
KANSAS AGRICULTURE HISTORY

From Homestead to Mechanized Farming



Can you imagine what it would be like to live on the prairie?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF KANSAS FARMING

The year 1854 was important for the state. The Kansas-Nebraska Act made the territory. The Homestead Act gave a person 160 acres if they agreed to stay for 5 years and improve the land. Some came to decide if Kansas would be a free or slave state. They farmed to provide food for themselves.

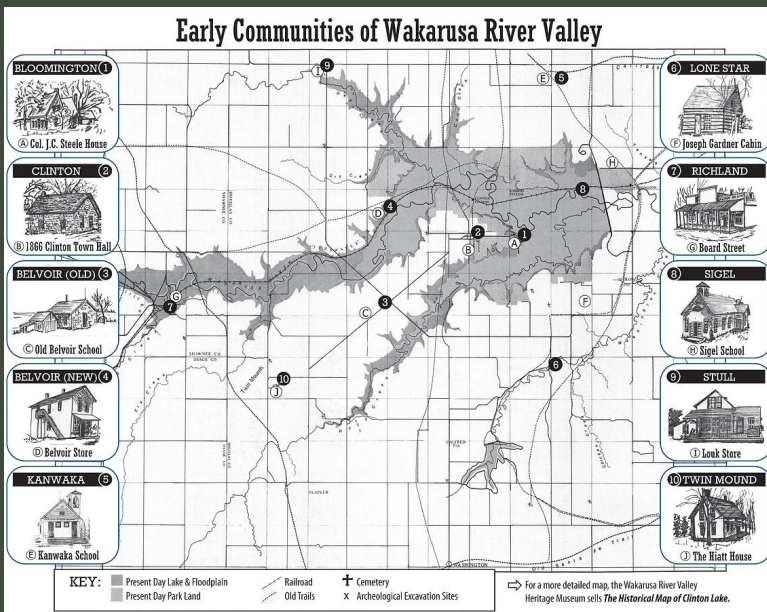
Before 1854, most of the land was farmed by Native Americans. They used tools like buffalo bones to grow crops like beans, squash, and corn. Then white settlers moved onto the land. They used tools like the steel plow and oxen or horses to farm. They tried crops like cotton, tobacco, and oats. But they found that grain, corn, and wheat grew better.

The life of a farmer and his family was often hard and sometimes short. Hard winters made the families rely mostly on their own harvests. They were often hurt by animals and the weather. Everyone in the family took on jobs to help run the home and farm.

Farming in Early Wakarusa River Valley



Tools like these were used on farms in this area. Growing crops were important because there were few stores. At first crops were ones in which the families could eat or use for themselves. Later farmers grew crops that they could sell. First, farmers had to clear the land. Then they would plow a field. Plowing was a tough job that left farmers tired. Guiding animals to keep in a straight line was hard.



These are the small towns that soon grew in this area. The surrounding land may have been wild area or farms. Local farms helped to supply food and other needed items for these small towns. Later, they may have sold crops to places further away. These small towns were small hives of community. Later, time and the building of Clinton Lake and Dam put these small towns and many acres of farm land under water.



FARMING TOOLS



Plow

The steel plow was invented by John Deere in 1837. This plow was good because it could be pulled across the field by only a few oxen or horses. The plow was used by farmers to break up the dirt and roots of grass.

Scythe

Scythes were also commonly used by early settlers. They were used during the harvest to cut crops in the fields. Crops like grain and hay grow tall and therefore needed to be removed with a tool. These tools can be scary looking, but they were very good at their jobs!



Pitchfork

When do you usually use a fork, and how does it help you eat? Farmers used a pitchfork for something like this: scooping up hay and other crops to feed the animals! Pitchforks have been around since the early times, but early Kansas settlers often used them on their farms, too!

Kansas Crops



Wheat

The proof says that wheat began to be grown in Kansas in the middle of the 1800s. It did not make the state money until the Mennonites arrived in 1874. Today, Kansas grows more grain than any other state in the country.



Cotton

The cotton gin was made by Eli Whitney. It was brought to Kansas during the Civil War by a Polish immigrant. Cotton is still grown in the southern counties of the state.



Corn

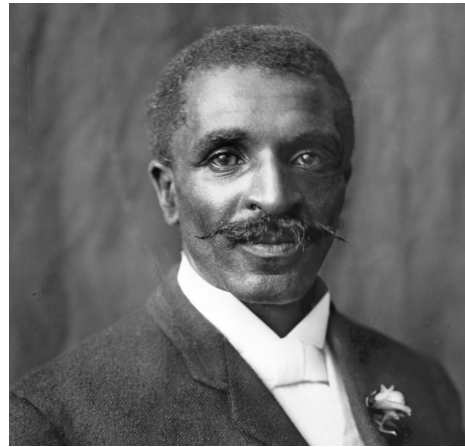
Native Americans grew corn on the land before any settlers arrived here. Kansas is 7th in the country for corn growth today.

Important People

IN THE HISTORY OF KANSAS AGRICULTURE

GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER

George Washington Carver spent his childhood in Kansas. He went to college in Iowa. He is known for running tests with peanuts. He also invented things like a tool that turns soybeans into plastic.



ALFRED GRAY

Alfred Gray settled in Kansas before the Civil War. He did a few jobs before becoming a farmer. After the war, he was the head of the State Agriculture Society until 1870.

DAVID WESLEY FINNEY

Mr. Finney was a farmer before the Civil War. After he came to Kansas he continued farming. He joined state politics later in life and served as lieutenant governor for four years.



Agriculture Summer Packet Activity:

Your activity is to write a letter back pretending to be the person the letter on the next page is sent to. Get creative about who you are and how you feel. Do not be afraid to add some cool details. Please bring this letter to the museum with you in order to get your prize and get your name in the raffle for the bigger prizes. Your letter will be on display at the end of summer party.



Plant Your Own Flowers

Use the flowers from this packet and follow the instructions below to grow your own plants!

1. Find a cup or pot big enough to support your plants and their roots!
2. Fill the pot with soil.
3. Dig a little hole and put a seed inside the hole. Cover the seed with soil.
4. Set the plant in or near the sun and make sure to water it every day.
5. Watch the plant grow!

April 8, 1857

Dear _____,

It is absolutely lovely to hear from you. Paul and I have settled down on some land west of the Kansas river. Paul has begun farming corn. Moving west has provided us with our very own land. Plus the freedom to farm it as we please. The children start school here soon. I am afraid that the number of chores they now have will stop them from getting there every day. The farm has been a nice change of pace from the grim conditions of the city, but it takes a lot of hard work. The family wakes at dawn to begin taking care of the animals. The rolling hills are a welcome sight in the morning. But they make it hard when we are trying to reach the shops in the small town of Lawrence, Kansas. Fights between pro-slavery and anti-slavery groups make neighbors tired. We try to avoid strangers on our trips into town. I have liked farm life but it certainly has its challenges. Do you see yourself moving out to the country soon? What are your thoughts that keep you from moving? What do you find exciting about this new chance? I sure hope to see you one day.

Best wishes,
Maggie

Kansas Agriculture Quiz for Online Users

Send the words "Wakarusa-Agriculture" and your answers to cpreut@watkinsmuseum.org

Students missing only one answer or less will receive a prize and be entered into the raffle.

1. Which Act gave the head of a household 160 acres if they promised to farm it?
 - a. Homestead Act
 - b. Kansas-Nebraska Act
 - c. Northwest Ordinance
 - d. Dawes Act

2. Which tool is used to help feed hay to the animals?
 - a. Plow
 - b. Scythe
 - c. Pitchfork
 - d. Hammer

3. Which crop was grown by Native Americans prior to the arrival of the settlers?
 - a. Wheat
 - b. Cotton
 - c. Corn
 - d. Grapes

4. Which inventor famously experimented with peanuts?
 - a. Alfred Gray
 - b. George Washington Carver
 - c. David Wesley Finney
 - d. Abraham Lincoln

5. Which crop would you choose to grow?
 - a. Corn
 - b. Beans
 - c. Squash
 - d. Pumpkins