The object of this paper is to describe a few of the more important dark colored prairie soils occurring in Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska, and to point out in the typical profiles described below the characteristics which serve as a basis for the differentiation of these soils into series according to the system used by the Bureau of Soils.

The location and extent of the various soil groups of series is shown on the sketch map at end of this article. The list of soils named in the legend does not include all the soils of the region which are dark colored. Only the normally developed upland soils which have weathered under good drainage conditions, or those upland soils which have developed in place under conditions of more or less restricted drainage will be considered in this paper. The large areas of soils which have developed over many kinds of water-laid material as on the glacial lake terraces in the Red River Valley in North Dakota and Minnesota, and the peat areas of Minnesota are not discussed. Soils covering small areas and those which can be differentiated only on minor variations have not been indicated on the general soil map, but are included within the representative group. On this map the soils are shown as covering the region over which they are extensively developed, but they do not in any case cover the entire surface. In some cases they occupy less than one-half of the total area. They may be regarded however, as the normally developed upland soils and as the work of the various soil-forming processes operating in that particular region. The distinguishing and important characteristics of these soils are also found in many minor types in the same region.

It would be highly desirable to discuss the features of this region which influence soil formation, the topography, climate and geology, but we have not space for these subjects. This paper must be confined to the soil characteristics and brief mention only will be made of the external factors which determine these characteristics.

It must be kept clearly in mind that the term soil characteristics includes only those features of the color, thickness, structure and chemical composition of the various horizons, and the arrangement of these horizons in the soil profile. Those external conditions or forces, coextensive though they may be with the dark colored soils and essential to their development, such as favorable climatic conditions with respect to temperature and moisture, a smooth topography, a treeless condition and a grass vegetation can not be regarded as soil characteristics, nor as essential factors in any system of soil classification.