

The Agricultural Revolution

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The Open Field System

•For centuries, British agriculture functioned on the "Open Field System". This meant that the land outside of small villages was shared, or *open* to anyone who wished to farm it.

•Farming was really a communal effort, as all villagers worked together to harvest food. Land, tools, labor and harvests were shared among all participants because generally, people were too poor to afford all of the tools necessary.

•Additionally, there was usually also "common land" outside of villages that was used for grazing farm animals. *Anyone* could let their animals graze on this land, and this was important because most peasant farmers did not have enough land on which to raise animals. This way, even the poorest families could keep a cow or sheep.



The Enclosure Acts

•The Open Field system was effective for subsistence farmers, but it was inefficient in terms of overall production. Britain's population began to expand, and they needed to produce more food.

•The British Parliament began passing a series of "Enclosure" Acts. The feeling was that larger, privately owned plots of land would be farmed more efficiently and would yield more food for the growing population. In order to "enclose" land, farmers had to:

1) prove they had some legal ownership to the land

2) enclose their land with fences or hedges

3) pay surveyors to map the land

•Large landowners and wealthy people benefited most from this process as many small farmers lost their land, or their ability to use the common land.



Effects of the Revolution

•Because many small farmers lost their land, they moved to towns and cities looking for employment. These cities and towns expanded greatly during the 17th and 18th centuries. This ready supply of labor would be key to industrialization.

•The enclosure movement and new agricultural methods and inventions increased the efficiency and variety of food production. As a result, diets became more varied, people were healthier and the population increased.



Inventions & Methods

•Agricultural Production was also changed by inventions and methods.

•The **Seed Drill** by Jethro Tull planted seeds in the soil.

•The **4 Field System of Crop Rotation** by Townshend rotated cereal crops (wheat, barley) with root & legume crops which replenished nitrogen in the soil. *All* land could be used during the growing season.

•**New Plows:** New iron plows were lighter, stronger & more maneuverable.

•In **Selective Breeding of Animals** by Robert Bakewell, only the best and the biggest animals were bred together. The average size of animals more than doubled in 80 years!

1. What was the *Open Field System*?

7. What did a farmer have to do to “enclose” his land?

2. Describe farming prior to the Agricultural Revolution.

8. What was the result of the Enclosure Acts?

3. Explain *common land* and how it was used.

9. List and explain four new methods or inventions in agriculture in this era.

4. What were the advantages of the *Open Field System*?

1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	

5. What were the disadvantages of the *Open Field System*?

10. Explain two direct results of the Agricultural Revolution.

a.

6. What were the Enclosure Acts? Why did Parliament pass them?

b.