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*Bread, Beer and the Seeds of Change. Agriculture's Imprint on World History* By T. R. Sinclair and C. J. Sinclair.  
Wallingford, UK: CABI (2010), pp. 193, £15.95 (paperback). ISBN 978-1-84593-704-1.

This compact book outlines the history of agriculture and its interaction with humankind at different times in different regions of the world, concentrating on the growing and preparation of crops for food and drink and moving from the hunter gatherers (still to be found in the Kalahari tribesman and Eskimo) of 10 000 years ago to the highly sophisticated mechanical/chemical-driven technology of the present. An introduction is followed by three parts, the first of which (Chapters 2 to 6) focuses on the basis of cropping and food/drink production. Chapter 3 'What Crops to Grow?' highlights the global dominance and attributes for food and drink of eight grain crops – wheat, rice, maize, barley, oats, rye, sorghum and millet – all members of the grass family selected from hundreds of thousands of plant species. Part II examines the rise and fall of five ancient societies (Sumerians, Egyptians, Chinese, Bantu of Africa and Maya) each with unique agricultural practices, whilst part III switches to technological advances in western societies (Athenian and Roman Empires, feudal Europeans, British, Development of Science and Technology and Americans).

A short epilogue on the development and likely future of biofuels, particularly in the USA, emphasizes that a number of essential technological challenges need to be overcome for both grain and non-grain ethanol production. At the end of each chapter key sources of information are listed, some of which can be accessed on the internet.

This stimulating and easy to read book should appeal to a general readership, including agriculturalists, anthropologists, historians and food technologists.

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*The New Peasantries: Struggles for Autonomy and Sustainability in an Era of Empire and Globalization* By J. D. van der Ploeg. London: Earthscan (2008), pp. 356, £ 20.99 (PB). ISBN 9781844078820.

In this book, Jan Douwe van der Ploeg draws on much of his life's work of long-term studies of modes of farming in different environments and his continuing analysis of the growth and resilience of peasant farming despite the rise of the globalization of food and farming systems and the emergence of what he terms 'Empire'.

The book's 10 chapters explore the characteristics of peasants and peasant styles of farming; provide case studies of the dynamics of peasantry, entrepreneurial farming and global food Empires in Latin America and Europe; examine repeasantization in Europe, opportunities for territorial autonomy in food systems and issues of controllability; concluding with a synthesis of ideas about Empire and how the peasant principle relates to it.

Jan Douwe's notion of Empire functions more as a metaphor for this control rather than an analytical concept. However, the case studies elaborate the operation of Empire, illustrating the diffuse nature of power and complexity of agency which differentiate it from earlier forms of Empire rooted in the political and economic power of nation states.

The book is amply illustrated with diagrams, photographs, graphs and tables which generally are helpful aids to understanding. Some of the conceptual diagrams might have benefited from more systemic forms of presentation that convey the processes more clearly.

Jan Douwe's knowledge of the science of farming and food, both natural and social, is profound and he has an engaging way of writing about very complex issues. His powerful arguments for the qualities and persistence of peasant forms of production and livelihood have great merit in our view.

David Gibbon and Adrienne M. Martin