

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

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Prototype A2 (8/31/22) (note my first playtest with a group will be on 8/31/22)

- Legumes not implemented
- Goals not tweaked nor are the misfortune and prestige metrics tweaked yet
- The money system is underdeveloped – only allows food purchases at rates depending on season. Nothing else to purchase for convenience or luxury. Needs chance of being stolen or overtaxed.
- Later - labor system be implemented using meeples where health/food affects labor?
- Please send comments and questions to [jmc.hst@gmail.com](mailto:jmc.hst@gmail.com) or @gamingthepast on Twitter.

De Agricultura – Rules

## Sources

- Bret Devereaux's ACOUP Blog Series on Farmers <https://acoup.blog/2020/07/24/collections-bread-how-did-they-make-it-part-i-farmers/> And <https://acoup.blog/2020/08/06/collections-bread-how-did-they-make-it-part-iii-actually-farming/>
- 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 24 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

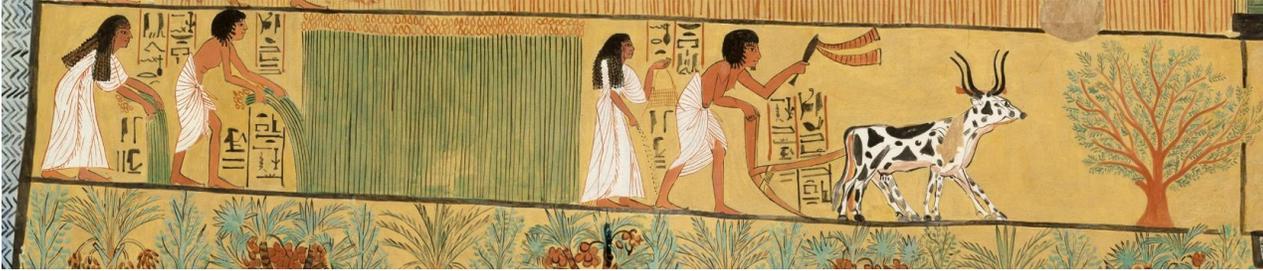
## Goal

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



<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/548354>

1. Plowing (not represented by any actions in game currently)
2. Eating Food and malnutrition
  - a. Eat food: Adult household members consume  $\frac{1}{2}$  cube of food each; elderly and child household members each consume  $\frac{1}{4}$  cube. Remove the required total of cubes from the granary and place in the general game supply pile. When adding together the amount of food needed to feed the household, round any fraction up to the next whole cube. So for example if a household needs 1.5 food, 2 cubes are needed to feed the household.
    - i. If the number of cubes eaten is sufficient to feed the whole family:
      1. If the number of barley cubes eaten in a season  $>$  number of wheat cubes, +1 misfortune for being reduced to food fit for animals. If the number of wheat cubes eaten in a season  $>$  number of barley, gain +1 prestige. 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 (+1 misfortune for each household member who is malnourished in a season). If a member of the household already has their malnourished box checked, check their Sick/Inured box (+1 misfortune for each household member who is sick/injured in a season). 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 = +2 misfortune
    - i. One season of the normal amount of food will remove a household member's malnourished or injured/sick status
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).  
*Rolling note: if you roll multiple dice at once for multiple fields (rather than 1 die repeatedly), the leftmost die rolled should go to the leftmost field, etc.*

### Spring round

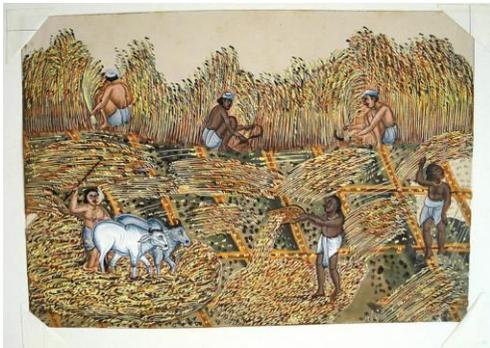
1. Eat food: see rules for eating in Autumn round
2. Plant barley as desired/able: Follow the rules for planting wheat. No more than one cube per field. The player, if they choose, may replace wheat planted in a field with barley, in which case the winter die roll for the growing wheat is erased/ignored. Place the cube of replaced wheat in the cube discard
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**



<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/548354>



[https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A\\_2003-0224-0-38](https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/A_2003-0224-0-38)

- 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 in total: winter, spring, summer. Barley will have two dice rolls in 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	
Growth Roll Total	Amount Harvested
< 4	0 cubes (crop failure)
4-9	3 cubes (normal harvest)
10-11	4 Cubes
12	5 cubes (spectacular harvest)

Wheat	
Growth Roll Total	Amount Harvested
< 11	0 cubes (crop failure)
11-16	3 cubes (normal harvest)
17	4 Cubes
18	5 cubes (spectacular harvest)

5. Taxes: The state's soldiers take 10% cubes from each player's harvest preferring wheat to barley whenever possible. Round fractions up or down to the nearest whole cube
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 +2 prestige. Each family may also provide food to the harvest festivals for the community. 1 cube from each member earns the supplier +2 prestige for contributing to the festival. A banquet or festival = ½ cube of food (for eating only; cannot be stored) for each family in the community

#### Selling or Buying Food

- At any point in the year a player can sell wheat to the market or buy it at the rate of receive 2 bronze cubes for 1 wheat cube in summer before the harvest, and 1 for 1 at any other point in the year
- At any point in the year a player can purchase 3 barley with 1 bronze cube

#### Helping Neighbors

- At any point during gameplay player can ask any other players(s) for assistance in the form of food cubes if:
  - They have insufficient food to feed their family
  - They have insufficient food to plant 5 crops

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 receives +1 prestige for every season turn they give food

#### Teacher Notes

- Have students keep a seasonal record of their family and food
  - We mostly ate
  - This season is the (name the agricultural labor)
  - Our food supply was:
  - Insufficient food etc.
- Question throughout during play: what risk did you take and how did it turn out
- Extension questions
  - Why might sacrifices to the gods seem an important thing to do
  - How important were good community bonds?
  - How igh

# Household

<p>Misfortune (subtracts from score)</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> </div> <p>Prestige (adds to score)</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> </div> <p>Help Received</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 30px; height: 15px;"></div> </div>	<p>House</p> <p>Garden and Trees</p> <p>Store Bronze Bits</p>	<p>Granary (max 30 cubes)</p>			
<p>Household Members (Total food req _____)</p>					
<p>Name _____</p> <p>Adult   Elder   Child</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <p>Food req.</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> Malnourished             <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-left: 5px;"></div> Sick / Injured         </div>	<p>Name _____</p> <p>Adult   Elder   Child</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <p>Food req.</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> Malnourished             <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-left: 5px;"></div> Sick / Injured         </div>	<p>Name _____</p> <p>Adult   Elder   Child</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <p>Food req.</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> Malnourished             <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-left: 5px;"></div> Sick / Injured         </div>	<p>Name _____</p> <p>Adult   Elder   Child</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <p>Food req.</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> Malnourished             <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-left: 5px;"></div> Sick / Injured         </div>	<p>Name _____</p> <p>Adult   Elder   Child</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <p>Food req.</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> Malnourished             <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-left: 5px;"></div> Sick / Injured         </div>	<p>Name _____</p> <p>Adult   Elder   Child</p> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 20px; height: 20px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> <p>Food req.</p> </div> <div style="display: flex; margin-top: 5px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-right: 5px;"></div> Malnourished             <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 15px; height: 15px; margin-left: 5px;"></div> Sick / Injured         </div>

## Fields

1	2	3	4	5
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>
Winter   Spring   Summer				
1	1	1	1	1
2	2	2	2	2
3	3	3	3	3
4	4	4	4	4
5	5	5	5	5

## Actions Each Turn

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. wheat grow roll; barley grow roll 3. Storage spoilage roll (for each stored cube; 1-3 = spoiled) 4. Harvest 5. State collects taxes (10% cubes, wheat preferred) 6. Festival / Banquet

## Barley Harvest

Growth Roll Total	Amount of Barley Harvested
< 4	0 cubes (crop failure)
4-9	3 cubes (normal harvest)
10-11	4 Cubes
12	5 cubes (spectacular harvest)

## Wheat Harvest

Growth Roll Total	Amount of Wheat Harvested
< 11	0 cubes (crop failure)
11-16	3 cubes (normal harvest)
17	4 Cubes
17-18	5 cubes (spectacular harvest)

# Debriefing Questions and Guide for Notes

## Play Notes: The Family Journal

- Record each month and what happened that month according to the chart and your decisions
- After each harvest, record the amount of wheat, barley, and bronze bits your family has
- Note if you sell any wheat or purchase any
- Record if anyone is sick or injured or malnourished

## Debriefing and Reflection Notes

**Note: This game is a highly simplified interpretation with a point of view. Respond to the questions below from the point of view of the game, but do not assume the game is accurate.**

What aspects of farming life does this game focus on?

What aspects of farming life does this game ignore

What assumptions about farming life does this game make?

What kinds of agency did a peasant family have? What sorts of choices and actions could they make to survive? What factors were beyond their control? To put it slightly differently, what were the “rules” of their world and nature that they could not change.

What strategies for survival are shown in the game? What might some other strategies have been?

Why do ancient law codes like Hammurabi’s Law code (18<sup>th</sup> century BCE Babylonia) have so many laws punishing those who harmed others’ fields

In this society, which asset would be more valuable: money or farmable land?

Outside the household:

How important were connections with the community for individual households?

What positive and negative roles could wealthier (= more farmland and available labor) people in the community play?

What was the household’s main interaction(s) with the state?

Why might a peasant community facing the situation your fellow players and you faced want to sacrifice to the gods of sun, wind, rain, and harvest regularly?

Sources for personal names from various places and periods

Sumerian-Akkadian List of Personal Names from the School of Nippur [14902.pdf \(etana.org\)](#)