

History of Food Production

History of Food Production – Study Notes

1. Early Human Diets

Period	Key Developments	Typical Foods
Paleolithic (?2.5?M–10?k?yr BP)	• Hunter?gatherer lifestyle • Seasonal foraging, hunting, fishing	Wild plants, fruits, nuts, tubers, meat, fish, insects
Mesolithic (?10?k–5?k?yr BP)	• More systematic gathering • Early use of simple tools (stone sickles, fishhooks)	Expanded plant repertoire, small?game hunting, shellfish
Neolithic (?10?k–4?k?yr BP)	• Agricultural Revolution – domestication of plants & animals • Sedentary villages	Domesticated cereals (wheat, barley, rice, maize), legumes, livestock (goats, sheep, cattle)

2. Birth of Agriculture (?10,000?BP)

Region	Crops Domesticated	Livestock Domesticated
Fertile Crescent (Middle East)	Emmer wheat, einkorn, barley, lentils	Sheep, goats, cattle, pigs
East Asia	Rice, millet	Pigs, chickens
Mesoamerica	Maize (corn), beans, squash	Turkeys, llamas (later)
Andean South America	Quinoa, potatoes	Llamas, alpacas
Sub?Saharan Africa	Sorghum, millet	Cattle, goats

Significance: Stable food surplus ? population growth, social stratification, trade, and the rise of cities.

3. Ancient Civilizations & Intensified Production

Civilization	Innovations	Impact on Food Production
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Mesopotamia (Sumer, Babylon)	Irrigation canals, plow, grain storage	Year-round wheat/barley, urban food supply
Ancient Egypt	Basin irrigation (Nile flooding), granaries	Massive cereal surpluses, tax in kind
Indus Valley	Sophisticated water management, wheat & barley cultivation	Urban planning tied to food distribution
China (Shang/Zhou)	Early rice paddies, iron tools	High yields, regional trade
Maya & Aztec	Terracing, chinampas (floating gardens)	Intensive maize production in marginal lands

4. Classical & Medieval Advances

- **Greek & Roman Worlds**
 - Crop rotation (legumes after cereals)
 - Large estates (latifundia) and slave labor
 - Introduction of new crops: olives, grapes, figs
 - **Islamic Golden Age (8th–13th c)**
 - Hydraulic engineering (qanats, norias)
 - Spread of crops: sugarcane, citrus, rice, cotton
 - Agricultural manuals (e.g., *Kitab al-Filaha*)
 - **Medieval Europe**
 - Three-field system → higher yields
 - Heavy plow, horse collar → more efficient tillage
 - Monastic farms as centers of innovation
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5. Early Modern Era (1500–1800)

Development	Example	Effect
Columbian Exchange	Transfer of maize, potatoes, tomatoes to Europe; wheat, cattle to the Americas	Global diversification