



Farming in the Middle Ages

The medieval farmer usually planted two crops: one in spring and another in the fall. The spring crop was usually barley, vetches, oats, peas and beans, while the fall crop was mainly wheat and rye. Each type of seed was used in a different manner.

The rye and wheat, in addition to being sold for cash, were used for bread. The barley was used for beer and the hay and oats were fed to the horses and other livestock such as oxen. To get the fields ready for planting, the farmers used oxen to plough the land. Most farmers did not own enough oxen, so ploughing was done by the whole community.

Farmers who wanted to sow in May helped each other. Additionally, the sowing of the fields was in three year cycle. For two years in a row, a particular field was sown and the field was left crop-free for the third year. This allowed the soil to regain nutrients to be ready to grow another crop again soon, and to produce more.

Also, because they grew more than one crop, they employed a system of crop rotation which is still used today. In crop rotation, different crops are planted on the same field in different years. One year they might plant wheat. The next year they might plant barley. Barley and wheat use different soil nutrients.

Fertilizer was also commonly used. A common technique was called marling. The marling process consisted of spreading clay containing carbonate of lime onto the soil. By doing this, most of the nutrients needed to grow crops were restored. They also used manure to fertilize which came from the livestock which they raised, such as sheep, pigs, cows, chickens and the occasional goat.

The wife of the farmer also played an important role on the farm. She would usually help with the chickens. These were sold for extra money or killed and eaten by the family. She also cooked and preserved the food and she earned extra money by spinning thread and selling it. Additionally, the thread was used to make clothes for the family to wear. She also brewed beer, made butter and cheese and other things for the family to use.

Scan the text and underline and translate the following words

- Barley _____
- Vetches _____
- Oats _____
- Wheat _____
- Rye _____
- Crop rotation _____
- Soil nutrients _____
- Preserved _____

Read the text and answer the questions in Dutch

1. Wanneer plantte een boer zijn gewassen in de middeleeuwen.

2. Hoe kwamen boeren aan ossen om het land aan te ploegen?

3. Hoeveel jaar achter elkaar werd een gewas op hetzelfde veld gezaaid?

4. Leg uit wat 'marling' is.

5. Welke werkzaamheden deed een vrouw op de boerderij? Gebruik ongeveer 20 woorden.
