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"Sustaining Soil Fertility: Agricultural Practice in the Old and New Worlds"

Cunfer, Geoff, and Fridolin Krausmann

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During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, tens of millions of Europeans migrated to the Americas. Many traded rural lives for industrial jobs in growing cities, while a significant number travelled west to make farms on the Great Plains. Using case studies from Austria and Kansas, this paper compares the socioecological structures of the agricultural communities immigrants left to those that they found and created on the other side of the Atlantic. It employs material and energy flow accounting (MEFA) methods to examine the social metabolic similarities and differences between Old World and New World farm systems at either end of the migration chain. Nine indicators reveal significant differences in land use strategy, labor deployment, and the role of livestock. Indicators include population density, average farm size, land availability, grain yield, area productivity, labor productivity, marketable crop production, livestock density, and nitrogen return to cropland. (Text part of the [authors' abstract](#).)

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