

Agricultural Economic History

Taught at the “Technische Universität München”, Germany

Lecturer: Dr Matthias Blum, Chair Group of Agricultural and Food Economics

Taught during winter terms 2011-12, 2012-13 (will be continued)

Area and time period: Mostly Europe; Neolithic revolution – ca. 2000

Level of instruction: graduate level

This course covers the development of agriculture since the time of the Neolithic Revolution. The first two parts provide introductions to Economic History, and quantitative methods. Part three covers the “invention” of agriculture during the Neolithic Revolution, Diamond’s (1997) theory of agriculture’s role in the timing of this event as well as its impact on subsequent economic and agricultural development. Quantitative measures are used for investigating living standards prior to, during, and after the Neolithic Revolution. Moreover, conventional per-capita income statistics and information on life expectancy and mortality rates are used in tracing economic development during the past millennia.

Part four is about economic development between the Middle Ages and the Early 20th century. Allen’s (2000, 2001) real wage and productivity series, Steckel’s (2004) anthropometric information, and Bairoch’s (1976) study on European demographics form the basis of this part of the course.

Part five forms the bulk of this course and is largely based on Federico (2005). Covering the role of inputs in agriculture (such as land, labor force, human and physical capital), developments of efficiency (in terms of Total Factor Productivity) in transforming inputs into outputs, and finally the impressive increases in production levels as a result of increasing inputs and improvements in efficiency. Moreover, other causes of rising production levels related to a series of institutional changes, such as market reforms, property rights, and the role of policy makers, are discussed. Finally, discussing corresponding outcomes of the aforementioned developments in terms of human well-being enables students evaluate the importance of agriculture.

This lecture has a strong focus on the utilization of quantitative and empirical methods in Economic History. This course aims at encouraging students for developing skills enabling them to understand and eventually, independently apply methods taught in the course.