

Farming in the Iron Age

Iron technology

The Celts knew that iron was stronger and more durable than bronze. It was also easier to mine iron ore than the ores needed to make bronze. They made tools from iron, which made farming much easier. This meant that settlements could continue to grow.

Iron tipped plough

The iron tipped plough, or 'ard', replaced the bronze plough in the Iron Age. The two iron blades of the ard could cut through heavier soil, meaning that more land could be farmed. The plough was guided by a farmer and pulled by oxen.



Artist's impression of Iron Age ploughing

Farming communities

The Celts mostly lived in small farming communities in lowland areas. During times of war, some communities built and lived in hillforts. Crops and animals were mainly kept in the fields below, but animals could be moved inside the fort for protection.

Land management

The Celts were excellent at managing land. They were able to use almost all land, including hillsides, for farming. When they needed more land, they used iron axes to cut down forests or drained the water away from marshland. Farmland was mostly organised into rectangular fields.



Artist's impression of an Iron Age hillfort



Arable farming

The Celts used arable farming methods to grow crops. Seeds were planted in rows after the soil had been ploughed. Crops, such as oats, barley, millet, rye, corn, spelt wheat and emmer wheat, were commonly planted, but not many vegetables were grown.



Artist's impression of Iron Age arable farming

Pastoral farming

Pastoral farming methods were also used by the Celts. Land was set aside to raise animals for food, milk and clothing. They kept cows, sheep, geese, goats and pigs. Pastoral farming was practised by many Iron Age tribes, especially those who lived close to the sea where the soil was less suitable for arable farming.

Storage

The Celts used granaries raised from the ground on posts, or bell-shaped pits dug into the ground, to store their harvests. Many hillforts were built with storage pits inside to keep harvested crops safe from invaders. Storing crops meant that the Celts could keep food for the winter months, as well as for times of famine or war.

Fertiliser

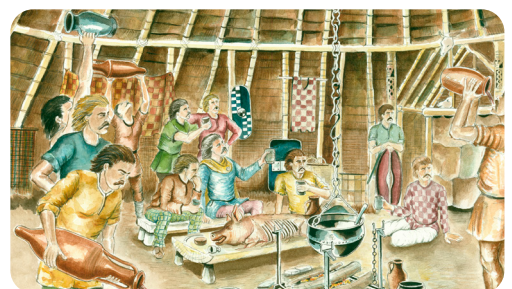
The Celts began to use fertiliser to help their crops grow bigger and faster. They used fertiliser made from trees, sand, clay, manure from their animals and chalk dug out of the earth.

Trade

As the Celts began to produce and store more crops than they could use, they were able to trade their crops with other tribes. The amount of land owned by a tribe and the crops that they harvested helped them to gain wealth and power.

Way of life

Celts did not spend all of their time working because their farming practices had improved. Farmers could spend their free time feasting, drinking beer, playing board games or enjoying music. Other Celts worked as metalworkers, weavers, carpenters or potters.



Artist's impression of an Iron Age feast

