

PUSH FACTORS:

- Europeans wanted to escape the poverty and old-fashioned class control of life in Europe.
- Jews, Amish and other religious groups wanted to live free of persecution.
- Farmers in the East saw land prices rise as more and more settlers arrived in the USA.
- Jobs in industry were irregular and there was often unemployment.

PULL FACTORS 1:

- Free Land. The 1862 Homestead Act gave anyone wanting to settle in the west 160 acres free, provided they lived on it and farmed it for five years.
- This was an offer that pulled people from thousands of miles away, Norway, Russia, Poland and all over Europe and the Eastern USA.
- Europeans (Scandinavians, Scots, Irish, English, Germans and Dutch) wanted cheaper land than was available at home.
- The 160 acres offered by the Homestead Act was enough to live on in the East, but not in most areas of the West.
- The Timber Culture Act, 1873, gave settlers another 160 acres if they planted 40 acres with trees.
- The Desert Land Act, 1877, gave settlers 640 acres in areas with low rainfall.

PULL FACTORS 2:

- The end of the American Civil War in 1865 left thousands of young ex-soldiers and their families eager to make a new start.
- Ex-slaves also wanted to start a new life.
- Defeated Southerners also wanted to start a new life.

- Railways advertised cheap land far and wide. They had built trans-continental railroads across empty plains.
- To make it worth their while the US government had given the railroad companies land along the tracks.
- To make any money out of this, the railroad companies needed to sell this land. They also wanted people to live along their routes, using their railroads.

- (6) Indians had been cleared off the land, defeated by the US Army and put in reservations.

PROBLEMS ON THE PLAINS:

- The climate was more extreme than anything most homesteaders had experienced. It was very hot and dry in summer, very cold in winter.
- They had to build a house to live in. There was no wood so they had to use the sods that lay around. It took about an acre of sods to build a sod house.
- It was difficult to build the roof because that needed long supports. Trees were scarce. On the Plains ...
- Water was scarce. Wells had to be dug, often by hand, and they needed to be very deep.
- Sod houses were difficult to keep clean, leaky in rainy weather. They were unhealthy places to live.
- Fuel was expensive, so they used dried dung called 'cow-chips'.
- Hazards, such as prairie fires or locust swarms, could destroy entire crops in hours.

PROBLEMS OF FARMING:

- The land had never been ploughed before. It broke many ploughs.
- Some crops planted by Homesteaders were not suited to the climate of the Great Plains.
- Water shortages meant that crops died.
- Crops were eaten by buffalo or cattle because early farms were not fenced.
- Hard work and endurance. Only homesteaders who could endure tough, hard life managed to survive.

WHY THEY SUCCEEDED:

- Hard winter wheat (e.g. Turkey Red), introduced by Russian immigrants, was found to be suitable for the climate.
- The Sod-Buster was a new, strong plough.
- Dry Farming, special ploughing and other methods were used to conserve moisture.
- Wind-pumps were used to draw up water from deep down, for irrigation and animals.
- New machines were invented: reapers, binders and threshers. The combine harvester was invented in 1872. They were all horse-drawn at first.
- Barbed wire was used as cheap fencing to keep out animals.