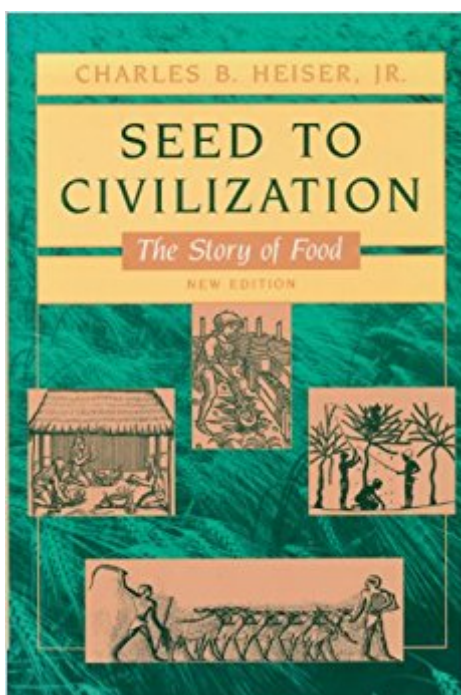


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Seed To Civilization: The Story Of Food



Synopsis

Seed to Civilization: The Story of Food

Book Information

Paperback: 228 pages

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Customer Reviews

Seed to Civilization: The Story of Food

was not as complete as I had expected - I found another in our library that had much more info (at least on plants): Five plants that changed history. Excellent history and defining of current uses.

This well-written book tells the story of the world's major food crop plants from an ethnobotanical point of view. Charles Heiser was a renowned expert in this field and his book is both informative and entertaining. While many similar treatments give faint mention to crop plants outside of America and Europe, this book takes a global perspective. The book is written to appeal to a wide range of readers and will be appreciated by anyone who has an interest in the long and complex relationship between humans and their primary sources of sustenance.

What are the major plants and animals on which humans subsist? Where do these plants and animals come from? This book addresses these and other questions related to food. It does so in a highly readable format, assuming no prior botanical or zoological knowledge. It organizes the discussion along chapter topics such as "Grasses: The staff of life." Learn that yams have served as a source of steroid hormones, that sugar is a grass from the South Pacific and observe how

cauliflower, kale and brussels sprouts all derive from a single plant species. On the down side, this book's treatment of genetic engineering is outdated and the faith given to improvements in crop production not well reconciled with a concluding chapter on food problems, e.g. pesticide use. But these weaknesses are outweighed to the reader seeking a concise, interesting overview of the foods on which we subsist.

This is not a book about hunger. Rather it concerns mostly the plants and animals that stand between us and starvation. The subject can be called ethnobiology, the study of plants and animals in relation to humans. Ecology, the study of organisms in relation to their environment, is another of our concerns. In this case we are the organisms and the part of the environment of interest to us is the plants and animals that provide our food. In this book I begin with some consideration of the origin of agriculture and why plants and animals were domesticated. The bulk of the book is concerned with basic food plants and animals, and covers where and when they were first domesticated as well as why and how they are used. I have, however, not hesitated to stray from the principal subjects from time to time when I have felt that the digression would be of general interest to my readers. There is, for example, some mention of the uses of plants and animals for purposes other than food. In this edition I have extensively revised several chapters, completely rewritten the last two, and increased the number of plants treated. In addition, I have incorporated some new photographs. Only one chapter is given to the discussion of animals and its focus is on those most important as food. As I am a botanist, some may think that I have neglected animals in favor of plants, but in defense I can point out that we get all of our carbohydrates and nearly three-fourths of our protein from plant sources. Moreover, nearly all of the food we get from animals is in turn derived from plants. After all, life depends on photosynthesis; chlorophyll has been referred to as the green blood of the earth. The last chapter concerns current and future food problems and, perhaps, some controversial topics. The book has been written with the general reader in mind and no particular background in biology should be necessary for understanding most of the topics. I had once assumed that the readers of a book such as this would have an elementary knowledge of human nutrition, but, judging from recent news releases, that assumption was unjustifiable, for malnutrition is not confined to the poor and uneducated but extends to the affluent and "educated" as well. Therefore, a brief treatment of nutrition is given (Chapter 3). Although I have not tried to include all of my sources, there is a fairly extensive and updated bibliography at the end of the book. This is included primarily for those readers who would like to pursue any subject in greater detail. Although I expect the same plants and animals to continue to serve as our principal foods for

a long time to come, our detailed knowledge concerning them will change as research makes more information available. Perhaps this is nowhere more true than in the realm of prehistory, for the next archaeological investigation may uncover new information regarding the "invention" of agriculture and the earliest domesticated plants and animals. There are a number of individuals to whom I am indebted for their advice. My thanks to all of them, particularly Gregory Anderson, Virginia Flack, Gunder Hefta, Jorge Soria, and my wife, Dorothy. Thanks also to those who supplied the illustrations.

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