

## 7<sup>th</sup> – Life in Temperate Grassland



A forests can be defined as the place where trees are the main types of vegetation, grassland can be defined as a region where grasses form the dominant type of plant life.

**Grasslands** make up almost a quarter of the total land surface. The types of plants that grow here greatly depend on what the climate and soil are like.

As climate plays an important role in the formation of grasslands, it is generally used as a basis to divide the world's grasslands into two broad categories: those that occur in the temperate region and those that occur in the tropical regions.

**Some of the well-known temperate grasslands of the world are:**

- Prairies of North America.
- Steppes of Russia.
- Pampas of South America.
- Veldts of South Africa.

**The Prairies:** The temperate grasslands of North America are known as the prairies. It is a region of flat, gently sloping or hilly land. For the most part, prairies are treeless but, near the low lying plains, flanking river valleys, woodlands can be found. Tall grass, up to two meters high, dominates the landscape. It is actually a “sea of grass” the prairies are bound by the Rocky mountains in the west and the great lakes in the east. The prairies cover parts of United States of America and parts of Canada. In the USA, the area is drained by his tributaries of Mississippi and the Canadian prairies are drained by the tributaries of Saskatchewan Rivers.

**Climate:** Being located in the heart of a continent, the climate is of continental type with extreme temperatures. The summers are warm with temperatures of around 20°C has been recorded in Winnipeg, Canada. The annual rainfall is moderate and is ideal for the growth of grass. Due to the absence for the north-south barrier, a local wind “Chinook” blows here.

**Flora and fauna:** Prairies are practically tree-less. Where water is available, trees such as willows, alders and poplars grow. Places that receive rainfall of over 50cm are suitable for farming as the soil is fertile.

Though the major crop of this area is maize, other crops including potatoes, soybean, cotton and alfa-alfa is also grown. Areas where rainfall is very little or unreliable, grasses are short and sparse. These areas are suitable for cattle rearing. Large cattle farms called ranches are looked after by sturdy men called cowboys. Bison or the American buffalo is the most important animal of this region.

**People:** The people of this region are very hardworking. They have successfully harnessed technology to utilize their rich natural resources. Two of the most developed countries in the world- the USA and Canada are located in this region.

**Scientific methods** of cultivation and use of tractors, harvesters and combines has made North America a surplus food producer.

The prairies are also known as the **Granaries** of the world, due to the huge surplus of wheat production.

**Dairy farming** is another major industry. The dairy belt extends from the great lakes to the Atlantic Coast in the east. Dairy farming and extensive agriculture both promote setting up of food processing industries.



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Large mineral deposits particularly coal and iron and a good network of roads, railways and canals in this region have made it are the most industrialized region in the world.

**Agriculture** is the most important occupation in the prairies. This region has the following geographical advantages:

- The plains are sloping, well-drained and suitable for large-scale farming.
- The dark brown soil is full of humus and other organic matter.
- The Chinook wind helps in melting the snow and provides moisture to the soil.

The farmers own large stretches of land. A farmer can easily own a farm of around 1,000 acres. The farmers live on the farms. They have sheds to keep machines. Ploughing, sowing, threshing and storage are all done with the help of one single machine called the combine harvester.

### **Transport and Cities:**

The prairies have an efficient network of transport. Since the land is almost level, it is easier to construct roads and railways in this region. Chicago is an important commercial and industrial centre of the USA, located in the prairies. Winnipeg in Canada is a big town which has become a large grain-collecting center. All farmhouses are equipped with grain-collecting sheds called silos. Inside the silos, the grain is well-protected against the harsh and changing climate.

**The Veldts:** The temperature grasslands of South Africa are called the Veldts. Veldts are rolling plateaus with varying heights ranging from 600 m to 1100 m. it is bound by the Drakensburg Mountains on the east. To its west lies the Kalahari Desert. On the northeastern part. “High Veldts” are located that attain a height of more than 1600m, in some places. The tributaries of rivers Orange and Limpopo drain the region.

**Climate:** The Veldts have a mild climate due to the influence of the Indian Ocean. Winters are cold and dry. Temperatures vary between 5°C and 10°C and July is the coldest month. Summers are short and warm. Johannesburg records about 20°C temperature in the summer. The Veldts receive rainfall mainly in the summer months from November to February. This is mainly because of the warm ocean currents that wash the shores of the Veldts. If the rainfall is scanty in the winter months from June till August, drought may occur.

**Flora and fauna:** The vegetation cover is sparse. Grasses dominate the landscape. Red grass grows in bush Velds. The animals of the Velds are primarily lions, leopards, cheetah and kudu.

**People:** Veldts are known for cattle rearing and mining. The soils are not very fertile in the Veldts due to the presence of discontinuous grasses exposing barren surface. However where the land is fertile crops are grown. The main crops are maize, wheat, barley, oats and potato.

Cash crops like tobacco, sugarcane and cotton are also grown. Sheep rearing is the most important occupation of the people. Sheep is bred mainly for wool and has given rise to the wool industry in the Veldts. Merino sheep is a popular species and their wool is very warm. Dairy farming is the next important occupation.

The veldts have rich reserve of minerals. Iron and steel industry has developed where coal and iron are present. Gold and diamond mining are major occupations of people of this region.

**Johannesburg** is known for being the gold capital of the world. Kimberley is famous for its diamond mines.

