

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

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