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
Tools from an Agricultural Society

These tools include a crescent-shaped scythe used in the harvesting of grain.

Tools from a Gatherer Societies

Found in the south-central Sahara Desert, these tools date back to 5000 BCE.

Sources:

[Link to additional information about tools and their significance.]
Around the world lived a similar lifestyle for millennia—hunter-gatherers who could be taken apart, moved, and put back together. This artist’s illustration shows a community of hunter-gatherers living in caves or other natural shelters. Sometimes shelters were made of building materials collected in the environment. Communities often numbered fewer than 50 people. Their settlements were often found near water sources. This lifestyle was common between 5000 and 6000 BCE in various regions of western Europe. Caves like the one depicted in the illustration were one of the first places where humans lived in dense settlements. Life at Catal Huyuk, in modern Turkey, was one of the first places in the world where humans lived in a settled environment.

**Catal Huyuk**

Life in Catal Huyuk

Map & Illustration of life in Catal Huyuk

**Hunter-Gatherer Shelters**

#2
HEALTHY SWEDES
IN KITAVAN'S CIRCUMFERENCE

PALAEOTHIC ERA
DURING THE
FOODS CONSUMED

#2