

3 LESSON PRACTICE

Use the Reading Guide to help you understand the passage.

The Dust Bowl and the Government Rescue

Reading Guide

Summarize what happened in the Great Plains between 1931 and 1939.

Great Plains farmers did not just go back to their farms when they discovered that California was not the opportunity they had hoped for. Why not?

What role did the federal government play in helping farmers and others in the 1930s? Why did they get involved?

The Source of the Trouble

When wind and dry soil meet, dust sweeps across the land. This combination happened on a massive scale during the 1930s in the United States. From 1931 to 1939, little or no rain fell across the Great Plains. The drought and erosion created a "Dust Bowl" across more than 50 million acres of farmland in states that included New Mexico, Kansas, Texas, and Oklahoma.

With no rain, little soil, and dusty air, farmers were powerless and penniless. They became refugees of the environment. To escape the dust storms, which became known as "black blizzards," many of them moved from the Great Plains to farms in California and cities in the West. It is estimated that 2.5 million people left the Great Plains during this period. They hoped to begin again, but most found poor living conditions and little aid. Many cities tried to keep them out; few people or organizations helped them resettle.

Desperate Times

The displaced had nowhere to turn and could not go back. Their old farms were useless, and they had already spent what little money they had to travel west. It would take major measures in the form of laws, programs, and financial assistance by the federal government to assist the millions of people devastated by the Dust Bowl and repair the unprecedented environmental problems.

The Government Responds

In the early 1930s, the U.S. government under President Franklin Roosevelt began to implement a series of "New Deal" programs to help the country recover from the Great Depression. Since the wide-scale dust condition in the Great Plains had never occurred before, it was not clear what should be done to help correct it. Beginning around 1934, though, the federal government tried a number of New Deal-style measures to alleviate the problems.

Reading Guide

Suppose the president vetoes a bill. How can it still become a law?

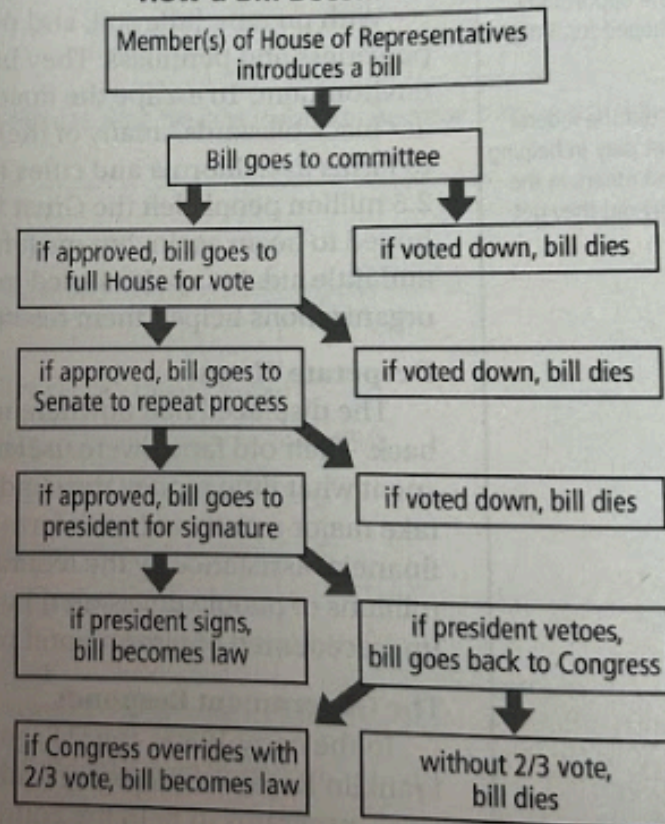
Reread the purposes of the Taylor Grazing Act and the Frazier-Lemke Farm Bankruptcy Act. How were they different?

The First Acts of the New Deal

The first of many New Deal maneuvers were laws passed to protect farmers and their land. Passing a law requires both the legislative and executive branches of the government, so both Congress and President Roosevelt were involved.

In 1934, Congress passed, and the president signed, the Taylor Grazing Act. It regulated grazing on publicly owned lands. That control stopped farmers from letting their animals overgraze as they had been and destroying farmlands. That same year, the Frazier-Lemke Farm Bankruptcy Act became law. It restricted banks from taking away farms from farmers who lacked the money to keep up with their payments.

How a Bill Becomes a Law



Reading Guide

How did the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation help Great Plains farmers?

How did the government spend \$500 million through the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act?

Why was it important for the government to have soil conservation programs like the Soil Conservation Service?

1935: A Busy Year for the New Deal

Many additions were made to the New Deal in 1935. The Drought Relief Service, designed to oversee all programs related to the drought situation, bought cattle from failing farms. Sick cattle were destroyed. The rest were distributed by the Federal Surplus Relief Corporation as food all over the country. While some farmers were unhappy to lose their cattle, the act helped them avoid losing everything. They could not afford to keep the cattle, and the price the government paid was significantly higher than the farmers could get anywhere else.

On April 8, the president signed the Emergency Relief Appropriation Act. It authorized \$500 million to create work-relief programs for drought victims and other people suffering through the depression. The Works Progress Administration, one of the most famous of all New Deal programs, started under this act. The idea was that the government would hire people—perhaps millions of them—for various jobs. The concept and scale of the program was unprecedented. It remains one of the largest public-assistance programs in American history.

Programs such as the Works Progress Administration helped people by providing jobs, loans, and other assistance.



Land Preservation

Although the new programs gave some relief to farmers, the land was getting worse. After another 850 million tons of topsoil were lost in the wind, a government report noted, "Unless something is done, the western plains will be as arid as the Arabian desert." Soil erosion needed to be stopped, so Congress created the Soil Conservation Service to teach improved farming methods. It taught farmers about crop rotation, which involves changing crops every few years so the soil has time to recharge its nutrients. They also learned about contour plowing with the curves of the land and strip cropping (planting different crops in alternating strips). Farmers who agreed to follow these methods received money from the government.

Reading Guide

Camps, like the Arvin Migratory Labor Camp, had an arrangement with people who lived there. What was it?

Consider the main points made in the conclusion. What do they suggest about the author's point of view regarding the New Deal? What phrases suggest that perspective?

Look at the timeline. Which year was the busiest for New Deal programs and legislation?

Other programs made efforts to protect the land from wind and erosion. The Prairie States Forestry Project, for example, worked with farmers to plant trees. Trees create a shield against the wind, and their roots hold soil in place.

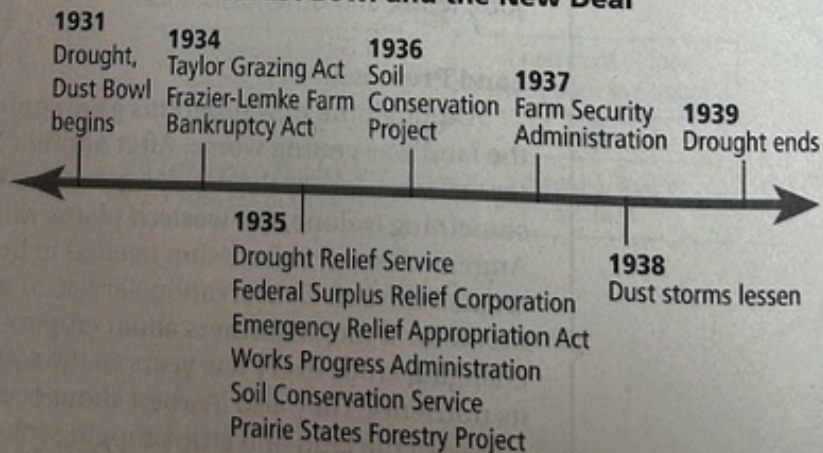
Help in California

Great Plains farmers also received some help in California. In 1937, the Farm Security Administration opened places there for people to live. The first was the Arvin Migratory Labor Camp, and the federal government paid for its operation. It provided a place to live in exchange for work. The conditions were simple, mostly tents on wooden platforms, but improved on the desolate situation before. Twelve more camps opened after Arvin, and the people in the camps worked together to govern them. It was still difficult to find regular, daily work, and the wages were low, but over time the transplants from the Dust Bowl began to make a life for themselves beyond the Great Plains.

Conclusion

The 1930s were an unbelievably desperate time for Americans, particularly the farmers of the Great Plains. Without the enormous help of the U.S. government through New Deal programs, there is no telling how much more difficult those years would have been and how much more devastated the farmlands would have become. Even a partial summary of the New Deal gives an idea of the contribution the government made to ease the challenges faced during the terrible decade known as the Dust Bowl.

The Dust Bowl and the New Deal



Answer the following questions.

- 1** The text claims that people who fled the Great Plains to California did eventually receive some help from the federal government. Identify the evidence in the text that supports that idea.

Write your answer on the lines below.

- 2** The following question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B.

Part A

What is a work-relief program?

- A. any plan that makes a person's job easier
- B. an office where people can apply for jobs
- C. money people receive when they lose their jobs
- D. a government program that pays people to work

Part B

Which sentence from the passage explains the meaning of work-relief in Part A?

- A. It restricted banks from taking away farms from farmers who lacked the money to keep up with their payments.
- B. The idea was that the government would hire people—perhaps millions of them—for various jobs.
- C. While some farmers were unhappy to lose their cattle, the act helped them avoid losing everything.
- D. Twelve more camps opened after Arvin, and the people in the camps worked together to govern them.

- 3 What does the author think about the New Deal and its role during the Dust Bowl? Would all people feel the same way? How can you tell that the author's perspective might be different from others?

Write your answer on the lines below.

- 4 How is "The Dust Bowl and the Government Rescue" structured?

- A. in time-order sequence
- B. by comparing and contrasting events
- C. as a list of problems and solution
- D. in a series of cause-and-effect paragraphs

- 5 The following steps in how a bill becomes a law are out of order. Write 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 to put them in order from beginning to end.

The full House of Representatives approves the bill.

A representative introduces a bill.

The president signs the bill.

The Senate approves the bill.

A House committee approves the bill.