

Was farming an improvement over foraging?

Transport yourself back to about 12,000 years ago, before the advent of agriculture, when humans were still living as foragers. What would your life have been like without domesticated plants and animals? Would you have been healthier or not? What would your diet have been like? Would you have had more or less leisure time?

Agriculture is regularly viewed as a key development in the emergence and rise of early human civilizations. The adoption of agriculture marked a major transition for human societies about 11,000 years ago. It introduced an era marked by the intensification of technology, increased extraction of natural resources, and a massive increase in human population.

Agriculture is the cultivation and domestication of plants and animals to obtain food and other products. These practices were developed independently in several parts of the world over thousands of years. As agricultural technology developed, so did human societies and settlements, eventually allowing for a transition from the hunter-gatherer lifestyles to the sedentary* lifestyle most of us are familiar with today. But was this new lifestyle better than the old one? Was farming an improvement over foraging?

Your job in this investigation is to develop your own ideas about quality of life and apply these ideas to what we know about the lives of hunter-gatherers and agriculturalists. You will be using a variety of different texts and images to compare these contrasting ways of life. Some of the sources you examine will offer very direct opinions. Other sources will require you to think about how they relate to the question. In the end, you will be able to use the evidence provided and your own visions of what makes a good life to form your own answer to the question: *was farming an improvement over foraging?*

*sedentary: seated; settled down; inactive

Investigation: Was Farming an Improvement over Foraging?

You will first analyze the following documents based on the guiding questions below in your notebook. Then, using evidence from the documents, you will answer the following question:

To what extent was farming an improvement over foraging?

DOCUMENT SET ONE: PRIMARY SOURCES

For each set of images, answer the following corresponding questions.

Documents: Tools

1. For what purposes do you think these tools were used?
2. Compare the tools from different societies:
 - a. How are they different?
 - b. How are they similar?
 - c. Which tools seem easier to use? Why?
 - d. Which set of tools do you think are associated with a higher quality of life? Why?

Documents: Shelters

1. How many people do you think could fit inside one of the teepees depicted?
2. What do you notice about the lifestyle in the first image?
3. Compare the shelters:
 - a. What are the major differences?
 - b. What are the benefits to having many people live close together (image 2) versus living in smaller tribal groups (image 1)?
 - c. What are the disadvantages?

Documents: Food Intake

1. Observe the Paleolithic diet. What limitations do you see?
2. What advantages exist to having only that set of foods available?
3. Observe the graphs. What do the graphs show about the difference between Paleolithic and Neolithic (agriculture-based) diets?
4. Which diet do you think is better? Why? Support with evidence from the real world.

Based on only the documents above, do you believe farming was an improvement over foraging? Support your claim (your answer to the question) with evidence from the documents. Answer this question in complete sentences.

DOCUMENT SET TWO: SECONDARY SOURCES

Make the following chart in your notes, and answer the corresponding question.

Document	In your own words, what is the author's main argument (claim)? Does the author believe that the advent of agriculture was good or bad?
Doc 1: Mark Nathan Cohen, "Health and the Rise of Civilization"	
Doc 2: Richard Lee, "What Hunters do for a Living"	
Doc 3: Marshall Sahlins, "The Original Affluent Society"	
Doc 4: Kevin Reilly, "Excerpt from the West and the World: A History of Civilization"	

Taking all of the information you learned from the primary and secondary sources, and your answers to previous questions, answer the following two questions in at least one paragraph each. Be sure to support your claim with evidence. You will turn this in for a grade.

- 1. Before you conclude your investigation, explain the reliability (or lack thereof) of secondary sources. Why are they less trustworthy than primary sources? What biases are present? Choose one document from the above four to include in your answer.**

- 2. To what extent was farming an improvement over foraging?**