

TEACHER'S GUIDE
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MISSION 5: "Up from the Dust"

Farmers' Lives in the Great Depression

This June 17, 1933 article in the Dalhart Texan newspaper describes a meeting between community members and representatives of the Roosevelt administration who were seeking information about the impact of the Depression on communities in and around the Oklahoma Panhandle. Years of drought and increasing numbers of dust storms made it nearly impossible for farmers to grow crops or raise livestock, and the speakers begged for immediate and direct federal aid to combat these conditions and save farmers' lives.

The simple, honest sons of the soil told a story of disaster and desolation to the four-state relief meeting at Gumon Friday that beggared description and staggers the mind.

President G. R. Gear, of the Guymon Chamber of Commerce, a banker, presided at the meeting called by the Chamber of Commerce and Red Cross officials of Guymon and Texas county. Three hundred delegates from approximately 30 counties attended.

Conditions Unbelievable

Not a blade of wheat in Cimarron county, Okla.; cattle dying there on the range; a few bushels of wheat in the Perryton areas against an average yield of four to six million bushels; with all stored surplus not more than fifty percent of the seeding needs will be met—ninety percent of the poultry dead in one Panhandle county because of sand storms; sixty cattle dying Friday afternoon, between Guymon and Liberal from some disease induced by dust—humans suffering from dust fever—milk cows going dry, turned into the highways to starve, hogs in such pitiable shape the buyers will not have them; cattle being moved from Dallam and other counties to grass; no wheat in Hartley county; row crops a remote possibility; cattle facing starvation; Potter, Seward and other Panhandle counties with one-third of their population on charity or relief work; ninety percent of farmers in most counties have had to drop loans, the continued drought forcing many of them to use the money for food, clothes, medicine, shelter.

These are only the dregs in the cauldron of the Panhandle's devastation. Civic leaders and farmers were asked to sketch conditions and they spent hours in rapid-fire talk.

Elmer Scott, Dallas, personal representative of Harry L. Hopkins, Washington, D.C., in charge of the administration of federal emergency relief, got these answers in questions asked



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Panhandle farmers, relating to general conditions: No wheat crop, no row crop possible, no grass, no chance of any money being produced in the Panhandle before the wheat crop of mid-summer 1934, imperative need of millions of dollars now to save livestock so that human life can be sustained and the productive agencies of the Panhandle snatched from obliteration. Estimates are from 45 to 60 counties and 60,000 families must have help at once. At \$250 per family to last the humans and livestock a year, the total is 15 million dollars...

Leaders Speak

This condition is beyond crop loans; beyond R. F. C. work these people must have direct help now." said C. R. (Jake) Stahl, of Borger.

President Fanning: "This is not charity. These people only ask a chance to earn. they have built this country. Our government in helping them is not giving, but investing in a section that is a big portion of the nation's bread basket. We think it humanitarian when our government sends money to earthquake-torn Hawaii; to feed the destitute Belgians; to save the Armenians—are we to stand idly by and see our fellow citizens starve to death?

Mr. Scott: "The big issue now is to save human lives."

Dr. D. S. Lee, Guymon: "A doctor knows conditions as well as the farmers—better than any other town or city resident. These farm families are starving to death. I know a family living on bread and milk, with the one cow going."

Source: "Disaster Threatens Farmers; Prevailing Destitution Is Beyond Description; Farmers Facing Bitter Struggle, Tell Story of Hardships Caused by Drought, as Citizens Urge Relief Measures" in *The Dalhart Texan*, June 17, 1933, p. 1, 12.

