

**Farms and Towns** Farming in New England was not easy. The growing season was short, and the soil in many places was rocky. Most farmers practiced **subsistence farming**. That is, they produced just enough food for themselves and sometimes a little extra to trade in town.

Most New England farmers lived near a town. Colonial officials sold large plots of land to groups of people—often to a Puritan **congregation**. The congregation settled the town and divided the land among its members.

This pattern of settlement led New England towns to develop in a unique way. Usually, a cluster of farmhouses and a meetinghouse were built around a **common**—shared land where public activities took place. Because people lived together in small towns, a diverse economy developed. Farmers sold produce to shopkeepers; shopkeepers had enough customers to make a living. Along the coast, seaport towns shipped farm products and provided a marketplace for goods coming into New England.

**Harvesting the Sea** The Atlantic Ocean offered many economic opportunities. Near New England’s coast were some of the world’s best whaling and fishing grounds for mackerel, halibut, cod, herring, and other fish.

New England’s forests provided everything needed to harvest these “pastures” of fish. Wood from oak trees made excellent ship hulls. Hundred-foot-tall white pines were ideal for masts. Shipbuilders used about 2,500 trees to produce just one ship!

The forests were a valuable resource. Soon New England was exporting timber, as well as fish, to the world. As merchants grew rich from exporting these goods, their ships began carrying goods produced in other places as well. New England’s ships became an important part of international trade.

Throughout New England, the population benefitted from the wealth being created in the seaports. The colonists were soon competing with England’s fishermen, shipbuilders, and merchants. As coastal towns like Boston, Salem, and Newport grew rich, the English government began to take notice.

**The Navigation Acts** According to the economic theory of **mercantilism**, the mother country was supposed to profit from its colonies. As the American colonists prospered, England wanted to make sure that it profited

## The New England Colonies 1750



### Connect Geography & History

- 1. Location** All of the New England colonies are located to the east of what major river?
- 2. Make Inferences** Why do you think New Englanders exported so many ocean-related products?