

Modeling a Prairie Ecosystem

A prairie, found in the temperate grassland biome, is typically a flat or gently rolling grassland with few trees and is largely covered by seasonal grasses. Organisms often found in a prairie ecosystem include prairie dogs, swift foxes, black-footed ferrets, and of course the grasses themselves. They are found throughout the United States and parts of Canada.




In this lab you will be looking at different factors that can cause fluctuations in populations in an ecosystem.

**Brainstorm:** Sort each of the prairie species identified into producers and consumers:

Producer(s)	Consumer(s)
Grass Prairie Dogs	Swift Foxes Black-footed Ferrets

Predict the source(s) of energy for each organism, and what the predator(s) is/are for each organism.

Organism	Source(s) of Energy - what do they eat?	Predator(s) - what eats them?
Grass	Sunlight, Water, Animal Waste	Prairie Dogs
Prairie Dogs	Grass	Swift Foxes, Black-footed Ferrets
Swift Foxes	Prairie Dogs	Organism higher in food chain
Black-footed Ferrets	Prairie Dogs	Organism higher in food chain

Grass	<u>Get the Gizmo ready:</u>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Click on the "Data" tab</li> <li>Leave the grass population at 4,000 tons</li> <li>Remove ALL animals from the prairie by clicking the (-) minus button next to each animal until they reach 0.</li> <li>Switch the graph to "line graph" and zoom out as needed to be able to see the populations on the graph.</li> </ul>	

- Click advance year until you have 20 years of data. Record your observations.
  - Remember to include **numerical data** in your observations.

The grass population grew for a year until it stayed stable and the population of the grass didn't increase or decrease. The tons of grass also went up by 4,000 from 4,000 tons to 8,000 tons.

- Where does the grass obtain the matter (carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus and oxygen) needed to survive?

Carbon - From the atmosphere through photosynthesis  
 Nitrogen - From the ground and past dead organisms  
 Phosphorus - From rich soil from old decomposed organisms  
 Oxygen - From the atmosphere through cellular respiration at night

- Where does the grass obtain the energy needed to survive?

Mainly from water, sunlight, oxygen, and carbon dioxide.

# Prairie Ecosystem Gizmo Answer Key

**Lauren Gardner**

A red circular graphic with a gradient, appearing as a semi-circle or a partial circle, located to the right of the author's name.

## **Prairie Ecosystem Gizmo Answer Key:**

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