The Farming Frontier

I. Government Land Policies

A. Homestead Act of 1862

1. 160 acres of land

2. Had to farm it for 5 years

3. Had to pay a small fee

B. Timber Culture Act

1. Additional 160 acres of land

2. Had to plant tree on at least 40 acres

C. Desert Land Act (encourages settlement of Southwest)

1. 640 acres of land

2. Had to attempt to irrigate it

II. Life on the Plains (very difficult)

A. Lack of trees

1. Could not build houses

2. Count not build fences

3. Could not keep a fire going for warmth/cooking

B. Houses

1. Made of blocks of hardened soil (sod houses)

2. Dugouts

a. Houses built right into the earth

b. Looked like caves

C. Fuel

1. Cow dung

2. Old grain

D. Role of pioneer women

1. Used anything she could to fix up the house

a. Buffalo skins to make rugs, curtains, wallpaper

b. Bits of cloth, quilts, boxes, and other comforts of home

2. Collected cow chips for fuel

3. Drew water for bathing and cooking

4. Made and laundered clothes

5. Made meals

6. Took care of the children

7. Helped husband in the field

III. Farming on the Plains (very difficult)

A. Climate

1. Freezing winters

2. Scorching summers

B. Soil

1. Very hard

2. Hard to plow

C. Lack of water

1. By 1880s, farmers used windmills

2. Dry farming – plow deep into the soil

3. Developed drought resistant crops

D. Inventions

1. Stream powered machinery

2. Corn sheller

3. Fertilizer spreader

E. Improved transportation (helped)

1. Farmers could now sell their crops all over the world

2. More products were needed

F. Problems

1. Grasshoppers in 1874 devoured everything from Texas to the Dakotas

2. Prairie fires

3. Starvation

4. Low prices for crops

5. High cost of transportation

G. Many farmers gave up and moved back to the city

H. Farmers started the Grange

1. Built grain storage centers

2. Did a number of things to help the farmer