

Field systems and farming systems in late medieval England

Ashgate - Farming in the Middle Ages



Description: -

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Middle Ages

Field crops -- Great Britain -- History

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Variorum collected studies seriesField systems and farming systems in late medieval England

Notes: Includes bibliographical references and index.

This edition was published in 2008



Filesize: 24.96 MB

Tags: #Agricultural #improvements

Farming in the Middle Ages

The three-field system of crop rotation was employed by medieval farmers, with spring as well as autumn sowings. Grain was cut with a sickle and grass mown with a scythe.

BBC

One reason output grew was through new farming systems involving the rotation of turnips and clover, although these were part of the general intensification of agricultural production, with more food being produced from the same area of land. Farmers only had a rudimentary knowledge of fertilizers. Thus fallow land was about 20 per cent of the arable area in England in 1700, and steadily declined to reach only 4 per cent in 1871.

Agricultural improvements

One night of bad frost could mean a whole year of bad crops. VI, 1989 About the author Mark Overton is Professor of Economic and Social History at the University of Exeter.

Farming in the Middle Ages

Also, most importantly, new nitrogen was added to the soil using legumes - a class of plants that have bacteria attached to their roots, which convert atmospheric nitrogen into nitrates in the soil that can be used by whatever plants are grown there in the following few years.

BBC

Existing stocks were exploited, for example, by ploughing up permanent pasture to grow cereals.

BBC

The balance between arable and permanent pasture also changed, so that more productive arable land was replacing permanent pasture. The fallow land was reserved to regain nutrients for the next year. The key probably lies in the way the English workforce was organised and employed.

Farming in the Middle Ages

Some farmers did have methods for fertilizing their soil. It had probably reached this level before, in the Roman period, then around 1300, and again in 1650. Contrary to expectation, however, population grew to unprecedented levels after 1750, reaching 16.

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