

History of Agriculture

History of Agriculture – Study Notes

1. Why Agriculture Matters

- **Foundation of Civilization** – Stable food supply enabled permanent settlements, population growth, and complex societies.
- **Economic Engine** – Agriculture drives trade, technology, and cultural exchange.
- **Environmental Impact** – Human?land interactions began with farming; understanding the past helps address today’s sustainability challenges.

2. Chronological Overview

Period	Approx. Dates (Global)	Key Developments	Representative Sites
Pre?Agricultural (foraging)	??10,000?BCE	Nomadic hunter?gatherers; seasonal mobility	Ohalo II (Israel), Monte Verde (Chile)
Neolithic Revolution	10,000–6,000? BCE	Domestication of plants & animals; sedentary villages	Jericho (West Bank), Çatalhöyük (Turkey)
Early River?Valley Civilizations	6,000–3,000? BCE	Irrigation, surplus production, social stratification	Mesopotamia (Tigris? Euphrates), Nile Valley, Indus Valley
Bronze Age Agrarian Expansion	3,300–1,200? BCE	Plow development, grain storage, trade networks	Shang China, Minoan Crete
Classical Antiquity	1,200? BCE–500?CE	Large?scale estates, crop rotation, fertilisation (manure, compost)	Roman Empire, Gupta India
Medieval Agronomy	500–1500?CE	Three?field system, heavy plow, watermills, horse collar	Europe, Song?dynasty China
Early Modern Intensification	1500–1800?CE	Crop?rotation innovations (e.g., Norfolk system), New World crops (maize, potatoes)	England, Spanish Americas

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Period	Approx. Dates (Global)	Key Developments	Representative Sites
Industrial Agriculture	1800–1950?CE	Mechanised ploughs, steam power, synthetic fertilizers, pesticides	United States, Britain
Green Revolution	1945–1970?CE	High?yield varieties, irrigation, chemical inputs, extension services	Mexico, India, Philippines
Contemporary & Future Trends	1970? CE–present	Precision farming, biotechnology, agroecology, climate?smart agriculture	Global

3. Major Milestones & Their Significance

3.1 Domestication of Plants

Crop	Region of Origin	Approx. Domestication	Why It Matters
Wheat (einkorn, emmer)	Fertile Crescent	~9,500?BCE	First staple grain; enabled storage
Barley	Fertile Crescent	~9,000?BCE	Tolerant of saline soils; early brewing
Rice (Oryza sativa)	Yangtze River basin	~8,000?BCE	Supports dense populations in Asia
Maize (corn)	Mesoamerica	~7,000?BCE	Highly productive; spread worldwide
Potato	Andes (Peru)	~5,000?BCE	Calorie?dense; transformed European diets

Key Concepts

- **Selection pressure** – Humans chose plants with desirable traits (larger seed, non?shattering rachis).

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- **Genetic bottleneck** – Early domestication reduced genetic diversity, influencing modern breeding.

3.2 Animal Domestication

- **Sheep & Goats**