THE LAND UTILIZATION PROGRAM IN THE SOUTHERN GREAT PLAINS

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The circumstances which have brought about the present distressing condition in which much of the Southern Great Plains region finds itself have, of late, received a great amount of publicity and are so well known that I shall content myself with presenting merely an outline of the chain of circumstances which have transformed some of the finest grazing land in the country into what is now being called the “dust bowl.”

It has been said that the history of the Southern Great Plains region has been, for the past 60 years, a story of exploitation. A half century of over-grazing by some cattlemen was bad enough, but the damage they did was nothing compared to what happened during the 1920’s. High wheat prices, favorable moisture conditions, and the introduction of farm machinery did the job. The residents were too busy making money to remember that earlier experiments in speculative dryland farming had not produced altogether happy results. The inevitable drought finally came, and with it came disaster.

The settlement of much of the Great Plains took place in accordance with a policy which was destined to place the largest portion of the area under private control as expeditiously as possible. The Federal Government, the state and territorial governments, the railroads and the multitude of speculators all desired to bring settlers into the country. The Homestead Laws have had a great deal to do with hasty settlement.