

# The first baby boom

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In an important new study assessing the demographic impact of the shift from foraging to farming, anthropologists use evidence from 60 prehistoric American cemeteries to prove that the invention of agriculture led to a significant worldwide increase in birth rate.

Discussing the shifts in the demographic patterns before and after the introduction of agriculture in Europe at the end of the Stone Age, Jean-Pierre Bocquet-Appel (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, France) writes, "The signal of a demographic change we detected ... is characterized by an abrupt 20 to 30 percent increase, over 500 to 700 years, in the proportion of immature skeletons."

While prior research has been done on the Neolithic Demographic Transition, as the increase in birth rate is known, Bocquet-Appel and Stephan Naji are the first researchers to expand the theory to a worldwide scale. In a forthcoming study in *Current Anthropology*, they show that though agriculture did not appear in the Americas until 7,000 – 8,000 years later, the archaeological evidence parallels the changes in Europe and North Africa that occurred with the advent of agriculture.

"The new farming system, resulting in sedentary societies vs. forager nomadism, not only greatly increased the number of people who could be fed, but also boosted individual fertility in women to a possibly unique extent on such a scale in human history," write the authors.

Source: University of Chicago

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