

# Problems and Solutions

Life on the Plains was really tough for the first European farmers there. But they were determined to survive, and found ingenious answers to many of the problems that faced them. The first farmers on the Plains faced huge problems - this table shows some of them, and some of the solutions the farmers found.

Problem	Solution
<p><b>1. Farming</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A hard crust on the soil made it hard to start farming.</li> <li>• Farmers could not afford a plough or machines.</li> <li>• There were not enough workers.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teams of 'sodbusters' using steel ploughs did the first ploughing.</li> <li>• After 1880, <b>thresher teams</b> travelled around following the harvest. Farmers could hire them for just a few days.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Drought</b></p> <p>There was only 38cm of rainfall in a year, and the hot summers evaporated dampness from the land. In the 1860s there were terrible droughts, followed by fires.</p>	<p>The well driller and windpump allowed deep wells to be dug, which gave water. New methods of <b>dry farming</b> were invented (the 'Turkey Red' variety of wheat was imported from Russia, and farmers put a layer of dust on the soil after rain, which stopped evaporation).</p>
<p><b>3. Food</b></p> <p>Farmers could not grow enough on their farms to feed a family.</p>	<p>The government realised that 160 acres was not enough to sustain people. The <b>Timber Culture Act</b> of 1873 gave farmers another 160 free acres if they grew some trees.</p>
<p><b>4. Fences</b></p> <p>Lack of wood for fencing meant farmers could not keep cattle off their crops. This led to trouble with the cattlemen.</p>	<p><b>Barbed wire</b> (patented by Joseph Glidden in 1874) solved the problem of fencing.</p>
<p><b>5. Insect pests</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the 1870s, grasshopper plagues stripped the cornstalks 'naked as beanpoles' and sent pregnant women insane.</li> <li>• Colorado beetle destroyed potato crops.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Settlers tried to harvest the crops before the grasshoppers came. They tried to kill them, but gave up, 'weary and dispirited'.</li> <li>• The government raised <b>relief funds</b>.</li> <li>• Modern insecticides solved this problem.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Law and Order</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rival settlers</li> <li>• Bandits</li> <li>• Renegade Native Americans</li> <li>• Vigilante cattlemen</li> </ul>	<p>Law courts and <b>sheriffs</b> such as Wyatt Earp slowly established law and order.</p>



This drawing from 1887 shows what the cartoonist thought life was really like for the homesteaders. The hats of the two gunmen in the foreground read 'Bushwacker' and 'Renegade'.

➤ See how many problems you can spot facing the homesteader in Source A.

As part of your revision, think about the arguments and facts you would use to explain:

1. Why farmers were able to settle on the Great Plains.
2. How homesteaders reacted to the many problems facing them on the Plains.
3. What life was like for the first farmers on the Plains.
4. How important the Timber Culture Act of 1873 was, in helping homesteaders to settle on the Plains.