tpo_33_passage_1

By 1850 the United States possessed roughly 9,000 miles of railroad track; ten years later it had over 30,000 miles, more than the rest of the world combined. Much of the new construction during the 1850s occurred west of the Appalachian Mountains—over 2,000 miles in the states of Ohio and Illinois alone. The effect of the new railroad lines rippled outward through the economy. Farmers along the tracks began to specialize in crops that they could market in distant locations. With their profits they purchased manufactured goods that earlier they might have made at home. Before the railroad reached Tennessee, the state produced about 25,000 bushels (or 640 tons) of wheat, which sold for less than 50 cents a bushel. Once the railroad came, farmers in the same counties grew 400,000 bushels (over 10,000 tons) and sold their crop at a dollar a bushel. The new railroad networks shifted the direction of western trade. In 1840 most northwestern grain was shipped south down the Mississippi River to the bustling port of New Orleans. But low water made steamboat travel hazardous in summer, and ice shut down traffic in winter. Products such as lard, tallow, and cheese quickly spoiled if stored in New Orleans' hot and humid warehouses. Increasingly, traffic from the Midwest flowed west to east, over the new rail lines. Chicago became the region's hub, linking the farms of the upper Midwest to New York and other eastern cities by more than 2,000 miles of track in 1855. Thus while the value of goods shipped by river to New Orleans continued to increase, the South's overall share of western trade dropped dramatically. A sharp rise in demand for grain abroad also encouraged farmers in the Northeast and Midwest to become more commercially oriented. Wheat, which in 1845 commanded $1.08 a bushel in New York City, fetched $2.6 in 1855; in similar fashion the price of corn nearly doubled. Farmers responded by specializing in cash crops, borrowing to purchase more land, and investing in equipment to increase productivity. As railroad lines fanned out from Chicago, farmers began to acquire open prairie land in Illinois and then Iowa, putting the fertile, deep black soil into production. Commercial agriculture transformed this remarkable treeless environment. To settlers accustomed to eastern woodlands, the thousands of square miles of tall grass were an awesome sight. Indian grass, Canada wild rye, and native big bluestem all grew higher than a person. Because eastern plows could not penetrate the densely tangled roots of prairie grass, the earliest settlers erected farms along the boundary separating the forest from the prairie. In 1837, however, John Deere patented a sharp-cutting steel plow that sliced through the sod without soil sticking to the blade. Cyrus McCormick refined a mechanical reaper that harvested fourteen times more wheat with the same amount of labor. By the 1850s McCormick was selling 1,000 reapers a year and could not keep up with demand, while Deere turned out 10,000 plows annually. The new commercial farming fundamentally altered the midwestern landscape and the environment. Native Americans had grown corn in the region for years, but never in such large fields as did later settlers who became farmers, whose surpluses were shipped east. Prairie farmers also introduced new crops that were not part of the earlier ecological system, notably wheat, along with fruits and vegetables. Native grasses were replaced by a small number of plants cultivated as commodities. Corn had the best yields, but it was primarily used to feed livestock. Because bread played a key role in the American and European diet, wheat became the major cash crop. Tame grasses replaced native grasses in pastures for making hay. Western farmers altered the landscape by reducing the annual fires that had kept the prairie free from trees. In the absence of these fires, trees

reappeared on land not in cultivation and, if undisturbed, eventually formed woodlots. The earlier unbroken landscape gave way to independent farms, each fenced off in a precise checkerboard pattern. It was an artificial ecosystem of animals, woodlots, and crops, whose large, uniform layout made western farms more efficient than the more-irregular farms in the East.

question 1

According to paragraph 1, each of the following is true about railroad track in the United States EXCEPT:

A In 1850 the United States had less than 10,000 miles of railroad track.

B By the end of the 1850s, Ohio and Illinois contained more railroad track than any other state in the country.

C Much of the railroad track built in the United States during the 1850s was located west of the

Appalachian Mountains.

D By 1860 there were more miles of railroad track in the United States than in any other country.

question 2

It can be inferred from paragraph 2 that the new railroads had which of the following effects on farm communities?

A Most new farms were located along the tracks.

B Farmers began to grow wheat as a commercial crop.

C Many farmers decided to grow a wider variety of crops.

D Demand for manufactured goods increased among farmers.

question 3

According to paragraph 3, in what way did the new rail networks change western trade?

A Northwestern farmers almost completely stopped shipping goods by

steamboat.

B Many western goods began to be shipped east by way of Chicago rather than south to New Orleans.

C Chicago largely replaced NewYork and other eastern cities as the final market for goods from the West.

D The value of goods shipped west soon became greater than the value of goods shipped east.

question 4

According to paragraph 3, what was a disadvantage of shipping goods from northwestern areas to New Orleans?

A There was no reliable way to get goods from New Orleans to eastern cities.

B The cost of shipping goods by river to New Orleans continued to increase.

C Goods shipped from New Orleans' neighboring areas had a significant competitive advantage because of their lower transportation costs.

D Goods stored in New Orleans' warehouses often spoiled because of the high temperatures and humidity.

question 5

Paragraph 4 supports the idea that the price of wheat more than doubled between 1845 and 1855 in part because

A the price of corn nearly doubled during that same period

B demand for grain increased sharply outside the United States

C farmers in the Northeast and Midwest began to specialize in cash crops

D many farmers had borrowed heavily to purchase land and equipment for raising wheat

question 6

Why does the author point out that "Indian grass, Canada wild rye, and native big bluestem all grew higher than a person" ?

A To provide a reason why people from the eastern woodlands of the United States were impressed when they saw the prairies

B To identify an obstacle to the development of the railroad lines fanning out from Chicago

C To explain why the transformation of the prairies by commercial agriculture was so remarkable

D To provide evidence supporting the claim that the prairies had fertile, deep black soil

question 7

According to paragraph 5, the first settlers generally did not farm open prairie land because

A they could not plow it effectively with the tools that were available

B prairie land was usually very expensive to buy

C the soil along boundaries between the forest and the prairie was more fertile than the soil of the open prairie

D the railroad lines had not yet reached the open prairie when the first settlers arrived

question 8

According to paragraph 8, prairie farmers changed the landscape by doing all of the following EXCEPT:

A Reducing annual fires

B Dividing the land into large, regularly-shaped lots

C Planting trees that eventually formed woodlots

D Fencing off their farms

question 9

Look at the four squares [ ] that indicate where the following sentence could be added to the passage.

By 1850 the United States possessed roughly 9,000 miles of railroad track; ten years later it had over 30,000 miles, more than the rest of the world combined. Much of the new construction during the 1850s occurred west of the Appalachian Mountains—over 2,000 miles in the states of Ohio and Illinois alone. The effect of the new railroad lines rippled outward through the economy. Farmers along the tracks began to specialize in crops that they could market in distant locations. With their profits they purchased manufactured goods that earlier they might have made at home. Before the railroad reached Tennessee, the state produced about 25,000 bushels (or 640 tons) of wheat, which sold for less than 50 cents a bushel. Once the railroad came, farmers in the same counties grew 400,000 bushels (over 10,000 tons) and sold their crop at a dollar a bushel. The new railroad networks shifted the direction of western trade. [] In 1840 most northwestern grain was shipped south down the Mississippi River to the bustling port of New Orleans. [] But low water made steamboat travel hazardous in summer, and ice shut down traffic in winter. [] Products such as lard, tallow, and cheese quickly spoiled if stored in New Orleans' hot and humid warehouses. [] Increasingly, traffic from the Midwest flowed west to east, over the new rail lines. Chicago became the region's hub, linking the farms of the upper Midwest to New York and other eastern cities by more than 2,000 miles of track in 1855. Thus while the value of goods shipped by river to New Orleans continued to increase, the South's overall share of western trade dropped dramatically. A sharp rise in demand for grain abroad also encouraged farmers in the Northeast and Midwest to become more commercially oriented. Wheat, which in 1845 commanded $1.08 a bushel in New York City, fetched $2.6 in 1855; in similar fashion the price of corn nearly doubled. Farmers responded by specializing in cash crops, borrowing to purchase more land, and investing in equipment to increase productivity. As railroad lines fanned out from Chicago, farmers began to acquire open prairie land in Illinois and then Iowa, putting the fertile, deep black soil into production. Commercial agriculture transformed this remarkable treeless environment. To settlers accustomed to eastern woodlands, the thousands of square miles of tall grass were an awesome sight. Indian grass, Canada wild rye, and native big bluestem all grew higher than a person. Because eastern plows could not penetrate the densely tangled roots of prairie grass, the earliest settlers erected farms along the boundary separating the forest from the prairie. In 1837, however, John Deere patented a sharp-cutting steel plow that sliced through the sod without soil sticking to the blade. Cyrus McCormick refined a mechanical reaper that harvested fourteen times more wheat with the same amount of labor. By the 1850s McCormick was selling 1,000 reapers a year and could not keep up with demand, while Deere turned out 10,000 plows annually. The new commercial farming fundamentally altered the midwestern landscape and the environment. Native Americans had grown corn in the region for years, but never in such large fields as did later settlers who became farmers, whose surpluses were shipped east. Prairie farmers also introduced new crops that were not part of the earlier ecological system, notably wheat, along with fruits and vegetables. Native grasses were replaced by a small number of plants cultivated as commodities. Corn had the best yields, but it was primarily used to feed livestock.

Because bread played a key role in the American and European diet, wheat became the major cash crop. Tame grasses replaced native grasses in pastures for making hay. Western farmers altered the landscape by reducing the annual fires that had kept the prairie free from trees. In the absence of these fires, trees reappeared on land not in cultivation and, if undisturbed, eventually formed woodlots. The earlier unbroken landscape gave way to independent farms, each fenced off in a precise checkerboard pattern. It was an artificial ecosystem of animals, woodlots, and crops, whose large, uniform layout made western farms more efficient than the more-irregular farms in the East.

question 10

Directions: An introductory sentence for a brief summary of the passage is provided below. Complete the summary by selecting the THREE answer choices that express the most important ideas in the passage. Some sentences do not belong in the summary because they express ideas that are not presented in the passage or are minor ideas in the passage. This question is worth 2 points.

A. Construction of new rail lines into the Midwest had been effectively stopped by the Appalachian Mountains, but by 1850 improved construction technology had made further advances possible.

B. Rail lines to Chicago and on to the East made it easier to get midwestern goods to distant markets, while growing demand encouraged crop specialization and led to higher crop prices.

C. Because of the growing volume of traffic coming by rail from the Northeast and Midwest, the value of goods arriving in New Orleans for shipment to markets abroad increased dramatically.

D. Access to rail lines combined with the development of more-efficient farming equipment allowed the fertile land of the open prairies to be used for large-scale commercial agriculture.

E. Reduction of annual prairie fires allowed trees to reappear, and native grasses were replaced by a few commercially grown plants as previously unbroken grasslands were divided into large fenced fields.

F. Native Americans had grown corn on the prairies for years but had not produced large surpluses because the varieties they planted had far poorer yields than those introduced by commercial farmers.