



The Conditions of Agricultural Growth: The Economics of Agrarian Change Under Population Pressure

Ester Boserup

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When it first appeared in 1965, *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth* heralded a breakthrough in the theory of agricultural development. Whereas 'development' had previously been seen as the transformation of traditional communities by the introduction (or imposition) of new technologies, Ester Boserup argued that changes and improvements occur from within agricultural communities, and that improvements are governed not only by outside interference, but by those communities themselves.

Using extensive analyses of the costs and productivity of the main systems of traditional agriculture, Ester Boserup concludes that technical, economic and social changes are unlikely to take place unless the community concerned is exposed to the pressure of population growth. In sharp contrast to widely accepted ideas, she shows how population growth may be the main stimulus to agrarian change. In developing this theme, the author identifies successive stages of agriculture, characterized by differences in techniques of cultivation and in social structure and show how they can be explained by differences in population density. This book is of relevance not only to economists, but also to historians interested in the way present changes in agrarian communities parallel those of the past.

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