

De Agricultura: Universal Abstract Overly-Simplified Ancient Peasant Agriculture Game

By Jeremiah McCall (jmc.hst@gmail.com or @gamingthepast on Twitter)

Prototype A (7/1/22)

- Legumes not implemented
- Goal not tweaked nor are the misfortune and prestige metrics tweaked yet
- The money system has not really been tested at all.
- Please send comments and questions to jmc.hst@gmail.com or @gamingthepast on Twitter.

De Agricultura – Rules

Sources

- Bret Devereaux's ACoup Blog Series on Ancient Farmers <https://acoup.blog/2020/07/24/collections-bread-how-did-they-make-it-part-i-farmers/>
- Peter Garnsey, Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco Roman World
- Helpful conversations with historian Neville Morley

Set up

- Use colored cubes or pieces of paper to represent Wheat, Barley, and Bronze Bits. Or just record on the record sheet. I recommend cubes for the tactility of it for students.
- Each player represents a subsistence farmer (peasant) in an ancient agrarian society
- Give each player a record sheet for households and fields
- Each player names their family members (tip: use names from the period and place you are studying)
- Player can vary the starting family members but a reasonable baseline is 2 Adults, 1 Elderly, and 3 Children
- Starting food: experiment but 22 cubes roughly half barley and half wheat would be needed to feed the baseline family and plant five fields until first harvest, so that should be the start unless you have something else planned. Either record on record sheet or place different colored cubes on the record sheet in the storage space to represent Barley and Wheat
- Taxation of 2 cubes was an aim of 10% or so off of the current average harvest numbers. May need to be tweaked. Probably need means of resistance/deception of tax officials

Goal

For as much of your family to survive as possible and to gain as much prestige as possible and experience as little misfortune as possible compared to the other players in your group at the end of 10 turns.

Order of Play

The game is played in turns that are divided into 4 seasonal rounds, starting with the Fall.

Autumn round

1. Plowing (not represented by any actions in game currently)
2. Food and malnutrition
 - a. Eat food: Adult household members consume 1 cube of food each; elderly and child household members each consume $\frac{1}{2}$ cube. Remove the required total of cubes from the granary and place in the general game supply pile.
 - i. If the number of barley cubes eaten in a season \geq number of wheat cubes, +1 misfortune for being reduced to poverty food. This reflects a prejudice in ancient Mediterranean societies at least that some crops are food fit for the lower classes and the desperate.
 - b. Insufficient food and malnourishment: If there are an insufficient number of food cubes feed everyone, household members who go without must have their malnourished box checked. If a member of the household already has their malnourished box checked, check their Sick/Inured box. If both of these boxes are already checked, the household member dies and is removed from play (crossed off the sheet). 1 dead household Adult = +3 misfortune. 1 dead Child = +1 misfortune
3. Sow winter wheat as desired/able. The player may decide to plant wheat in their fields. 1 whole cube of wheat is needed for each field. Take wheat cubes from storage and place one in each field planted.
New family members: If household is < 6 , add 1 new household member to the family as a child.

Winter round

1. Eat food: see rules for eating in fall round
2. Wheat grow roll: roll one six-sided die for each field with wheat planted and record the number rolled in the "winter" spot on the field (record sheet)

Spring round

1. Eat food: see rules for eating in Autumn round
2. Plant barley as desired/able: Follow the rules for planting wheat. No more than one cube per field. The player, if they choose, may replace wheat planted in a field with barley, in which case the winter die roll for the growing wheat is erased/ignored.
3. Wheat grow roll in fields with wheat planted – record in spring space
4. Barley grow roll in field with barley planted – record in spring space

Summer Round

1. Eat – see rules above. This is the time, right before harvest, when supplies will likely be the lowest
2. Wheat grow roll; barley grow roll – record in summer spot
3. Spoilage roll – roll one die for each cube of food in the Larder/Storage. 1-3: The cube has spoiled and must be removed (placed in the game supply). 4-6: The food is not spoiled.
 - a. Note: the assumption is that older food will be eaten first which is why spoilage is only checked once per year.
4. Harvest wheat and barley crops (Late Summer early Fall): **For each field with a cube planted in it**

- a. Place the crop cube that was marking the crop planted in the field back into the general game supply pile
- b. add up the growth die rolls for the crop in that field. Wheat, planted in Fall, will have 3 dice rolls to total: winter, spring, summer. Barley will have two dice rolls to total, spring and summer.
- c. Consult the following chart using the growth dice total to determine the harvest of that field. The player places that number of cubes into their larder. (Figures roughed out from Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco Roman World*, pp. 10-17 so that Wheat fails 38% of the time (a little high) Barley fails 8% of the time (just a little bit low)

Barley		Wheat	
Growth Roll Total	Amount Harvested	Growth Roll Total	Amount Harvested
< 4	0 cubes (crop failure)	< 11	0 cubes (crop failure)
4-9	6 cubes (normal harvest)	11-13	6 cubes (normal harvest)
10-11	8 Cubes	14-16	8 Cubes
12	10 cubes (spectacular harvest)	17-18	10 cubes (spectacular harvest)

5. Taxes: The state's soldiers take 2 cubes from each player's harvest preferring wheat to barley whenever possible.
6. Harvest banquets and Community Festivals: Each willing family may hold banquets and invite as many of the community members as they wish. 1 cube supplies 1 banquet and earns the host +1 prestige. Each family may also provide food to the harvest festivals for the community. 1 cube from each member earns the supplier +1 prestige for contributing to the festival.

Selling or Buying Food

- At any point in the year a player can sell wheat to the market and receive 2 bronze cubes for 1 wheat cube.
- At any point in the year a player can purchase 1 wheat with 2 bronze cubes, 3 barley with 2 bronze cubes 2 bronze cubes

Helping Out Neighbors

- At any point during gameplay any player can ask any other players(s) for assistance in the form of food cubes. No one is required to gift/loan food cubes to another player and can always choose not to. Any player who does give a player who needs it food (need being defined as having too little food to plant at planting time or to feed everyone in the household for the current season), receives +1 prestige for every 2 cubes given

Household

<p>Misfortune</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> </tr> </table> <p>Prestige</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> </tr> </table> <p>Help Received</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> <td style="border: 1px solid black; width: 33px; height: 15px;"></td> </tr> </table>																<p>House</p> <p>Garden and Trees</p> <p>Store Bronze Bits</p>	<p>Granary (max 40 cubes)</p>

Household Members

<p>Name _____</p> <p>Adult Elder Child</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Food req.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Malnourished</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sick / Injured</p>	<p>Name _____</p> <p>Adult Elder Child</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Food req.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Malnourished</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sick / Injured</p>	<p>Name _____</p> <p>Adult Elder Child</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Food req.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Malnourished</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sick / Injured</p>	<p>Name _____</p> <p>Adult Elder Child</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Food req.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Malnourished</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sick / Injured</p>	<p>Name _____</p> <p>Adult Elder Child</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Food req.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Malnourished</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sick / Injured</p>	<p>Name _____</p> <p>Adult Elder Child</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Food req.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Malnourished</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sick / Injured</p>
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Fields

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Fall	Winter	Spring	Summer
1. Eat 2. Plant wheat	1. Eat 2. Wheat grow roll	1. Eat 2. Plant barley 3. Wheat grow roll; barley grow roll	1. Eat 2. Plant barley 3. wheat grow roll; barley grow roll 4. Storage spoilage roll 5. Harvest

Growth Roll Total	Amount of Barley Harvested
< 4	0 cubes (crop failure)
4-9	6 cubes (normal harvest)
10-11	8 Cubes
12	10 cubes (spectacular harvest)

Growth Roll Total	Amount of Wheat Harvested
< 11	0 cubes (crop failure)
11-13	6 cubes (normal harvest)
14-16	8 Cubes
17-18	10 cubes (spectacular harvest)