



STATE OF WASHINGTON

## DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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### Overview of Aquisition of Washington's Centennial Farm Land

While many farms were acquired through sales between private parties, most of Washington's Centennial Farm land was acquired from the U.S. Government through provisions of the following public lands disposal acts.

The Donation Land Claim Act of 1850: granted 320 acres to single men, or 640 acres to married men, who had settled in the Territory prior to December 1, 1850; granted 160 acres to single men, or 320 acres to married men, who had settled in the Territory from December 1, 1850 to December 1, 1855. Residency and cultivation required for four consecutive years, later reduced to two years. Limited to white male settlers, including half breed Indians, over the age of 18 who were citizens or declared their intent to become one.

The Pre-Emption Act of 1841: (extended to Washington in 1854) granted a preferred, or preemptory, right to buy 160 acres of land for \$1.25 per acre to any head of a family, widow or single man over 21 who did not already own 320 acres of land. Improvement and residency required.

Originally, by filing a declaratory statement within 30 days of settlement, an individual acquired the exclusive right to purchase the land within 12 months after settlement upon final proof and payment. After 1871 claimants had 3 months after settlement to file their claim and then 30 months to prove up their claim. On unsurveyed land, settlers had to file their claim within a specified time after survey.

Patents reference the April 24, 1820 Act of Congress "An Act making further provisions for the sale of Public Lands".

The Homestead Act of 1862: granted 160 acres free to a settler after five years of improvement and continuous residency or for \$1.25 per acre after six months residency and suitable improvement of at least one acre. Heads of households, widows and single persons over 21 years of age were eligible. Residency requirement reduced for war veterans.

Patents reference the May 20, 1862 Act of Congress "To secure homesteads to actual settlers on Public Domain".

The Timber Culture Act of 1873: granted 160 acres to a settler who planted and maintained a minimum number of trees on a portion of the acreage. No residency requirement.

The Desert Lands Act of 1877: granted up to 640 acres for \$1.25 per acre to a settler who irrigated the land within three years. Twenty-five cents per acre was to be paid upon original entry and \$1.00 per acre at final proof.

#### Railroad Grants

Settlers also purchased land that had been granted to the railroads. In 1864, the Northern Pacific Railroad Company was granted every odd-numbered section for 40 miles on either side of its proposed lines in Washington. After completing a section of line, the railroad could sell the land to help cover construction costs.

Even-numbered sections within the 40-mile grant limits were open to settlers but until 1879 homesteaders were limited to 80 acres and until 1889 preemptions had to pay \$2.50 per acre instead of \$1.25 per acre. Those who settled on the odd-numbered railroad sections were guaranteed a prior right of purchase once the line was completed and the land offered for sale. The minimum land price was \$2.50 per acre.

#### School Lands

Settlers also purchased land that had been granted to the Territory to support a university and public schools. The Organic Act of 1853, creating the Washington Territory, reserved sections 16 and 36, or equivalent lieu lands, in every surveyed township for the support of common schools. In 1854, two townships to be selected by the territory, were reserved for the support of a university. Both reservations were to be granted to the state when it was admitted to the Union.

Generally, territories were not to use the lands before attaining statehood. However, Washington Territory sold nearly half of its university lands by 1864 and started selling and leasing school lands in the 1860's.

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