

Growing Illinois Agriculture by River, Rail, & Road

Grade Level: 4-8

Lesson Overview

How did Illinois become a major supplier of agricultural products to the United States and the world? It's a fascinating story that begins with rivers.

Student Objectives

1. Describe three features that make Illinois an ideal center of agriculture.
2. Identify the land features that were constructed to connect important waterways.
3. Explain how Illinois benefits from selling its farm products around the world.

Materials

- ✓ Illinois Growth is Tied to Rivers—and Agriculture information sheet
- ✓ Growing Illinois Agriculture by River, Rail, and Road Worksheet

Vocabulary

- **canal** - a man-made waterway for the passage of boats.
- **economy** - system of production, consumption, and distribution of goods and services.
- **elevator** - structure for unloading, storing, and loading out grain.
- **flatboat** - large rectangular boat suitable for shipping large quantities of goods, passengers, and livestock.
- **immigrants** - people coming to live in a new land.
- **profitable** - to make money beyond expenses.
- **self-sufficient** - able to survive without outside help.

Background Information

See the Illinois Growth is Tied to Rivers—and Agriculture information sheet included with this lesson.

Procedure

1. Ask students, “Do you think Illinois plays a significant role in the agricultural economy of the United States? Why or why not?” Allow students to share and discuss their ideas.
2. Distribute the informational reading, “Illinois Growth Tied to Agriculture.” Give students time to read.
3. Revisit the opening question and discuss further as a class.
4. Ask students to complete the Growing Illinois Agriculture by River, Rail and Road worksheet by referring to the informational reading.

Additional Resources

- At Home in the Heartland online exhibit from Illinois State Museum
<http://exhibits.museum.state.il.us/exhibits/athome/index.html>)
- I&M Canal National Heritage Area
<https://iandmcanal.org/about-this-place-history/>

Standards

Illinois Social Science Standard

SS.G3.6-8.MdC Explain how changes in transportation and communication influence the spatial connections among human settlements and affect the spread of ideas and culture.

Illinois English Language Arts Standard

RI 1 Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

The **M**ultidisciplinary **A**gricultural **I**ntegrated **C**urriculum (mAGic) was created in 2004 under the leadership of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Facilitating Coordination in Agricultural Education Project (FCAE). Funding was made available through the FCAE grant budget from the agricultural education line item of the ISBE budget. This revision, as printed, was developed in April 2021.



These mAGic lessons are designed to bring agriculture to life in your classroom. They address the Illinois Learning Standards in math, science, English language arts and social studies.

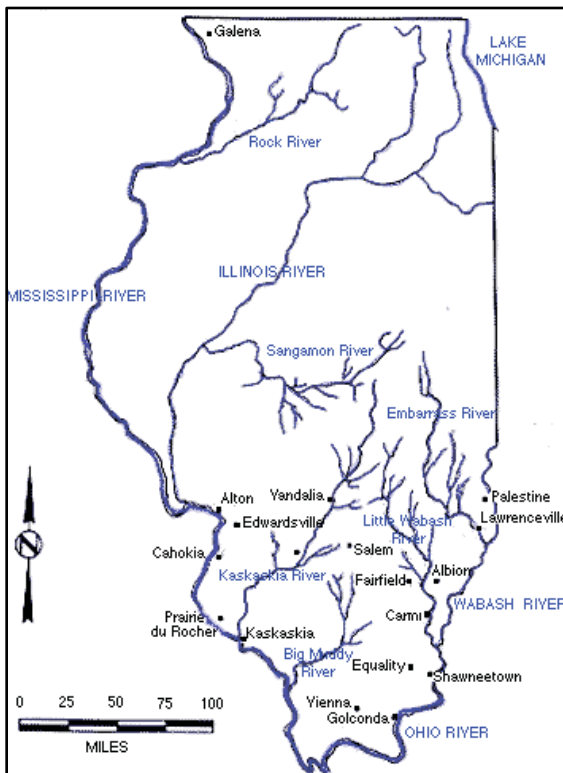
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Illinois Growth is Tied to Rivers—and Agriculture

The state of Illinois is known around the world as a major center of business and agriculture. Illinois is home to the city of Chicago, the third largest city in the United States and a powerhouse in worldwide trade. How did that happen? A look at maps of the United States and of Illinois gives us important clues.



Illinois is located in the heart of the continental United States. By comparing the U.S. map to a map of Illinois and its rivers, you can see that the western border of the state is formed by the Mississippi River.

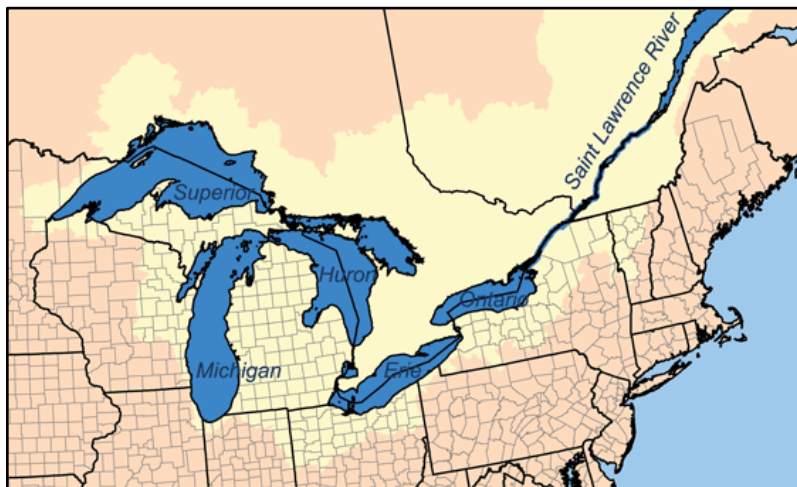


This historic map shows that Illinois' oldest communities are located in the southern part of the state. There are two key reasons for this. First, French fur traders traveled up the Mississippi River from the Gulf of Mexico in the early 1600s, becoming the first Europeans to visit the area. Second, settlers from the East came by flatboat down the Ohio River to the southern border of present-day Illinois. Over time, settlers pushed farther north on Illinois' many rivers, which were the easiest and safest way to travel before the existence of roads or railroads.

Until the 1800s, Illinois farmers were largely self-sufficient. They grew food mostly for their own families, selling few or none of their products to others. Around 1830, this began to change. The economy in New England and in Europe began to boom and the demand for farm products dramatically increased. Prices went up, and Illinois farmers started to produce and sell some of their crops and livestock for cash.

Rivers had played a major role in European settlement of Illinois. Now they played a key role in the ability of Illinois farmers to take advantage of the boom in product demand. Items like wheat flour and salted meat were carried down the Mississippi River by flatboat to the port of New Orleans on the Gulf of Mexico. Ships could then move these products from the Gulf of Mexico to the East Coast of the U.S. as well as to Europe.

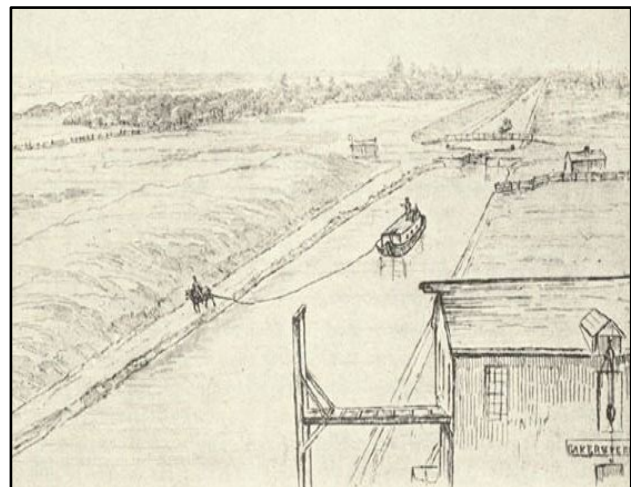
With more money than ever before, farmers bought more equipment and goods from local businesses. As their farms thrived and farmers purchased more goods, businesses grew. With growth in business, towns grew, too.



Despite the ability to ship farm products down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico, the route had its drawbacks. The trip from New Orleans to eastern markets by sea was long and dangerous. As an alternative, merchants and ship owners sought ways to use the Great Lakes (see map) instead.

In 1825, the Erie Canal opened, linking New York's Hudson River to Lake Erie and the other Great Lakes, including Lake Michigan on Illinois' northeast corner.

The opening of the Erie Canal meant passengers could now travel from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes States. Many immigrants traveled to Illinois via this water route, further increasing the state's population and demand for farm products.



The construction of another important canal allowed transportation of goods from the Mississippi River to the Great Lakes. In 1848, the Illinois & Michigan or I & M Canal joined the Illinois River to Lake Michigan. Now goods could be transported by water up the Mississippi River to the Illinois River, then through the I & M Canal to Lake Michigan. The settlement around the port on Lake Michigan became the city of Chicago.



In the 1850s, newly-constructed railroads also began to connect Illinois to other parts of the United States. Now the pieces were in place to make Illinois a center of agriculture and business in the country and the world. Illinois' rich farmland now produced food and fiber for an exploding market.

The railroads brought change even faster. Farmers sold their grain to elevators along the railroad lines.

The elevators loaded the grain onto

rail cars and shipped it to market. In time, Illinois grew less wheat and more corn to feed its thriving pork industry. Hogs, too, went to market by train. Chicago became known as the “hog butcher to the world.”

Farmers also needed good roads to transport their products. Thousands of miles of new roads were built to get farm products to market. These roads made it easier to settle even the most remote parts of the state.

Farmers bought more land and new equipment—especially the new inventions that made farming easier and more profitable. Because people had more money to spend, stores offered more goods. Banks, factories, and food processing companies sprang up all over the state. Landholders supported colleges to research better ways to grow crops and livestock. Immigrants came, contributing their skills and knowledge.

Illinois is fortunate to have a location, climate, and soil ideal for agriculture. Today, this agricultural industry continues to be part of the global marketplace. Due to technology advances, buyers and sellers around the world trade goods. All the transportation systems available in Illinois—its rivers, rails, and roads—continue to support its agricultural economy.

Name _____

Growing Illinois Agriculture by River, Rail, and Road

Circle the correct answer:

1. What three features made Illinois an ideal center of agriculture?
 - a. Indians, fur traders, and bison
 - b. Location, climate, and soil
 - c. Gold, silver, and copper
2. Which part of Illinois was settled first, and why?
 - a. The north, because it was near Wisconsin
 - b. The central region, because it had a fort
 - c. The south, because settlers came down the Ohio River and worked their way north
3. How did farming change around 1830?
 - a. Farmers started to sell their products for cash.
 - b. Harvests were celebrated with square dances.
 - c. Tractors were invented.
4. How were farm products first transported to New Orleans from Illinois?
 - a. By horse and wagon
 - b. Across the Atlantic on ships
 - c. Down the Mississippi River by flatboat
5. What made it possible for goods to be shipped by boat from the Mississippi River to the Great Lakes?
 - a. A log raft
 - b. A canal
 - c. A bridge
6. What new transportation method became important after 1850?
 - a. Railroads
 - b. Space Shuttle
 - c. Federal Express

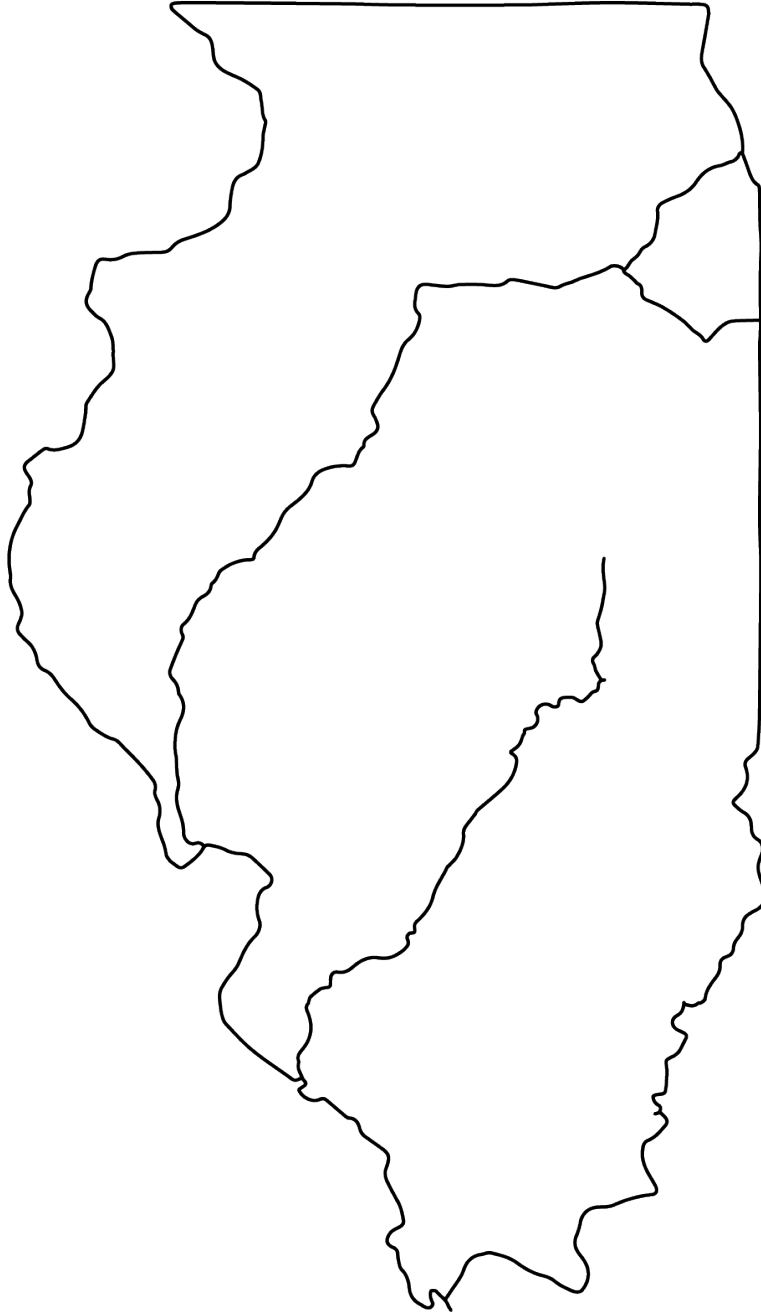
Answer the following questions:

1. Describe how Illinois might benefit from selling its farm products around the country and the world.

2. How would Illinois agriculture be different today if the Mississippi River did not border the state?

Follow the directions to label the map below:

1. Label the Mississippi River and trace it with a pink highlighter.
2. Label the Ohio River and trace it with a blue highlighter.
3. Label the Illinois River and trace it with a green highlighter.
4. Label the location of Lake Michigan. Trace the shoreline with a yellow highlighter.



Growing Illinois Agriculture by River, Rail, and Road Answer Key

1. What three features made Illinois an ideal center of agriculture?
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Answer the following questions:

7. Describe how Illinois might benefit from selling its farm products around the country and the world.

Answers will vary, but may include more income for Illinois farmers, more jobs for Illinois residents, and more goods and services in Illinois
8. How would Illinois agriculture be different today if the Mississippi River did not border the state?

Answers will vary.

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