Name: _____   Klasse: _____

The Great Plains – Bread Basket and Cattle County of the USA

Natural Environment

The Great Plains cover an area of about two million square kilometers. They are not complete flat, but rise gradually from about 500 meters to over 1500 meter at the foot of the Rocky Mountains. The original environment was grassland. Depending on rainfall the grass in the prairie was short or long. Today natural steppe landscapes can still be found in national parks and in the Oglala National Grasslands (a region with free-living buffalos). The soil in the Great Plains is generally good. It is black soil, sometimes with a top layer of loess. Some regions are natural (e.g. Badlands in South Dakota) or man-made deserts. The one key factor for the development of natural grassland was and is the rainfall. Only one percent of the Great Plains is still natural steppe, everything else was turned into farmland, settlements or transport infrastructure.

Economic Use

The Great Plains are a core area of agriculture in the United States. Wheat is produced on a large scale. The Wheat Belt is the Bread Basket of the U.S. Two-thirds of the beef in the country is produced here, too. The cattle are kept in so-called feedlots or living on large, open pastures.

1. Read the text about the Great Plains thoroughly. Highlight the important points regarding climate, soil and the original vegetation of the Great Plains with a marker.

2. Name the U.S. states which have a significant share of the Great Plains.

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3. The area with intensive wheat cultivation continues in Canada. Which Canadian provinces grow the most wheat?

_____

4. In the atlas, look for the major grain producing areas in Europe. Where are they? Compare these areas to the grain producing areas in the U.S.

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5. From the satellite image you can make out the approximate meridian which divides the United States into a humid east and the arid west. Determine this meridian in the atlas and draw it into the satellite picture.

6. Which amount of precipitation marks this divide of natural landscapes?

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7. The meridian in the Great Plains is also a boundary for the cultural landscape that determines the agricultural use. Explain!

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8. Explain which measure is used to turn the natural grasslands into farmland.

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9. Assess this measure from an ecological perspective.

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