

What Caused the Agricultural Revolution?

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Abstract

Explanations of changes in agricultural TFP during the agricultural revolution typically consist of a purely narrative account. Often these accounts present a timeline of key innovations or a discussion of the achievements of great agricultural pioneers. Using data drawn from a variety of sources we estimate agricultural TFP over the period 1690-1914. Applying causality tests appropriate for analyses involving nonstationary data we show that changes in the volume of agricultural output and the cumulative number of first editions of books on agriculture precede changes in TFP. By contrast the length of the canal network, measures of private R&D and the number of parliamentary acts of enclosure do not precede changes in TFP. Our findings appear to confirm the importance to the agricultural revolution of learning-by-doing and the improved dissemination and retention of knowledge.

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