The Agricultural Revolution

Agricultural Revolution

The Agricultural Revolution was the unprecedented increase in agricultural production in Britain due to increases in labor and land productivity between the mid-17th and late 19th centuries. Agricultural output grew faster than the population over the century to 1770 and thereafter productivity remained among the highest in the world. This increase in the food supply contributed to the rapid growth of population in England and Wales, from 5.5 million in 1700 to over 9 million by 1801, although domestic production gave way to food imports in the 19th century as population more than tripled to over 32 million. The rise in productivity accelerated the decline of the agricultural share of the labor force, adding to the urban workforce on which industrialization depended. The Agricultural Revolution has therefore been cited as a cause of the Industrial Revolution. However, historians also continue to dispute whether the developments leading to the unprecedented agricultural growth can be seen as “a revolution,” since the growth was, in

fact, a result of a series of significant changes over a her long period of time. Consequently, the question of when exactly such a revolution took place and of what it consisted remains open.

Crop Rotation

One of the most important innovations of the Agricultural Revolution was the development of the Norfolk four-course rotation, which greatly increased crop and livestock yields by improving soil fertility and reducing fallow.

Crop rotation is the practice of growing a series of dissimilar types of crops in the same area in sequential seasons to help restore plant nutrients and mitigate the build-up of pathogens and pests that often occurs when one plant species is continuously cropped. Rotation can also improve soil structure and fertility by alternating deep-rooted and shallow-rooted plants. The Norfolk System, as it is now known, rotates crops so that different crops are planted with the result that different kinds and quantities of nutrients are taken from the soil as the plants grow. An important feature of the Norfolk four-field system was that it used labor at times

when demand was not at peak levels. Planting cover crops such as turnips and clover was not permitted under the common field system because they interfered with access to the fields and other people's livestock could graze the turnips.