

AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION IN THE AMERICAS

(BY 7000 BC)



A 5700 year old corn cob shares more genetic similarity to modern maize than to the wild Teosinte plant, from which domesticated maize came from.

The Agricultural Revolution involved the **domestication of plants and animals**

- a. Much higher concentrations of plants and animals in one area (than would naturally occur in the wild)
- b. While some animals were domesticated in the Americas, they were not beasts of burden, and thus incapable of farm work; nor were they very large (thus incapable of providing much meat for people).
- c. Squash seeds (along with irrigation ditches), underneath stone walls, have been found in the Andes dating to 8000 BC; maize was domesticated in Mexico around 7000 BC; beans were domesticated some time around 2000 BC.

The Agricultural Revolution had a dramatic impact:

1. **greater population density:** Anywhere from 10 to 100 times the number of people, per square kilometer, can be supported by agriculture (than with hunting and gathering)
2. **expanding population**
 - a. often primitive farming techniques drain the soil of nutrients within a few years, so farming communities need to move to a new area
 - b. Because of the increase in food supply, more people can be supported. This increasing population at some point will need to bring more land under cultivation
3. **exposure to animal germs (this happened only in the Old World, not in the New World)**
 - a. Many human sicknesses can be traced to animal germs (measles, smallpox, tuberculosis, flu, and malaria)
 - b. In the short run, such exposure is bad, but in the long run, it helps develop a more immune population; populations that did not domesticate animals did not develop these immunities

Some 80% of the Amerindian population at the time of contact with the Europeans around 1500 AD, lived in two areas: central Mexico and the Andes mountains in South America. These were the regions that had thoroughly domesticated those three crops.