

Prosofski, Lisa. "The Story Of... Wheat." *Guns, Germs, and Steel*. PBS, 2005. Web. 27 Oct 2013.

The Story Of... Wheat

More of the world's farmland is devoted to wheat than to any other crop. At the end of the twentieth century, close to 570 million acres, or one-sixth of all the **arable** land on the planet, was used to grow wheat. Six hundred million tons are produced annually around the world, 60 kilograms of which will be consumed by the average American every year.

Land that you can grow crops in.

Yet this extraordinary seed-bearing grass, which alongside rice provides 41% of the calories consumed across our globe, was originally native to just a tiny region of western Asia.

Cultivated by the earliest Neolithic farmers in the hills and valleys of Syria, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq over 13,000 years ago, wild-growing wheat has since changed beyond recognition. In the wild, as it still grows in those places today, wheat evolved to **shatter** in the late summer breeze, spreading its tough-coated seeds far and wide.

Planted or grown.

Explode/splinter off

But the act of human harvesting, using bare hands or **primitive sickles**, favored those rare mutant plants whose ears were less likely to shatter; whose grains were softer and larger, and therefore more appetizing.

Ancient farm tool.

By **subconsciously** selecting, favoring, and re-planting these seeds, humans were unwittingly transforming the plant's dominant DNA — and created an entirely new species.

Not on purpose or with intention.

The wheat used for bread today is almost unrecognizable from its ancient ancestor. An **iridescent** blue-green for most of the year, it has shorter stalks, fatter non-shatter ears, and plump grains which are easy to thresh and mill. Farmed alongside its surviving wild ancestor throughout the modern Middle East, bread wheat is **testament** to the power of human interference over thousands of years.

Color changes in the light.

Evidence or proof of.

Wheat was a critical element of European success, both at home and abroad. Designed to **thrive** in temperate climates, it was easily exported to North America, South America, the Cape of South Africa and the south-east corner of Australia. Wherever wheat was successful, colonial farmers could establish a model European society — although this **prosperity** was often achieved at the expense of indigenous populations.

Flourish, grow or develop well.

Success.

Modern wheat, the product of ancient genetic engineering, symbolizes the success of the European model — success **dictated** by a fluke of **botanical** geography.

Ordered.

Relating to plants.