

Western Farmers

YOU LIVE IN WESTERN AND MIDWESTERN states and territories—places like Illinois, Ohio, Nebraska, and Kansas. Your family owns a farm and you work it yourselves. You own no slaves. Some of you were born in the United States, but many of you come from other countries like Germany and Great Britain.

Like farmers everywhere, you want the best land you can get. Those of you in states like Ohio and Illinois think about moving someday to western territories like Kansas and Nebraska where there is plentiful, rich land and good amounts of rainfall. For all of you, perhaps your biggest worry is that southerners will move into the territories and bring their slaves with them. You hate slavery. Not because you believe that all people are created equal, but because slave labor would cheapen *your* labor. Any crop grown by slaves can be sold more cheaply. How can you compete against people who work for free? Let the slave owners keep their slaves in the South where they've always been. But every year, slave owners get more bold. In 1854 Congress repealed the "Missouri Compromise"

that outlawed slavery in Kansas and Nebraska. In the 1857 *Dred Scott* decision, the Supreme Court ruled that a slave owner can take slaves wherever he wants, and Congress can't say anything about it. These slave owners have to keep away from free farmers like you.

For a long time there has been talk of the government giving good land in the West to farmers who will work it themselves. Congress passed a "homestead" act recently, but President Buchanan, a Democrat, vetoed it. Maybe you'd move and maybe you wouldn't, but you sure would like the choice. Perhaps you could sell your farm for a profit and move west onto better land.

Another concern of yours these days is transportation. Travel is slow. There's no way to get way out west to California or Oregon except by wagon. And if you move farther west, how would you get manufactured goods like guns, stoves, and tools from the east? And you'd need some quick and safe way to get your products to market in the east.