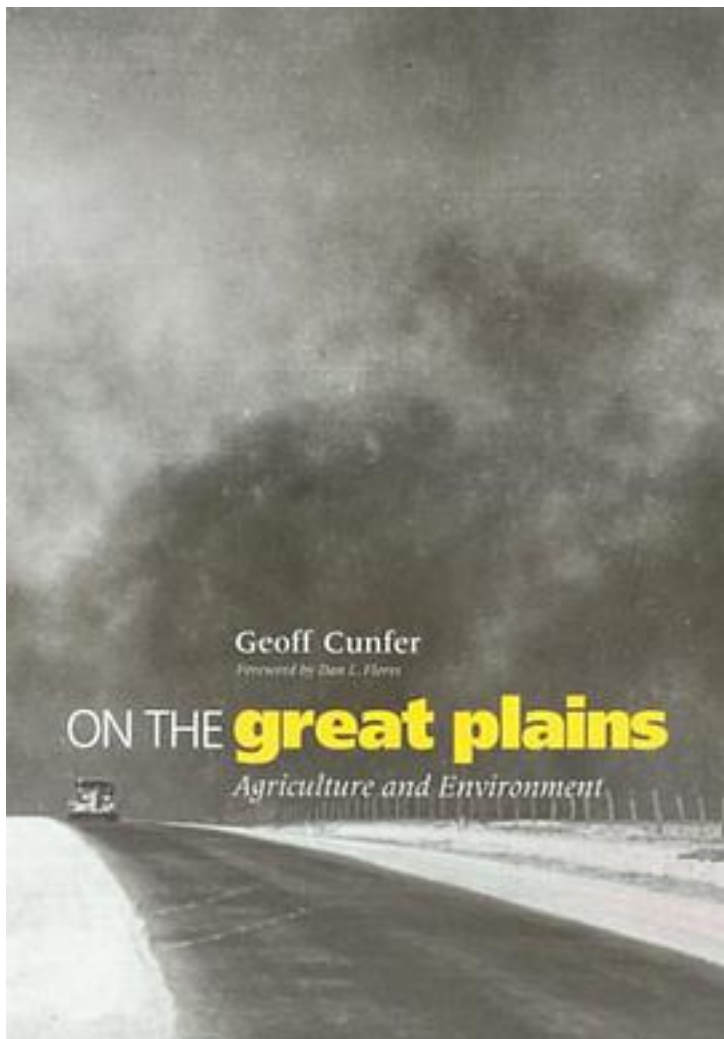


On the Great Plains



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Depending on who is telling it, the history of Euro-American farmers on the Great

Plains has been a story of either agricultural triumph or ecological failure--an optimistic tale of taming nature for human purposes or a dire account of disrupting nature and suffering the environmental consequences. In *On the Great Plains*, author Geoff Cunfer poses an alternative scenario: that people were not the masters of nature on the Great Plains. Land use in America's vast interior prairies has stayed remarkably stable throughout the twentieth century, changing little as droughts came and went, as farmers shifted from horses to tractors, and as federal subsidies and fluctuating crop prices transformed the economics of farming. An equilibrium between natural and human forces emerged as farmers plowed and planted the same amount of cropland during most of this period, maintaining two-thirds of the Great Plains in unplowed, native vegetation. To support his theory, Cunfer looks at the entire Great Plains (450 counties in ten states), tapping historical agricultural census data paired with GIS mapping to illuminate land use on the Great Plains over 130 years. Coupled with several community and family case studies, this database allows Cunfer to reassess the interaction between farmers and nature in the Great Plains agricultural landscape.

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