



## Why Was Agriculture So Important?

The invention of farming was not just about tastier food. Farming unlocked powerful forces that transformed history.



<p><b>0:00</b></p> <p><i>Video of a busy intersection with crowds of people crossing followed by a video of water filled terraced farms on a hillside.</i></p>	<p>In today's world with 7 billion humans to feed, foraging couldn't come near to providing enough food. Farming is absolutely essential to the survival of the modern world.</p>
<p><b>0:20</b></p> <p><i>Video of a grey and white globe on a black screen with dates on the bottom left corner. The video zooms into various areas of the globe which are highlighted in green.</i></p>	<p>At the moment it looks as if farming, really began about 11,000 years ago in the highlands east of the Mediterranean that we know as the fertile crescent and here they grew wheat. It may also have grown appeared at about the same time in the Nile Valley slightly further south. Then from about 8,000 years ago we have evidence of rice growing in China and at about the same time we have evidence of the growing of taro and yams in the highlands of Papio New Guinea, though it took several thousand years for agriculture to really flourish here. Then from about 5,000 to 4,000 years ago agriculture pops up in several different parts of the world. In West Africa farmers start growing sorghum and millet, and farming also appears in the Americas right across the Atlantic in Meso-America where they're growing maize and squash, and also in the Andes where potatoes are a very important crop.</p>
<p><b>1:20</b></p> <p><i>Video of a green rice farm next to a river and a jungle.</i></p>	<p>From these core regions agriculture then spreads to neighboring regions but there's a real puzzle here because none of the core regions seem to have been connected so what was really going on.</p>
<p><b>1:33</b></p> <p><i>Video of a green farm with white text overlaid.</i></p>	<p>There seemed to be two main reasons, one factor is overpopulation, the other is climate change, and these factors operated in many different parts of the world. Let's take over population first.</p>
<p><b>1:51</b></p> <p><i>Grey and white globe on a black screen rotating with blue dots highlighting various areas followed by an aerial view of a village overlaid with white text.</i></p>	<p>During the Paleolithic era, if populations grew too much you could generally solve the problem by migrating into a new region, but after the settlement of the Americas from about 15,000 years ago there were no large areas left to migrate into. So, from now on, if populations began to grow you had to try to get more resources from a given area. In other words, you had to farm. Now that's the first factor, the second climate change is subtler.</p>
<p><b>2:20</b></p> <p><i>Video of a caveman huddled by a fire with snowy trees in the background</i></p>	<p>Most of the Paleolithic era was dominated by the ice ages and during the ice ages, for the most part, climates were so cold and so unpredictable that farming was more or less impossible.</p>
<p><b>2:32</b></p> <p><i>Video of a blue, grey, and white globe on a black screen with white text on the left briefly interrupted briefly by a video of chunks of ice in the water next to land.</i></p>	<p>Then from about 18,000 years ago, global climates began to change. They began to get warmer, glaciers began to retreat, sea levels began to rise, and in area after area you began to get warmer and wetter climates. Then, from about 12,000 years ago, climates became warmer and wetter, and we entered the interglacial period that we're still living in today.</p>





<p><b>3:00</b></p> <p><i>Areal video of a herd of cows running in a brown field.</i></p>	<p>Now as a result of global climate change humans and animals and plants everywhere in the world had to start changing their behaviors.</p>
<p><b>3:11</b></p> <p><i>Video of a green and tan modern-day map of the fertile crescent, followed by a video of grain plants, followed by an aerial video of a village with white text overlaid.</i></p>	<p>In some areas such as the fertile crescent east of the Mediterranean, as climates changed resources became more abundant, there were more plants and more animals. And in these regions, these particularly favored regions, some foragers began to settle down because they found they could live in one place for most of the year without traveling around and they began to form villages, they became sedentary. In the fertile crescent, archaeologists refer to the people who settled in these villages as Natufians...</p>
<p><b>3:47</b></p> <p><i>Montage of images starting with an aerial view of an archeological dig, then rocks on the side of a hill, then huts next to a fence with green plants on either side, then an aerial view of an old stone village with the roofs falling in, finally an aerial view of an older village with roads and foundations of structures.</i></p>	<p>... and they've excavated many of their villages. As they settled down their behaviors changed and in particular, populations began to grow. We're not sure why but one reason may be that if you're a villager you don't have to carry children around so there's less pressure to reduce the number of children. In any case populations grew and that posed a problem. Within a few generations they found they didn't have enough resources to feed everyone in what had once seemed an area of abundance. So, what are they to do?</p>
<p><b>4:17</b></p> <p><i>A video of a person picking yellow mushrooms followed by a video of a person carving a stick with a knife over a map and a basket of mushrooms.</i></p>	<p>Well perhaps they could go back to foraging. The problem was they'd probably forgotten many of the old techniques of foraging and besides neighbors probably occupied those lands now. So, what can they do?</p>
<p><b>4:28</b></p> <p><i>Aerial view of a green farm with white text overlaid follow by a farmer moving sheep in a tan field.</i></p>	<p>Well, they can start tending their crops and animals more carefully. They can start providing the plants they like with extra water, they can start clearing away weeds, they can start penning particular animals in enclosures. In fact, they can start farming.</p>
<p><b>4:47</b></p> <p><i>Montage of videos staring with cows on the crest of a hill with a larger mountain in the background, red berries in a tree, brown cows eating hay, rows of plants in a field, ending with a digital video of a large prehistoric city.</i></p>	<p>Now something like what happened to the Natufians seems to have happened in many other areas. Agriculture is not just a matter of tastier fruit or fatter cows. Agriculture unlocked forces much more powerful than that and they would transform human history.</p>