When people think of Colorado, its mountains usually come to mind first. While the Rockies cross many state borders, the presence of Colorado's mountains explains why the state was first settled and, in many cases, why so many people have moved there since. Even the state's large cities on the plains—Denver and the rest—have depended and continue to depend on the mountains, whether because of mining or tourism, for their continued economic existence. But not exclusively.

Colorado has been an important agricultural state since the late nineteenth century if for no other reason than the people in its cities and its mountains have always needed to eat. At first glance, Colorado's eastern plains appear similar to the other plains that surround it, but Michael Weeks's book on the northeastern section of Colorado (the Colorado Piedmont) and the industries that developed there explains the complicated relationship between this region, the rest of the state, and to some extent the rest of the American West. That alone makes this work a tremendous contribution to Colorado history.

Weeks puts the environmental history of this region front and center, but his use of John Muir's quotation about everything being “hitched to everything else in the Universe” at the beginning of the second chapter demonstrates that he wants to cover a lot of different subjects (p. 47). Justifying the book's title, Weeks quickly establishes the direct relationship between cattle and sugar beets as soon as he introduces both industries. At the most basic level, cattlemen fed their cows the tops of beets that sugar producers could not use. Also, both these industries depended on water.

Each of these industries was influenced by different factors too. The success or failure of the cattle industry depended on the weather, while the sugar industry depended on federal agricultural research. Beet biology determined where and when that crop could be grown and harvested. Because sugar beet agriculture was so labor intensive for so long, it relied on immigration...
policy and the willingness of various immigrant groups to perform back-breaking labor. This is a book that rightfully begins with the land, but it has to shift its focus to explain all these factors, and Weeks does a good job following the connections.

Weeks is particularly adept at describing the importance of water to the success of these industries. Cattle came to the Colorado Piedmont because of the Cache la Poudre River. The growth of the sugar beet industry late in the twentieth century depended on the Colorado-Big Thompson project which cut the variation in the size of the crop from year to year by bringing water in from across the Continental Divide. With respect to connections, it is worth noting that the proximity to water in the mountains is what made the industrial development of these particular plains possible.

While the decision to put the natural environment at the center in this discussion is thoroughly justified, the book is missing an overall explanation combining all these connections. Some parts of the system Weeks describes are not as well developed as others, like the role of the federal government in making sugar beet cultivation possible or even the basic structure of the sugar beet industry, which relied on three different parties: the corporations, farmers, and farm labor. (Weeks only seems interested in the first and third groups.) There is a terrific novel discussion of sugar beet seeds here but little about the technology that mechanized sugar beet cultivation and therefore eliminated the growers' labor problem. Of course, no book can take in a whole universe of causations, but alluding to so much inevitably shortchanges some intriguing subjects that might carry significant explanatory power.

The simple act of moving the narrative beyond 1930 makes the book something of a novelty in the area of Colorado history. Post-1950 is when agriculture in the state started to grow big. That much of this discussion is a close examination of the environmental effects of petrochemical agri-
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