

## 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?*

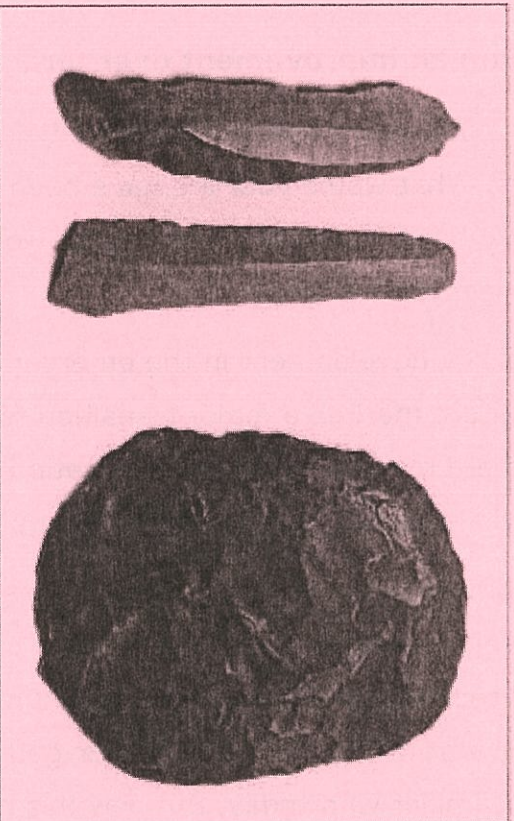
\*sedentary: seated; settled down; inactive

DOCUMENT SET  
#1:  
PRIMARY SOURCES

# #1

## TOOLS FROM HUNTER-GATHERER SOCIETIES

Hunter-gathering societies have used various types of stones, as well as bone and antler, to make a variety of tools such as scrapers, blades, arrows, spearheads, needles, awls, fishhooks, and harpoons. The 6.5- to 6.7-cm (2.5- to 2.6-inch) flint blades on the left are from North Africa, dating from 5000–4500 BCE. The 5.7- x 4.6-cm (2.2- x 1.8-inch) scraper on the right is made of green jasper, dates from 5200 to 2500 BCE, and was found in the south-central Sahara Desert.



### Sources

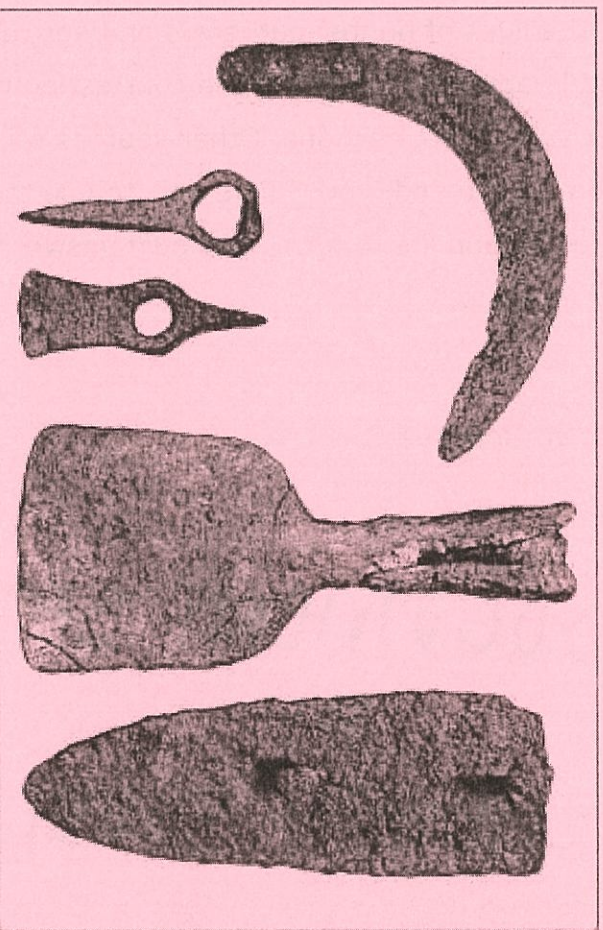
<http://www.worldmuseumofman.org/display.php?item=1167>

<https://www.worldmuseumofman.org/display.php?item=434>

# #2

## TOOLS FROM AN AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY

These metal tools include a crescent-shaped scythe used in the harvesting of grain and a square-end hoe used for weeding and other farming activities. They were excavated in contemporary Spain, and date from the fourth century BCE.



### Source

[http://intercentres.edu.gva.es/albat/EL\\_S%20IBERS%20E/agricultura\\_1\\_els\\_texte.html](http://intercentres.edu.gva.es/albat/EL_S%20IBERS%20E/agricultura_1_els_texte.html)

# DOCS: TOOLS

#1

# HUNTER-GATHERER SHELTERS



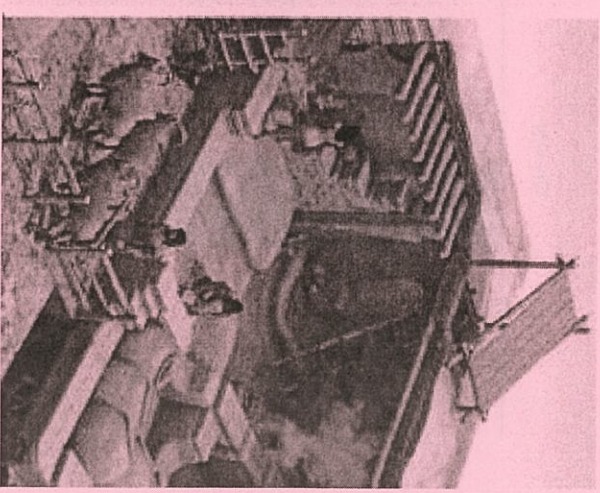
Hunter-gatherer societies were (and some still are) generally nomadic, with individual communities often numbering fewer than 50 people. Their settlements were often found in caves or other natural shelters. Sometimes shelters were made of building materials that could be taken apart, moved, and put back together. This artist's illustration shows an encampment of Sioux on the Great Plains of North America. Hunter-gatherers around the world lived a similar lifestyle for millennia.

Image Credit  
A lithograph by Karl Bodmer, c. 1840 © CORBIS.

# DOCS: SHELTERS

#2

# MAP & ILLUSTRATION OF LIFE IN CATAL HUYUK



Catal Huyuk, in modern Turkey, was one of the first places in the world where humans lived in dense settlements. From about 7500 to 5700 BCE, an estimated average of between 5,000 and 8,000 people lived in mud-brick houses with rooftops serving as streets. James Mellaart, the British archaeologist who excavated Catal Huyuk in 1958, produced this drawing of the settlement's layout. Alongside is an artist's illustration of an individual dwelling.

## Sources

<http://makingmaps.net/2008/10/13/catalcocoethes-why-the-worlds-oldest-map-isnt-a-map/>

[http://www.educiona.com/gaortafolio/image/5/21/0/5/casa\\_catal\\_huyuk\\_5025.jpg](http://www.educiona.com/gaortafolio/image/5/21/0/5/casa_catal_huyuk_5025.jpg)

#1

# FOODS CONSUMED DURING THE PALEOLITHIC ERA

## Foods available:

- Insects, fish, shellfish and other marine animals, reptiles, birds, wild (land) mammals, and eggs
- Plant leaves, seaweed, sea grasses, and algae
- Roots
- Tubers
- Berries and wild fruits
- Nuts and seeds
- Honey (occasionally)

## Foods not available:

- Dairy (except for human milk during early childhood)
- Cereal grains (with the exception of occasional intake in the Upper Paleolithic)
- Legumes (except certain varieties that were consumed seasonally)
- Isolated sugar
- Isolated oils
- Alcohol
- Refined salt (even sea salt would be available only to shore-based populations, who may have dipped their food in sea water)

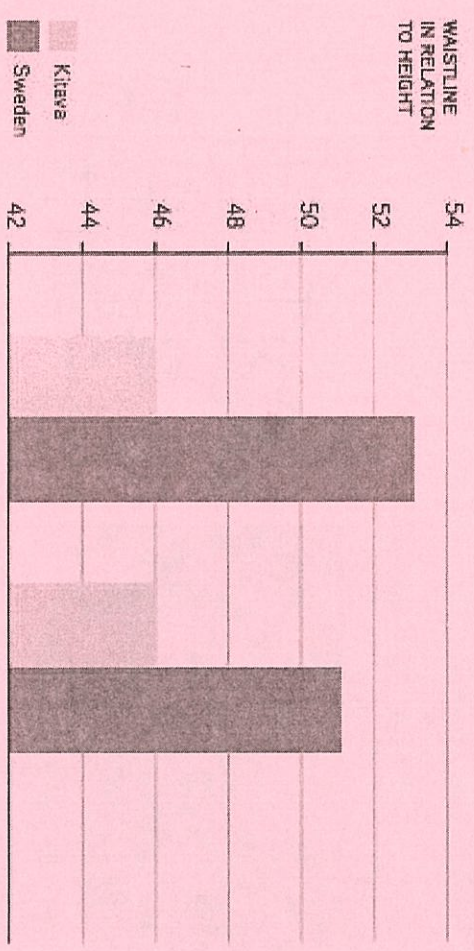
## Source

Pedro Carrera-Bastos, Maelan Fontes-Villalba, James H O'Keefe, Staffan Lindenberg, Loren Cordain, "The Western Diet and Lifestyle and Diseases of Civilization," *Research Reports in Clinical Cardiology* (March 8, 2011).

#2

# WAIST CIRCUMFERENCE IN KITAVANS & HEALTHY SWEDES

Kitava is an island off the coast of Papua New Guinea. The inhabitants of this island and their diet and lifestyle have been the subject of medical research due to their reported excellent health and traditional diet. This graph establishes a ratio of waist size (in centimeters) to height (in meters). A higher overall number suggests a larger waistline in relation to height.



## Source

Pedro Carrera-Bastos, Maelan Fontes-Villalba, James H O'Keefe, Staffan Lindenberg, Loren Cordain, "The Western Diet and Lifestyle and Diseases of Civilization," *Research Reports in Clinical Cardiology* (March 8, 2011).

DOCS: FOOD INTAKE