

## Government Incentives to go West 1860s and 1870s

Anyone could file a claim as long as they were head of a family or single and over 21. In fact you could be under 21 if you had fought for the government in the civil war) Anyone intending to become a US citizen could file a claim.	Although 80 million acres was eventually homesteaded, this was out of a total of 500 million acres of public land (16%). Only 13 million acres of claims had been 'proved up' by 1884; 24 million by 1900.	60% of homestead claims were never proved up, often because of the challenges of farming the Plains. Half the population of western Nebraska in the 1860s had left the state by the 1880s.
The Homestead Act ensured that parts of the Great Plains were being settled for the first time. Eventually 80 million acres would be settled as a direct consequence of the Homestead Act.	The government realised 160 acres was not enough to support a homesteader family. This Act allowed a homesteader to claim a further 160 acres if they promised to plant trees on half of it.	The Homestead Act was important in encouraging immigration from Europe. By 1875 more than half Nebraska's population of 123,000 were recent immigrants and their children.
Despite the government's best intention, rich landowners were able to use the Act to get more land very cheaply. Big ranch owners would make all their employees file claims and then hand over the rights to the land to the ranch owner.	Once someone had lived on the land for 5 years, built a house and planted five acres of crops they could pay \$30 and own their homestead outright. This was called 'proving up'.	The government wanted to prevent businessmen snapping up lots of land cheaply under the scheme and then selling it on at a profit.
It cost just \$10 to register a claim to a homestead plot - called 'filing a claim'.	This Act gave settler the right to buy 640 acres of land cheaply in areas where lack of rainfall was a more than usual problem	By 1876 over six million acres of government land had successfully become homesteads
The plots were 160 acres 'homesteads'. This meant a family house and enough land to support the family.	Many more homesteads were formed by people buying land from the railroad companies than were proven up through the Homestead Act.	The biggest success was in Nebraska where nearly half of all settled land was homestead land and Nebraska's population growth resulted in it becoming a state in 1867.
<b>KEY</b>	<b>1. Facts about the Homestead Act 1862</b>	<b>2. Achievements of Homestead Act</b>
<b>3. Limitations of Homestead Act</b>	<b>4. Facts about the Timber Culture Act 1873</b>	<b>5. Facts about the Desert Land Act 1877</b>