

# GROWING A NATION

THE STORY OF AMERICAN AGRICULTURE

## Prosperity & Challenges, Lesson 3: 1950–1969

### Materials

- ◆ Growing a Nation CD, and necessary projection equipment or computer lab
- ◆ Embedded Resource Cards
- ◆ *Farm Facts* booklets from <http://www.fb-orders.com/afbf/>

### Background: Labor and Technological Change

An advance in technology (the application of scientific knowledge) has had monumental effects on the way we live today, taking us from hunters and gatherers to the space age and beyond. Agriculture was adopted over hunting and gathering as it more efficiently met our basic needs of food, clothing and shelter. Technological inventions and the understanding of more complex scientific knowledge catapulted western civilization and changed how we live today. The 1950s saw the complete mechanization of agriculture. In 1954 the number of tractors on farms exceeded the number of horses and mules for first time. Increased numbers of automobiles also impacted American society and left a mark on how Americans consume food, namely drive-in and drive-through restaurants and the resulting “fast food.” From the farm to the fork, “new” or “modern” conveniences such as refrigeration, food processing factories, and frozen foods—including TV dinners—changed the way Americans produced, prepared, and consumed food.

### Activity 1: Embedded Resource

After students view selected slides, assign each student or group of students an Embedded Resource Card (Appendix 2) and ask them to be prepared to answer the Embedded Resource questions either by direct response or by using one of the Teaching and Learning Strategies outlined in Appendix 2. You may want to assign a particular strategy or cut the strategies into strips and ask each student to pick one or two. If the student or group of students is allowed to pick two, ask them to choose the learning strategy they prefer and put the other one back.

The embedded resources that pop up on each *Growing a Nation* screen are designed to be adaptable to a variety of teaching strategies and flexible for diverse learning styles. Each slide contains five or six embedded resources that detail events in American history that can be explored for a greater understanding of the time period or historical cause and effect relationships. Each embedded resource asks higher order questions to not only increase student knowledge but to increase their comprehension to the level of application, analysis,

### **National Standards Explored**

National Standards for Eras 6-10. To view the correlated Standards and the student understanding of each Standard visit [www.agclassroom.org/gan](http://www.agclassroom.org/gan).

#### Era 6, Standard 1

How the rise of corporations, heavy industry, and mechanized farming transformed the American people.

#### Era 9, Standard 1

The economic boom and social transformation of postwar United States.

#### Era 10, Standard 2

Economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States.

### **Enduring Understanding**

The significant events throughout American agricultural history that have changed American society and the lives of her citizens.

### **Essential Questions:**

More than 90% of America’s population farmed 200 years ago. There were about 5 million Americans then. Today less than 2% of the American population works on farms; that’s about 5 million producers. Our population of about 300 million today has plenty of food.

- *How has America fed itself and much of the world?*
- *What has happened in the last 200 years to reduce farm labor and increase production?*
- *How has agriculture made it possible for Americans to pursue their hopes and dreams?*

synthesis and evaluation (Bloom’s Taxonomy of educational objectives). The Teaching and Learning Strategies in Appendix 2 can be applied to nearly all the embedded resources in addition to students answering the embedded resource questions.

### Activity 2: Timeline – Inventions in Farm Machinery and Technology

As a class, review the “Farm Machinery and Technology” category of the *Growing a Nation* historical timeline found on the website ([www.agclassroom.org/gan](http://www.agclassroom.org/gan)) noting the production numbers and labor hours required to produce wheat and corn from 1830-2000.

Together the class is going to create a cause and effect timeline. Use a strip of masking tape or crepe paper to create the timeline on one of the classroom walls. Add decade markers, spaced appropriately. Assign each student or group of students a decade between 1800 and 2000 from the “Farm Machinery and Technology” category. (There are 15 decades, so depending on your class size you may have 3 students to a group.)

Each student or group of students should identify the events in their decade and evaluate the item as a cause or effect contributing to the increase in production or decrease in labor. Ask students to create a pamphlet by folding a sheet of 8-1/2" x 11" paper in half (lengthwise). On the top front page, students should glue or tape a picture from the *Growing a Nation* photo gallery or from other websites to identify the event, then below the picture write the title of the cause or effect event. These “pamphlets” will be used on the timeline. If they have more than one event in their assigned decade, they should create a separate sheet for each. On the inside, students should write down whether the event is a “cause” or an “effect” related to the increase in production or the decrease in labor. If the event is a cause, ask students to find the effect; if the event is an effect, ask students to find the cause, even if they have to look in different decades. Students may also look at other categories on the timeline or in their textbook to help them determine causes or effects. For example, were other things going on in the 1950s in the other categories (Economic cycles, Land, Crop and Livestock, Transportation, Trade, Life on the Farm Organizations, Agricultural Education and Extension, or Government Programs and Policy) that had a cause or effect relationship to the event? If so, they should identify them on the inside of the pamphlet. Once the pamphlets are completed, ask students to present their event and then paste the event onto the timeline in the appropriate decade.

### Activity 3: Event or Invention Project

Ask students to select an event or invention from the *Growing a Nation* timeline and then research the event or invention and create a PowerPoint slide show or advertisement flyer/poster about the



event and present this project to the class. The presentation should include important statistics, highlights, graphs and or pictures. For example students could graph the number of people fed by farmers in 1940 (19), 1950 (27), 1960, (46), in 1970 (73), 1980 (115), 1990 (129), 2006 (144). The *Farm Facts* booklet noted in the Materials list would be useful for this activity.

#### **Activity 4: Primary Source Analysis**

As a class, download or stream the following films from the Classroom Resources of the *Growing a Nation* website and compare and contrast what each Secretary of Agriculture is saying:

- Secretary Benson Speaks, 1955 (4 minutes). Created by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Secretary of Agriculture, Ezra Taft Benson gives a New Year's Day address concerning the future of agriculture.
- Secretary Freeman Talks on Food and Fibers, 1968 (3 minutes). As part of President Johnson's "War on Hunger," Secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman addresses the issue of hunger and raises questions about who America could or should feed and how hunger can be ended.

Students could complete the Motion Picture Analysis Worksheet in Appendix 3 or note the three most significant concepts they hear. Discuss the concepts and issues raised in each film.

#### **Activity 5: State Statistics**

Investigate your state's agriculture. What do you know about farming in your state? Visit this website

[http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics\\_by\\_State/index.asp](http://www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/index.asp) and learn about your state's top agricultural products and much more. How does your state's agriculture contribute to the state's economy?

#### **Useful Websites**

<http://www.iol.ie/~manister/tractortrouble/tractorex3.html>

<http://www.tractorrace.com/tractorhistory.htm>

<http://www.froelichtractor.com/tractor.htm>

[http://www.steamshow.org/Steam\\_Info/overview.htm](http://www.steamshow.org/Steam_Info/overview.htm)

