What solutions did the Homesteaders come up with?

Windmills

A lack of water was a major problem on the Great Plains. In 1874 Daniel Halliday invented a self-governing windmill – it always kept in line with the wind so that it did not get damaged by the strong winds. It could be used to pump water from underground. A high powered drill was used to get down to the water, then the wind pump was fitted. It would pump water night and day for people to use in their homes and irrigate their crops.

Dry farming

Farmers ploughed their land when there had been heavy rain or snow. This left a thin layer of dust over the surface, which trapped and preserved the moisture in the soil. The land was then left unseeded, ready for the following year’s crops.

Hard work

By the 1890s a combination of all these inventions and developments had helped the homesteaders to solve the problems of farming on the Great Plains. The Great Plains became a fertile area for wheat production and the majority of homesteaders prospered. Their success can be explained by their determination, hard work and adaptability. They were supported by the railroads which took them there, brought their equipment and carried their crops to the market.

Other machinery

From the 1880s other new farming machinery was developed. This included reapers, binders and threshers. These could be easily transported by railroad to the Great Plains and were affordable. The machines increased the area that a homesteader could manage to farm and were well suited to the wide open spaces of the Great Plains.

Sod-buster

John Deere invented a strong plough which could deal with the tough grass roots. It was known as the sod-buster.

Barbed wire

In 1874, Joseph Glidden invented barbed wire. This provided a cheap and effective solution to the problem of fencing and protecting the crops.

Hard winter wheat

Homesteaders recognised that wheat was a more suitable crop than corn. Those who settled on the high Plains realised that it was better to keep animals – sheet and cattle – rather than just to grow crops. They introduced hard winter wheat which was used in Russia – a similar climate to the Great Plains. The crops flourished and homesteaders who grew it were successful.

Growing a surplus

In their early years on the Great Plains, homesteaders would plough enough land to grow food to feed their family. In later years they could plough more land and grow more crops. This would produce a surplus that they could then sell. With this money they could buy better equipment and increase their surplus.