

Early farmers brought light skin, height to northern Europeans

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When agriculture arrived in Europe some 8,500 years ago, humans didn't simply adapt their lifestyles and eating habits, but also their genes.

Researchers, led by geneticist David Reich at Harvard Medical School, analyzed the DNA of 230 ancient humans who lived between 3,000 and 8,500 years ago and found 12 positions on the human genome where natural selection seems to have occurred with the advent of farming. The scientists were also able to trace which genes were passed down from various prehistoric ancestors.

In a paper [published in Nature](#), the researchers show that northern Europeans seem to have a stronger genetic link to a particularly tall nomadic population from the Eurasian steppe who came to Europe around 4,500 years ago. Because of these genes, northern Europeans are still tall compared to others on the continent.

Southern Europeans became shorter as they turned to farming, as genes connected to reduced height were passed down through the generations. These shorter genes were inherited from Neolithic and Chalcolithic populations on from the Iberian peninsula, though it's not clear why this happened in the south but not the north.

After they began farming, ancient Europeans also evolved to have lighter skin pigmentation, which is better able to capture vitamin D from the sun. Reich hypothesizes that earlier prehistoric hunter-gatherers didn't need lighter skin, as the meat they caught provided enough Vitamin D, [according to the New York Times](#).

Read full, original post: [How Europeans became tall and fair-skinned 8,500 years ago](#)