

## FARMING: THE GREAT INNOVATION?

Some people believe that farming was humankind's greatest invention. Others believe that the negative consequences outweighed the benefits. The following excerpts provide arguments on both sides of this debate.

### HUMANKIND'S GREATEST INVENTION

*The following text was posted on the agricultural website Farming UK in October 2016.*

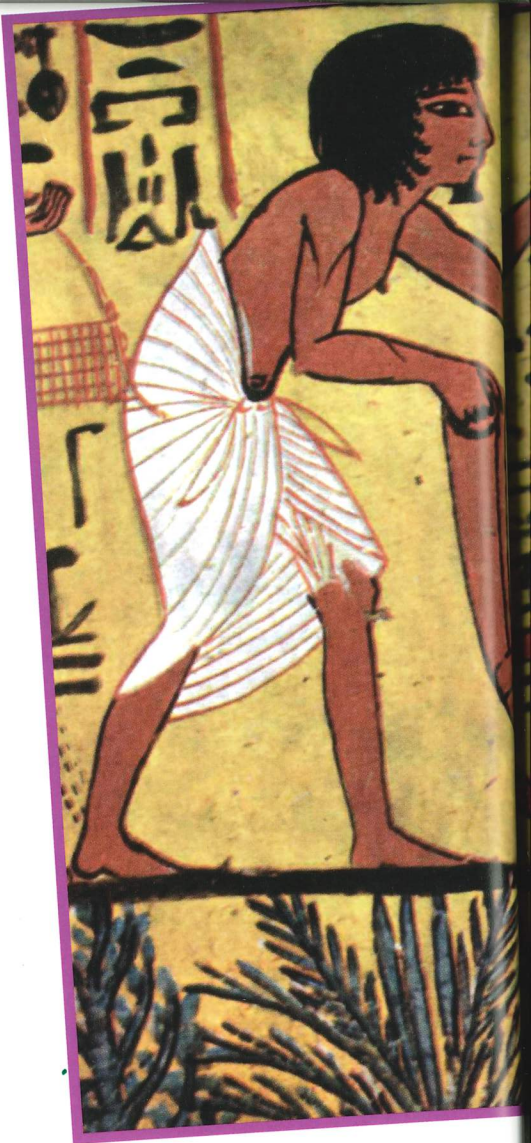
The transition from hunter-gathering to farming is described as a revolution because it constituted the one crucial breakthrough from which all later human advances evolved, transforming every aspect of people's lives .... Early farmers bred their animals to improve their usefulness to humans, and soon they were yielding not only meat for food and skin for clothing, but also milk for additional nutrition .... Wherever farming developed, the more reliable food source it produced [led] to a massive upswing in population.

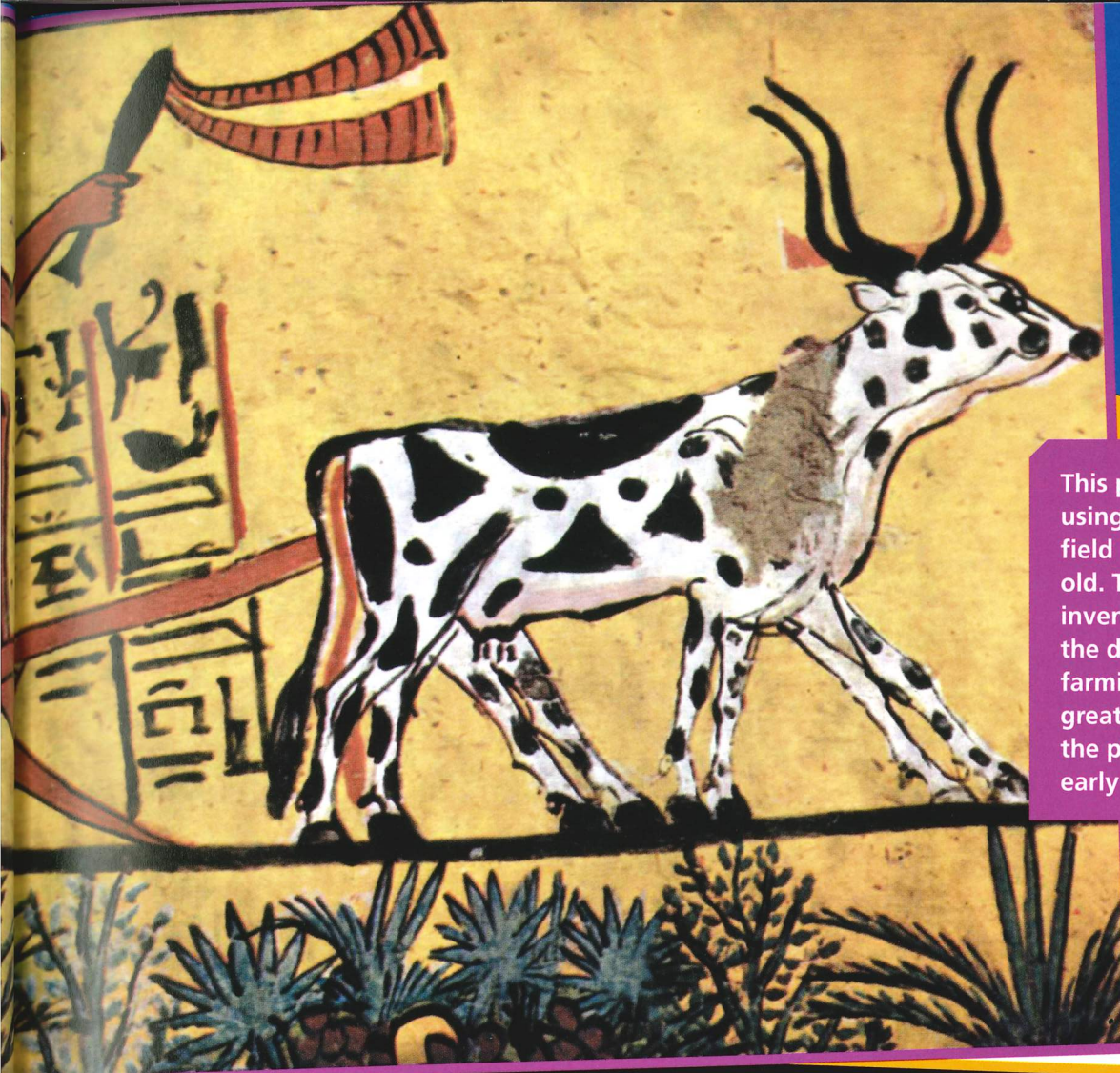
### THE CASE FOR FORAGING

*Historian Yuval Noah Harari, author of Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind, said the following on the CBC-Radio program Ideas.*

On the whole, **foragers** [people who search for food in their surroundings] seem to have enjoyed a more comfortable and rewarding lifestyle than most of the peasants, shepherds, labourers, and office clerks who followed in their footsteps.

While people in today's affluent societies work an average 40 to 45 hours a week and people in the developing world work 60 and even 80 hours a week, hunter-gatherers living today in the most inhospitable of habitats, such as the Kalahari Desert, work on average just 35 hours to 45 hours a week. They hunt only one day out of three, and gathering takes up just three to six hours daily.





This painting of a man using oxen to help plow a field is about 3200 years old. The plow is an ancient invention. **Q:** Consider the debate over whether farming was the world's greatest invention. Did the plow help or harm early societies?



Farmers produced grain that could be made into flour. Both the grain and the flour could be stored for later use. Women spent long hours performing repetitive tasks, such as grinding grain into flour by pushing a stone back and forth over the grain, as shown in the photo. Fossils from the period show that this kind of work caused wear on people's joints and led to arthritis.