

10

AGRICULTURAL GEOGRAPHY

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- Agriculture has been one of the longest activities of humans.
- Changes in technologies are responsible for various waves of agricultural practices affecting crop yields.
- Given that regions vary in climate, physically, and are host to different cultural groups, many different types of agriculture are practised.
- There has been a fundamental restructuring occurring in the agricultural industry.
- Food preferences are becoming increasingly homogenized internationally through globalization.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you should be able to

- define the main factors that affect location of agricultural activities;
- define the different stages and regions of agricultural practice;
- understand the origins and evolution of major agricultural activities;
- describe how capitalism, trade, and globalization have affected the restructuring of the agricultural industry and the positive and negative effects this has had on the environment and communities;
- understand the relationship that food has to identity and consumption and how this has recently become a facilitating factor in globalization processes; and
- understand how agriculture productivity is part of a wider production and consumption system.

KEY TERMS

Ceiling rent The maximum rent that a potential land user can be charged for use of a given piece of land. (p. 347)

Commercial agriculture An agricultural system in which the production is primarily for sale. (p. 347)

Economic operator A model of human behaviour in which each individual is assumed to be completely rational; economic operators maximize returns and minimize costs. (p. 349)

Economic rent The surplus income that accrues to a unit of land above the minimum income needed to bring a unit of new land into production at the margins of production. (p. 347)

Landrace A local variety of a domesticated animal or plant species that is well adapted to a particular physical and cultural environment. (p. 366)

Location theory A body of theories explaining the distribution of economic activities. (p. 347)

Neo-colonialism Economic relationships of dominance and subordination between countries without equivalent political relationships; often develops after political colonialism ends and the former colony achieves independence, but may also occur without prior political colonialism. (p. 361)

Normative Focusing on what ought to be rather than what actually is; in normative theory, the aim is to seek what is rational or optimal according to some given criteria. (p. 349)

Rational choice theory The theory that social life can be explained by models of rational individual action; an extension of the economic operator concept to other areas of human life. (p. 349)

Satisficing behaviour A model of human behaviour that rejects the rationality assumptions of the economic operator model, assuming instead that the objective is to reach a level of acceptable satisfaction. (p. 349)

Subsistence agriculture An agricultural system in which the production is not primarily for sale but is consumed by the farmer's household. (p. 347)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Vandana Shiva is a leading voice in a movement opposing the green revolution and biotechnology. Evaluate her arguments against these agricultural methods.
2. Describe and discuss the factors related to the increasing homogenization of food preferences on a global scale.
3. Select a type of local food production. Describe how it relates to the local culture, religion, economy, climate, and physical features—space and place.
4. Discuss the implications of Europe's opposition to the import of genetically modified products. How has this affected the agricultural system and consumption patterns inside and outside of Europe?
5. What are the Marxist, feminist, and/or postmodern perspectives on the current dominant agricultural system? How is the current agricultural system implicated in the replication of inequalities? What are its impacts on culture?

LINKS OF INTEREST

- Navdanya
<http://www.navdanya.org/>
- United Nations World Food Programme
<http://www.wfp.org/>
- National Farmers Union
<http://www.nfu.ca/>
- United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization
<http://www.fao.org/>
- Organic Agriculture at the University of Guelph
<http://www.organicag.uoguelph.ca/>
- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
<http://www.agr.gc.ca/>
- Canadian Cattlemen's Association
<http://www.cattle.ca/>

SUGGESTED READINGS

Atkins, P., and I. Bowler. 2001. *Food in Society: Economy, Culture, Geography*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Covers a wide range of topics, including food consumption preferences.

Robbins, P. 2004. *Political Ecology: A Critical Introduction*. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell.

Readable text with some very useful summaries of agricultural studies.

Robinson, G .M. 2004. *Geographies of Agriculture: Globalization, Restructuring and Sustainability*. Toronto: Pearson Education.

Comprehensive text with substantial coverage of conceptual and empirical topics.

YOUTUBE VIDEOS

- mwyeoh. 2011. “The Origins of Food- A small taste’ eLearning video.” YouTube video, 8:26. Posted January 2011. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVVvF7PWo-I>

1. What are the four types of meat discussed in the video and where did they originate?
 - The four types and origin of meats discussed in the video are: beef, pork, lamb—all originated from ancient Mesopotamia—, and chicken—originated from southern Asia.
 2. Which vegetable discussed originated in North/Central America?
 - Pumpkin
- PragerU. 2015. “Are GMOs Good or Bad?” YouTube video, 5:57. Posted July 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HSten18rI9A>
 1. Are GMOs new?
 - The anti-GMO groups state that nature doesn't cross DNA from one species to another. This is not the case; genes have always been moving across species (through bacteria, for example). Seemingly random and is now one of the driving forces of species.
 2. What is the argument presented in support of GMO development?
 - The speaker argues that the innovative work of GMO scientists have helped reduce the use of pesticides. Additionally, on average GM crops increase yield by 22 per cent, reduce pesticide use by 37 per cent, and increased farmer profits by 68 per cent. Also, new varieties of GM crops offer additional benefits that are not available in traditional varieties of crops.