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"Agricultural Sustainability in the Semi-Arid Near East"

Hole, Frank

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Agriculture began in the eastern Mediterranean Levantine Corridor about 11,000 years ago toward the end of the Younger Dryas when aridity had diminished wild food resources. During the subsequent Climatic Optimum, agricultural villages spread rapidly but subsequent climatic changes on centennial to millennial scales resulted in striking oscillations in settlement, especially in marginal areas. Natural climate change thus alternately enhanced and diminished the agricultural potential of the land. Growing populations and more intensive land use, both for agriculture and livestock, have led to changes in the structure of vegetation, hydrology, and land quality. Over the millennia, political and economic interventions, warfare, and incursions by nomadic herding tribes all impacted sustainability of agriculture and the ability of the land to supports its populations. In much of the region today, agricultural land use is not sustainable given existing technology and national priorities. The Near Eastern case is instructive because of the quality of information, the length of the record, and the pace of modern change. (From the authors's abstract.)

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