

Oklahoma's Legacy

By the time Oklahoma and Indian Territories wed in 1907 to become the Great State of Oklahoma, there were over 62,000 farms, producing 8.6 million bushels of wheat, 113 million bushels of corn, 8 million chickens, 347,000 turkeys, 2 million bushels of potatoes, 90,000 bushels of flaxseed, 864,000 bales of cotton, and 60,000 sheep. By 1910, the 3-year-old state had over 190,000 farms.

That's amazing, considering 100 years earlier, US government surveyors had declared Oklahoma part of a Great American Desert, "unfit for cultivation and uninhabitable by people depending upon agriculture for their subsistence." The Great American Desert was renamed the Great Plains, once actual farmers moved in and proved earlier assessments wrong.

The land that would become Oklahoma had an agricultural legacy long before statehood and long before the US government bought it from France as part of the Louisiana Purchase. Thousands of years earlier, ancient people were cultivating corn, squash, sunflowers and many other plants now considered weeds. On the plains nomadic tribes burned brush to manage grazing land for herds of bison, elk and deer.

One hundred years after statehood, Oklahoma has become one of the great agricultural states of the Great Plains. We have rolling prairie land, forests and streams. Today, Oklahoma has 83,000 farms and ranches. The average size of a farm in Oklahoma is 406 acres. About 73 percent of our state's 45 million acres of land is used for farming and ranching.

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