

America's First Farmers

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An outstanding fact regarding American agriculture is the extent to which it is a continuation of that practiced originally by the aboriginal Americans, the American Indians.

The first European settlers found corn growing here under cultivation by the Indians and they learned from the Indians how to grow it.

The potato is another product of the American native agriculture.

Tobacco, another native crop, was until superceded by cotton about 1803, the principal money crop of the South.

The earliest colonists, both in the North and the South, found that the hog flourished in the woods feeding on shrubs and roots. Raising hogs was one of the first branches of animal husbandry to be developed. Corn proved to an important adapted crop to the fattening of hogs.

Seven thousand years ago, Central American Indians had cultivated many kinds of squash, chili peppers, avacados, pumpkins, maize, black walnuts, peanuts, cranberries, white potatoes, sweet potatoes, and manioc.

Three thousand years ago, North American Indians were growing corn, squash, beans together with hill cultivation. The corn served as a support for the peas, squash was a ground cover that conserved moisture and the peas provided nitrogen.

During the colonial period farmers were exposed to a period of experiment and adjustment. The settlers faced conditions of which they had had not previous experience and they had to acquire their experience through bitter trials and disappointments. The summers were hotter and the winters far colder than anything with which they were familiar in Europe. The plant and animal life also differed from that of the old world. What crops grow and how to grow them was consequently an unsolved problem for the first European settlers except in so far as the practices of

the Indians gave them a clue.

Jamestown is in the same latitude as the northern coast of Africa. The first English explorers had visited the coast of Virginia in the summer when the heat was more intense than in England. A natural assumption was made that the new country would be adapted to a semi-tropical agriculture. The fig and the olive were tried and there were numerous experiments in silk culture. There were soon given up, however, in favor of stock-raising and the growing of corn and tobacco.

Most changes in agriculture have been modifications of the old and aboriginal methods, so while the Europeans improved the methods used, America's first farmers were really American Indians.
