

The First Farm Animals

How did domestication of animals change society?

Researchers think dogs, which are descended from wolves, were the first animals domesticated, or tamed and bred, by humans. Dogs were most likely domesticated by early nomads to help with hunting. Scientists originally thought people first domesticated dogs about 12000 BCE in [Central Asia](#). However, in 2009 and 2011, three separate teams of scientists found much older skulls, dating from about 30,000 years ago, that suggest dogs were domesticated in Europe.

People first domesticated farm animals about 10,000 years ago, when they began herding and pasturing local wild animals. Instead of following the packs of animals they were hunting, people directed those animals to rich food sources and kept the herds near human settlement.

Goats and sheep were the first domesticated farm animals. Their remains have been found among early human settlements in the Southwest Asia, central Asia, and Europe. These animals were probably easy to domesticate because of their small size, their tameness, and their plant-based diet. Over time, these wild goats and sheep developed into animals that interacted with their human farmers. Farm animals

could be used not only for food but also for their wool, hides, milk, and manure. People also domesticated pigs early on in Europe, Asia, and **North Africa**. Then came cattle, such as cows and oxen, along with larger herd animals. These animals could be used to help with labor in the fields and came to be known as “beasts of burden.”

Many early humans practiced **nomadic** pastoralism. They traveled with their domesticated animals across their settled regions. Many had different sites they would stay in at certain times of the year, and seasonal changes guided their movements. **Pastoral** nomads used their animals for food and clothing, but also traded them with other people.

Living in close quarters with animals created some problems. Sometimes diseases spread from animal populations to humans, similar to the modern-day threats posed by swine flu and avian flu. Despite this drawback, the **domestication** of animals enabled farmers to increase the amount of food they could grow because animals could efficiently do more work more quickly than humans could, and animals could work for longer periods of time. For example, an animal pulling a plow could prepare a field much faster than a person working with early simple tools. The **domestication** of animals helped to provide a stable food supply and enabled the development of civilizations.

Because fewer people were needed in the fields, they could specialize in other trades, such as toolmaking. Specialization led to innovation, and innovation led to improvement in people's lives.