

**Chapter 1 : An Introduction to Agricultural Geography - PDF Free Download**

*An Introduction to Agricultural Geography Employing nearly on half of the world's workforce, agriculture is clearly of great economic and social importance.*

Graham Allsopp and Paul Coles drew the maps and graphs, and to them, many thanks. Yet the study of agriculture receives relatively little attention from geographers. In Britain and the USA far more notice is given to manufacturing industry and the problems of urban areas. This neglect perhaps reflects the relative unimportance of agriculture in the economies of developed countries, in contrast to its predominance in the developing countries and the world as a whole. In Britain and the USA only 2 per cent of the employed population are engaged in agriculture, and it contributes a similarly small proportion to the national income. In many developing countries, however, over half the population depends upon farming for a living and it is the most important contributor to the national income. But even in developed countries agriculture is more important than these statistics suggest, for between 12 per cent and 30 per cent of disposable income is spent on food, while agriculture is the major user of land. In England, for example, four-fifths of the land surface is used for agriculture purposes. Thus the study of agriculture geography is clearly important. The subject may be simply defined. The heart of this task is to explain the great diversity of agriculture. It has been estimated that there are over million farmers in the world. Between them they grow many different crops—“at least species are in use”and they raise these crops in a variety of ways. Thus on some British farms aircraft spray the land with pesticides and computers control the day-to-day running of the farm; yet in parts of the Middle East fellahin still raise wheat with implements little changed since biblical times. Equally great are the differences in organization and social conditions. Many farmers in Britain or the USA are rich and successful, owning their land; in parts of Latin America peons toil on land they do not own under conditions not far removed from slavery. Even more striking are the differences in productivity. Although forestry and fishing are often placed with agriculture in economic classifications, they are not considered here. It should be noted, however, that many Scandinavian farmers combine agriculture and forestry, while in parts of Asia coastal villages often practise both fishing and farming. Attempts to raise wild game for meat in parts of Africa form an interesting stage between hunting and pastoralism. It has been argued that some modern forms of agriculture, such as the broiler industry, are more akin to industrial operations than agriculture. But the fact that little land is used and that the technology and organization are modern and efficient cannot be allowed to exclude such activities; a rapid growth in the scale of organization and technical expertise is a distinctive feature of modern agriculture. Some have argued that geographers have confined themselves solely to production on the farm; instead they should deal with the geography of the food system, and cover not only the production of food on farms but also the geography of input production—such as the manufacture of fertilizers and machinery—and the processing of the raw materials raised on farms, in flour mills, sugar refineries and breweries for example. Some would go further and include the distribution and consumption of foods as part of the system. This is a laudable aim, but as yet there is little written upon the subject, and the execution of this task lies in the future. If agriculture is diverse, it is also remarkably complex, and there is a need to be clear what features of agricultural production the geographer is trying to describe and explain. Yet there is a long list of variables that give rise to diversity. Thus the differences between farming in Britain and the former Soviet Union are legion, but that of land tenure might spring first to mind, for in Britain farmers either own their farms or rent them from private landlords whilst in the Soviet Union all land was the property of the state, and indeed most still is. A study of Louisiana and southern Vietnam would show that rice is grown in both areas but the methods used and the efficiency with which the crop is raised differ greatly. Some comparisons would emphasize differences in the crops grown and the livestock raised. Thus a few miles to the west of Sheffield in northern England there are parishes where few if any crops are grown and no stock kept but sheep, which feed upon rough grazing and permanent grass. There is thus a great variety of variables that must be discussed in order to describe spatial variations in agriculture. Kostrowicki, *World Types of Agriculture* Warsaw, , pp. First is the systematic analysis of the distribution of one variable. Thus it is useful

to study the spatial variations in the growth of wheat. This can be done at any scale—the world or a British parish. Such a study tells us where wheat is grown, where it is absent, in what places it is a major crop, in what places it is of minor importance. It also suggests explanations of the pattern. The distribution of wheat growing may be related to rainfall or the presence of large urban markets. Valuable as such an approach is, it has its limitations. Wheat is not grown—or is rarely grown—as the only crop on a farm. Further, analysis of crop statistics may suggest that wheat is generally grown in characteristic crop combinations. In one region it may be commonly grown with sugar-beet and potatoes, in another area with barley and oilseed rape. Second is the approach to description by means of the idea of type of farming map, or agricultural region. This can be best illustrated by amplifying the remarks made upon the distribution of wheat. The analysis of the distribution of crops requires statistics on the use of agricultural land, usually available only for administrative districts such as the British parish, the French commune, or in the USA, the county. But these figures are aggregates of the land use of a number of farms. If figures were available by farms, then it might be seen that not only are there spatial variations in the importance of wheat or in distinctive crop combinations containing wheat, but that these variations correspond to variations in other variables such as the size of farms or the presence or absence of dairy cows. An imaginary example may make this clearer. In the east of a country little wheat is grown, the farms are small, most of the farmers own their land and rely upon their family for labour. No sheep are kept and few beef cattle; most of the livestock are cows, and the main source of income is from the sale of milk. Moving westwards there are changes; more wheat is grown, sheep and beef cattle replace cows, farms are large and rented, and farmers hire labour. Maps of the distribution of wheat or dairy cows fail to capture the way in which a number of variables change spatially. It is clearly possible to classify farms into types on the basis of not one but several variables. Similarly, it is possible to see that some areas are characterized by a predominance of one type of farming. Both the systematic study of spatial variations of a single variable, or the definition of type of farming area or agricultural region, are useful approaches to the study of agricultural geography. But they are only a beginning. There have been several approaches to explanation in agricultural geography. Environment and agriculture Agriculture deals with living plants and animals which thrive in some physical environments, but flourish less successfully or not at all in other environments. Not surprisingly students of agricultural geography have for a long time assumed that differences in the physical environment determine spatial variations in agricultural activity, and that regional differences in climate and soil give rise to distinctive agricultural regions or types of farming area. Thus the earliest regional descriptions of British farming, the Reports made to the Board of Agriculture in the 1830s, for the most part assumed that farming varied spatially largely as a response to differences between upland and lowland and between different soil types. Similar assumptions were made in many of the essays on the agriculture of the English counties published in the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England* in the mid-nineteenth century. It is a view which was still prevalent in the *County Monographs of the Land Utilization Survey of Britain* published in the 1890s and 1900s. In the USA a series of articles on the agricultural regions of the world, published in the 1890s and 1900s, all bore the assumption that climate was the principal determinant of world patterns of farming. Such geographical determinism, or environmentalism—the belief that environment inflexibly determines human activities—was not confined to agricultural geography; it was a view attacked by Paul Vidal de la Blache in the early twentieth century. His studies of French pays, or regions, emphasized the mutual interaction of man and environment. But by the 1920s American geographers, reacting against environmentalism, were seeking explanations for agricultural differences everywhere but in the environment. This did not mean that there was no study of the relationships between crops and the physical environment; rather it was now left to agronomists, soil scientists, climatologists and botanists. Agricultural geographers had cut themselves off from their roots. He devised an imaginary world where all the other factors that could influence farming practice—such as soil type, or imports—were held constant. He thus devised the first economic model. When *The Isolated State* was translated into English in 1940, it had a profound impact on agricultural geographers and prompted many studies of the influence of distance on the farm, at the national level and the world scale. It emphasized one factor, assumed that economic forces were paramount, and largely discounted the significance of environment. It also led agricultural geographers to try and frame hypotheses and test them

with rather more rigour than had hitherto been the case. Behavioural approaches In the study of agricultural geography the fundamental unit is the farm and the farmer. But most published agricultural statistics are available only at an administrative level that conceals farms by aggregation. Hence it has been difficult to explain agricultural variations in terms of individual behaviour. Yet clearly spatial variations in agriculture are a result of many decisions made by many individual farmers. In recent years more emphasis has been put by geographers upon nonenvironmental and non-economic factors in explaining spatial variations in agriculture. Internationalization, modernization and the political economy approach In the s the approaches outlined above became less common in agricultural geography, and there was a search for other modes of explanation. This was partly prompted by the growing importance of state intervention in the behaviour of farmers, and the inability to solve the problems of overproduction; and partly by the growing importance of food processors in the food production system. Some believed that the globalization of world food production was of paramount importance in understanding world patterns of production, and linked this to the rise of transnational food producers and processors. Others, concerned with much the same array of topics saw the growth of agribusinessâ€”rarely precisely definedâ€”as the key to understanding. Such theories are often described as the political economy approach. One advocate in the s described these INTRODUCTION 7 methodologies as being in their infancy, and it is perhaps not unfair to argue that they remain still more polemical than empirical; there are more calls to farther research than reliable evidence. Such work as yet remains on the research frontiers of the subject rather than in an introductory text such as this. This is a laudable aim and has been attempted by many. Nor is the purpose to take one explanatory factor and illustrate its significance. This is an introductory textbook, and it makes the assumption that it is highly improbable that one factor such as climate or distance from the market will explain spatial variations in all parts of the world. Instead those factors that have been suggested by geographers as important are reviewed. It should be emphasized that the aim is to show how a variety of variables can affect spatial variations in farming, not to discuss those variables per se. But the concern here is only how differences in tenure influence variations in land use, productivity and farming structure. The second part deals with the economic behaviour of farmers and the behaviour of the consumers of food and fibre. The role of the state is considered, and also the consequences of the modernization of agriculture. This is followed by a consideration of the influence of the location of urban markets upon farming. Population density and labour availability are then discussed. The third part deals with institutional and social influences on agricultural geography. The role of land tenure, farm size, innovation diffusion and religion are discussed. A final chapter deals with the impact of farming upon the environment.

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*An Introduction to Agricultural Geography provides an extensive guide through this diverse and increasingly important geographical subject, aiming to show that a wide range of factors explain how agricultural practices differ from place to place.*

Rural geography includes a breadth of topics relevant to rural areas and small towns, from social issues to natural resources management and land use. As time has gone on, some connections have become mostly via human-environment perspectives on natural resources, sustainability, health, and food systems. In addition to shifting broad social concerns affecting work related to agricultural geography, modern industrial agriculture has spread to other world regions, with perhaps greater variability within particular regions e. Broader considerations of social and economic conditions related to farming also have become more apparent since the s. Agricultural geography today focuses specifically on farms including ranches and farming; production of food, fiber, and fuel; economic, policy, and resource issues related to agriculture; and farm household and livelihood concerns. There are connections between agricultural geography and related disciplines, particularly rural sociology and agricultural economics. It must be noted that, with the exception of the descriptive work by geographers in the Global North addressing conditions in the South, most of the work in agricultural geography has been produced in North America and Europe, with much less analytical work on agricultural conditions in other world regions. The works mentioned here are drawn from the English-language literature and are admittedly biased toward researchers based in the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. General Overviews Much of rural geography no longer places a strong focus on agricultural geography as a broad area of study, and many of the general background works are older. Because of this, they often are somewhat dated in terms of their descriptions of geographic patterns and the status of agricultural practices in different world regions. Those listed below are some of the sources most likely to provide good general portrayals of the topic. Ilbery presents a breadth of agricultural geography topics, all of which continue to be relevant to the subdiscipline. Similarly, Grigg offers a thorough introduction to the traditional concerns of agricultural geography, including global considerations and addressing international variations in the practices of agriculture. Grigg traces social and technological shifts and the development of modern i. Bowler and Ilbery and Morris and Evans take on the changes in agricultural geography and the evolution to the broader rural geography see Introduction at different points in time. Others see Duram , cited under Organic Farming and Sustainable Agriculture , support alternative agriculture, with appreciation of small family farms and organic farming practices. The Transformation of Agriculture in the West. Consideration of multiple aspects of agriculture, including land, labor, changes in productivity, and economic conditions, with a focus on historical shifts in agricultural production and agricultural systems in Europe and North America, from approximately to the later s. An Introduction to Agricultural Geography. A thorough, if somewhat dated, consideration of environmental, economic, biological, and technological aspects of agriculture. The Changing Scale of American Agriculture. University of Virginia Press, It accomplishes this by blending in-depth interviews with farmers and ranchers with statistical analysis of US Department of Agriculture data. Making the Corn Belt: Indiana University Press, Follows early US settlers and land speculators in their search for land capable of becoming what we know today as the Corn Belt, from southern Ohio to its most current expansion northward and westward into the Great Plains. A Social and Economic Analysis. Oxford University Press, Morris, Carol, and Nick Evans. Users without a subscription are not able to see the full content on this page. Please subscribe or login. How to Subscribe Oxford Bibliographies Online is available by subscription and perpetual access to institutions. For more information or to contact an Oxford Sales Representative click here.

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