

Name: Klasse:

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



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.

Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, Texas.

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

Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

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.

The areas in Europe are, for example, in the Paris basin, in Ukraine and in Western Russia. The major grain producing areas in Eastern Europe compare well with those of the United States. They are typical grasslands of moderate latitudes – shaped by a continental climate with fertile black soil, sometimes with a top layer of loess.

Name: Klasse: 

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?

The amount is about

500 mm per year.

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

East of the 100th meridian about 500 mm rain falls annually, making the cultivation of wheat possible. This is where the Wheat Belt is located. East of the 100th meridian it rains significantly less. Pastures and feedlots dominate here

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

Artificial irrigation is supposed to help the problem of the lack of precipitation.

9. Assess this measure from an ecological perspective.

Due to the withdrawal of water, the groundwater level decreases west of the 100th meridian, thereby increasing the dryness in these areas.