

## Food and Drink

*You are in a farmer's field, where a man and a woman are planting seeds and plowing.*

More than 90 percent of ancient Egyptians spent most of their time farming. The farmer's year was centered around what happened to the Nile River. In November, after the Nile flood had subsided, farmers would sow their fields. Usually this was done in pairs. One farmer scattered wheat or barley seed, while the other followed behind with cattle drawing a plow. Crops were harvested in the summer using wooden sickles (metal blades with short wooden handles). The farmer's entire family, including the children, helped with the harvesting. Afterward, donkeys were used to bring the crop to the granaries (places where grain is stored and collected) or the marketplace.

Farmers grew many different crops. Two of the most important crops were wheat and barley, which were used to produce bread and beer, the most common food items. Farmers also grew vegetables such as onions, radishes, peas, beans, cucumbers, and lettuce. For meat, Egyptians raised cattle and hunted geese, ducks, cranes, and other wildfowl. Cows also provided milk, which Egyptians drank or made into cheese. While eating pork was forbidden and some kinds of fish were considered sacred, many people ate these foods anyway. In addition to beer, wealthy Egyptians drank wine, which was made from grapes that were grown in the Nile River delta.

Members of the lower classes ate simple meals, while upper-class families had the choice of a wide selection of foods. For example, a laborer's meal might include some vegetables, fish, bread, and water or beer. In contrast, an upper-class banquet might consist of fish, pigeon stew, kidneys, quail, ribs of beef, bread rolls, small round cakes, some cherrylike fruit, stewed figs, cheese, and wine and beer to drink.

**Discussion Questions:** What foods did the ancient Egyptians eat, and how did they obtain them? What kinds of beverages did they drink?