemical fertilizers, improved varieties of seed, and better cultivation methods produced LARGER CASH CROPS ON LESS LAND

1970s

The MCCLELLEN-KERR ARKANSAS RIVER NAVIGATION SYSTEM opened, connecting Tulsa (and Oklahoma) to the Mississippi River. Wheat, soybeans and other Oklahoma farm products were shipped via this system.

In 1972, Oklahoma farmers began selling WHEAT TO THE SOVIET UNION, which brought higher prices to farmers.

Many farmers were encouraged by the PROSPERITY of the 70s to go into DEBT to expand their operations.

1980s

RECESSION—The prices farmers got for their products went down while the cost of farming went up. Many Oklahoma farmers were forced out of farming. As farms failed, so did small town businesses. To keep their farms, many farmers took jobs off the farm.

Some farmers developed ALTERNATIVE uses of their land—catfish farming, dude ranches (agritourism), vegetable farming, etc.

OKLAHOMA AG IN THE CLASSROOM PROGRAM was created to provide resources for classroom teachers to help students understand the importance of agriculture in their lives.

1990s

Farmers began using COMPUTERS AND SATELLITE TECHNOLOGY to track and manage their farms.

BIOTECHNOLOGY brought important new developments in dairy, corn, soybeans and other commodities; genetically engineered crops and livestock appeared.

Oklahoma FARMS continued to GROW LARGER.

SWINE and POULTRY industry grew in eastern Oklahoma.

Impact of animal waste on WATER QUALITY became a concern.

ALTERNATIVE AGRICULTURE and AGRITOURISM continued to keep small farmers in business.

1994, NORTH AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (NAFTA) lowered trade barriers and enhances export prospects for Oklahoma agricultural products.

DISTANCE EDUCATION made agricultural research and Extension resources more accessible to Oklahoma farmers.

2000s

9/11 terror attack led to concerns about BIOTERRORISM, and outbreaks of diseases in poultry and cattle in other countries caused FOOD SAFETY concerns. Oklahoma agricultural agencies continue to take measures to protect our food supply. FARM TO SCHOOL PROGRAM was established to encourage school districts to use more local foods in school cafeterias.

DROUGHT

Oklahoma Ag in the Classroom is a program of the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service, the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry and the Oklahoma State Department of Education.