

ARTIFACTS

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The Environment, Maize and the Human Genome

Dylan Raithel

Corn, as it is today, is a result of a long history of humans changing the land, its flora and fauna. Corn produced today is the product of thousands of years of humans selectively breeding corn's ancestors for beneficial traits. The corn we are all familiar with originates from the domestication of a grass called teosinte, or grain of the gods by the early farmers of central Mexico between seven and ten thousand years ago. These farmers had a keen eye for observation, and recognized that they could selectively breed teosinte for more fruitful and productive traits by breeding the more suitable plants with one another. Now that corn has spread throughout South America, North America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia, it is one of the more heavily produced and relied upon foods of the world. Billions of acres of land bear the mark of corn production. Because of corn's integration into the global food system there is a plethora of land and water use issues associated with its growth, use as animal feed, additive in food products, and biofuels.

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