

# The Roots of Agriculture

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Directions:

Underline a fact you thought was interesting

**Circle** a fact you would like to know more about

Label with a **?** a fact that you have a question about

Label with a **+** a fact about something positive in our history

Label with a **-** a fact about a challenge in our history

**Agriculture** means working with the soil, producing crops, and raising livestock. The word agriculture is the English adaptation of the Latin word agricultura, from ager, a “field,” and cultura, “cultivation,” meaning “tillage of the soil.”

The earliest known cattle to set foot in Wyoming came in 1830 with a party of mountain men led by William Sublette. They drove several beef cattle and a milk cow to the fur trader’s rendezvous on the Wind River in what is now Fremont County. In 1842, John Fremont, an explorer, noted the countryside around Ft. Laramie was well suited to grazing. Seth Ward, a **sutler**, at Ft. Laramie, provided a much needed supply of fresh oxen that pioneers could trade out for their weary livestock.

In the early 1860s, the western half of the United States was open territory, which was sparsely populated. Most of these **inhabitants** were Native Americans from the many different tribes that lived in Wyoming. In an effort to encourage more settlement in the west, President Lincoln signed The Pacific Railroad Act and The Homestead Act in 1862. These laws led to the distribution of over 80 million acres of the country’s public ground by 1900. Many of the successful homesteaders became farmers and ranchers.

The development of the railroad provided opportunities for farmers and ranchers to **export** their cattle. The railroad was also used to export coal and timber. The increased sale of cattle brought enormous wealth, as well as conflict to Wyoming. Cattlemen, sheepmen, settlers, and Native Americans endured much conflict over land use.

In 1890, when Wyoming became the 44<sup>th</sup> state, the **census** showed 3,125 farms and ranches in Wyoming. That was an increase of 2,668 in 10 years. In the early 1900s, the sheep industry **surpassed** the cattle industry. By 1910, there were 11,000 farms and ranches in Wyoming. Small family farms and ranches began to decline just before 1920 when **modernization** of farm equipment encouraged larger **commercial** operations. By the 1950s, there were fewer and fewer farms and ranches. The farms and ranches that did survive became larger. Many are still family owned and operated today.

In the late 1900s, several events occurred that affected farming and ranching in Wyoming. As technology continued to advance, production increased and the need for manual labor decreased. There was a massive movement from **rural** to **urban** areas, which caused some cultural changes.



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For example, instead of going out to milk the family cow or gather eggs from the chickens each morning, people used grocery stores to supply everyday needs.

Wyoming is still one of the few states in the country with agriculture at its core. Approximately 90% of land in Wyoming is described as rural. About a third of the population lives in rural communities, and their primary source of income is from farming and ranching. Wyoming has over 30 million acres of agricultural land consisting of 11,000 farms and ranches. The average farm and ranch size is 2,621 **acres**. The population of livestock far exceeds the amount of people in the state. Recent estimates suggest over one million cattle and more than 350,000 sheep. The production of beef cattle is

the biggest part of Wyoming's agriculture industry. Other important **commodities** include hay, barley, wheat, corn, and sheep. Farmers also grow sugarbeets and raise hogs, horses, and honeybees. It's one of the top three main industries along with minerals and tourism.

The primary natural resources in Wyoming agriculture are water, soil, and rangeland. Farmers and ranchers carefully steward these renewable resources to ensure they are available for future generations.

## Terms to Know:

**Acre** - a unit of land area (about the size of a football field)

**Agriculture** - cultivating of the soil, producing of crops, and raising of livestock

**Census** - the official process of counting the number of people in a country, city, or town, and collecting information about them

**Commercial** - buying and selling of goods and services

**Commodities** - something of use, advantage, or value

**Export** - to send a product to be sold

**Inhabitant** - a person or animal that lives in a particular place

**Modernization** - to make something modern and more suited to present styles or needs

**Rangeland** - land used for livestock and/or wildlife grazing

**Rural** - living outside of a city

**Stewardship** - As Wyoming citizens, we are stewards entrusted with the responsible development, care, and use of our resources to benefit current and future generations.

**Surpassed** - to be better or greater than someone or something

**Sutler** - a person who followed an army or maintained a store on an army post to sell to soldiers

**Urban** - living in a city

