9 Geographies of Food and Agriculture

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

- Agriculture has been one of the longest human activities.
- Changes in technologies are responsible for various waves of agricultural practices ultimately 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

Agribusiness A highly integrated form of transnational corporation in the agricultural, or food production, sector; typically highly capitalized, operating on a large scale (often across various regions), corporately owned, and vertically integrated (encompassing the growing, processing, and marketing of food). (p. 358)

Agricultural Revolution The gradual transition of human subsistence, beginning about 12,000 years ago, from dependence on foraging (hunting and gathering) to food production through plant and animal domestication. (p. 339)

Commercial agriculture An agricultural system in which production is primarily for sale for profit; typically large scale, utilizing large amounts of land and the latest technology, and highly mechanized. (p. 333)

Domestication The ongoing process of selectively breeding plants and animals for specific characteristics (abundance of fruit, hardiness of seed, protein content of meant, and so on) that make them more useful to humans. (p.339)

Economic operator A model of human behaviour in which each individual is assumed to be completely rational (makes sound and well-reasoned decisions); economic operators aim to maximize returns and minimize costs. (p. 335)

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. 333)

Landrace A local variety of a domesticated animal or plant species that is well adapted to a particular physical and cultural environment. (p. 350)

Location theory A body of theories explaining the spatial distribution of economic activities; commonly applied to agricultural, industrial, and urban contexts. (p. 333)

Neo-colonialism Economic and political strategies of dominance and subordination by powerful states over others; often develops after colonialism ends and the former colony achieves political but not economic independence. (p. 346)

Normative theory A theory that focuses on what ought to happen, rather than what actually does occur; the aim is to seek what is rational, or optimal, according to some given criteria. (p. 335)

Pleistocene The geological time period from about 1.5 million years ago to 12,000 years ago, characterized by a series of glacial advances and retreats; succeeded by the Holocene. (p. 342)

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. 335)

Rent ceiling The maximum rent that a potential land user can be charged for use of a given piece of land. (p. 333)

Restructuring In capitalist economy, changes in or between the various components of an economic system resulting from economic change. (p. 355)

Satisficing behaviour A model of human behaviour that rejects the rationality assumptions of the economic operator model; assumes that the objective is to reach an acceptable level of satisfaction. (p. 335)

Subsistence agriculture An agricultural system in which production is not primarily for sale, but is consumed by the producer; typically small scale, utilizing small amounts of land and limited technological inputs, and relying on manual labour. (p. 333)

Third places Social locations, separate from home (first places) and work (second places), where social networking and community building takes place; include public and private spaces such as libraries, community centres, cafés, churches, parks, and so on. (p. 360)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Differentiate between subsistence and commercial farming.

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.

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. Choose two countries, one from the more developed world and one from the less developed world, and compare their main crops and methods of agriculture.

LINKS OF INTEREST

- Navdanya
  http://www.navdanya.org/

- The Arrell Food Institute
  https://arrellfoodinstitute.ca

- 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/

- 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.

Patel, R. 2007. *Stuffed and Starved*, Toronto: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd.

A comprehensive global investigation into food networks.

Pollan, M. 2006. *The Omnivore's Dilemma*. New York: The Penguin Press.

This book follows food from the source to the table in order to help give insight on the moral, political, environmental, and health decisions we are faced with every day when we choose what to eat.

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.