

The Fertile Crescent

Scientists believe that one of the earliest civilizations to domesticate plants and animals was located in a region in the Middle East known as the Fertile Crescent. This refers to the land that includes the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers between the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea and the northern coast of the Persian Gulf. It was in that region, at around 9000 BCE, that a group of ancient people left behind their lives as hunter-gatherers. Instead, they decided to plant grains, harvest them, and live off of them. They were among the first farmers in the world.

They took wild grains and, using their seeds, grew forms of wheat and barley that provided a nutritious, stable food supply. They grew enough to store, saving seeds for the next season's planting. To cultivate their crops they had to stay in one place. So instead of being constantly on the move, gathering wild grains or following wild herds, they developed villages. They built permanent homes for themselves and granaries to store their crops. They domesticated animals, which became a major food source and a source of wealth, too. With a steady supply of food, the population grew. Villages grew into cities. This early group of farmers became a civilization.

Although there is no written record of exactly what life was like for the first farmers of the Fertile Crescent, we can get a glimpse of it. The Sumerian civilization existed in the Fertile Crescent in about 3500 BCE. They developed one of the first written languages, called cuneiform. Cuneiform was a writing system with wedge-like symbols that represented different words. By studying Sumerian cuneiform, we can understand many things about their lives. We can learn about their religion, farming methods, and systems of government. Writing is not always present in civilizations, but in the case of the ancient Sumerians, their writing system helps us understand more about how the cultures of the Fertile Crescent developed.

