

CUET · GEOGRAPHY · CLASS XII · CODE 313

Primary Activities

CUET unit: Human Development

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Snapshot

- Economic activities are primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary; primary activities (hunting & gathering, pastoralism, agriculture, mining, fishing, forestry, quarrying) directly tap earth's resources.
- Agriculture has a clear typology (subsistence — primitive & intensive; commercial — plantation, extensive grain, mixed, dairy, Mediterranean, market gardening, factory farming; co-operative; collective).
- Nomadic herding differs from commercial livestock rearing; transhumance has Indian examples (Gujjars, Bakarwals, Gaddis, Bhotiyas).
- Mining profitability depends on physical & economic factors, and uses two methods (surface/open-cast and underground/shaft).
- CUET regularly tests definitions (transhumance, viticulture, truck farming, jhuming, Kolkhoz), regional pairings (Milpa-Central America, Ladang-Indonesia/Malaysia) and "which is/is not" questions on plantation crops and grain-farming regions.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

- Economic activities are grouped into primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary; primary activities directly depend on the environment — utilisation of land, water, vegetation, building materials and minerals (NCERT §Primary Activities intro, p. 22).
- Primary activities include hunting and gathering, pastoral activities, fishing, forestry, agriculture, and mining and quarrying; workers engaged here are called **red-collar workers** because of the outdoor nature of their work (NCERT p. 22).
- Earliest humans depended on the immediate environment, subsisting on (a) animals hunted and (b) edible plants gathered from nearby forests; primitive tools of stones, twigs or arrows kept the kill small (NCERT §Hunting and Gathering, p. 22).
- Gathering is practised in (i) high-latitude zones — northern Canada, northern Eurasia, southern Chile, and (ii) low-latitude zones — Amazon Basin, tropical Africa, northern fringe of Australia, interior parts of Southeast Asia (NCERT p. 23, Fig. 4.2).
- Modern commercial gathering yields bark for quinine/tanin/cork, leaves for beverages/drugs/cosmetics/fibres/thatch/fabrics, nuts for food and oils, and tree

trunks for rubber, balata, gums and resins; **Chicle** (chewing-gum base) comes from the milky juice of the **zapota tree** (NCERT p. 23).

- **Pastoralism** arose when hunting proved unsustainable; today it is practised at subsistence (nomadic herding) or commercial level (NCERT §Pastoralism, p. 24).
- **Nomadic herding / pastoral nomadism** — herders rely on animals for food, clothing, shelter, tools, transport; each community has a well-identified territory; animals reared vary by region — cattle in tropical Africa, sheep/goats/camel in Sahara and Asiatic deserts, yak and llamas in Tibet and Andes, reindeer in Arctic/sub-Arctic (NCERT p. 24).
- Three core nomadic regions: (1) Atlantic shores of North Africa eastwards through Arabian peninsula into Mongolia and Central China; (2) tundra of Eurasia; (3) small areas in south-west Africa and Madagascar (NCERT p. 24, Fig. 4.4).
- **Transhumance** = seasonal movement from plain pastures to mountain pastures in summer and back in winter; Himalayan groups — Gujjars, Bakarwals, Gaddis, Bhotiyas — practise it; tundra herders move south-to-north in summer and reverse in winter (NCERT p. 24).
- Nomad numbers and areas are shrinking because of (a) imposition of political boundaries and (b) new settlement plans by governments (NCERT p. 24).
- **Commercial livestock rearing** is organised, capital-intensive, fenced-ranch based with parcels rotated by carrying capacity; products (meat, wool, hides, skin) are scientifically processed and exported; key countries — New Zealand, Australia, Argentina, Uruguay, USA (NCERT p. 24-25, Fig. 4.6).
- Agriculture divides into **subsistence** (primitive subsistence / shifting cultivation; intensive subsistence) and **commercial** (plantation, extensive grain, mixed, dairy, Mediterranean, market gardening, factory farming) (NCERT §Agriculture, p. 25-31).
- **Primitive subsistence / shifting cultivation** — vegetation cleared by fire (slash and burn); patches cultivated 3-5 years till fertility falls, then abandoned; called **Jhuming** in NE India, **Milpa** in Central America & Mexico, **Ladang** in Indonesia & Malaysia (NCERT p. 25-26).
- **Intensive subsistence agriculture** has two sub-types — (i) wet-paddy dominated (rice, high man:land ratio, family labour, farmyard manure, high yield per unit area but low per labour) and (ii) crops other than paddy (wheat, soyabean, barley, sorghum in N. China, Manchuria, N. Korea, N. Japan; wheat in western Indo-Gangetic plains, millets in western and southern India) (NCERT p. 26-27).
- **Plantation agriculture** — introduced by European colonists in tropical colonies; large estates, large capital, managerial expertise, scientific methods, **single-crop specialisation**, cheap labour, good transport; crops — tea, coffee, cocoa, rubber, cotton, oil palm, sugarcane, bananas, pineapples; examples — French cocoa/coffee in West Africa, British tea in India & Sri Lanka, British rubber in Malaysia, British sugarcane/banana in West Indies, Spanish/American coconut & sugarcane in Philippines, Dutch sugarcane in Indonesia, Brazilian coffee fazendas (NCERT p. 28).

- **Extensive commercial grain cultivation** — semi-arid interiors of mid-latitudes; **wheat** is principal crop with corn, barley, oats, rye; very large farms, fully mechanised; **low yield per acre but high yield per person**; regions — Eurasian steppes, Canadian & American prairies, Pampas of Argentina, Velds of South Africa, Australian Downs, Canterbury Plains of New Zealand (NCERT p. 28-29, Fig. 4.12).
- **Mixed farming** — found in NW Europe, eastern North America, parts of Eurasia, temperate Southern continents; moderate farms; crops — wheat, barley, oats, rye, maize, fodder & root crops; equal emphasis on crops and animal husbandry; crop rotation and intercropping maintain fertility; high capital expenditure on machinery & buildings, chemical fertilisers and green manures (NCERT p. 29).
- **Dairy farming** — most advanced, efficient and **capital-intensive** rearing of milch animals; highly **labour-intensive** (no off-season); practised near urban/industrial centres; three main belts — (1) North-Western Europe (largest), (2) Canada, (3) South-Eastern Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania (NCERT p. 29-30, Fig. 4.16).
- **Mediterranean agriculture** — highly specialised commercial farming on either side of the Mediterranean Sea, Atlantic coast of N. Africa (Tunisia), southern California, central Chile, SW South Africa, S and SW Australia; supplier of citrus fruits; **viticulture** (grape cultivation) is its speciality — high-quality wines; inferior grapes dried into raisins and currants; also olives and figs (NCERT p. 30-31).
- **Market gardening and horticulture** — small, intensive farms producing high-value vegetables, fruits and flowers for urban markets; labour-and-capital intensive (irrigation, HYV seeds, fertilisers, insecticides, greenhouses); well developed in densely populated industrial districts of NW Europe, NE USA and the Mediterranean; Netherlands specialises in tulips/flowers; **truck farming** = specialisation in vegetables, named after the overnight distance a truck can cover; **factory farming** is the modern stall/pen rearing of poultry and cattle on manufactured feedstuff with breed selection and scientific breeding (NCERT p. 31-32).
- **Co-operative farming** — voluntary pooling of resources by farmers; individual farms remain intact; co-operatives procure inputs, sell produce, process products; successful in Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Italy — in Denmark every farmer is a member (NCERT p. 32).
- **Collective farming / Kolkhoz** — introduced in the erstwhile Soviet Union; based on social ownership and collective labour; farmers pooled land, livestock and labour but retained small plots for daily needs (NCERT p. 32).
- **Mining** — actual development began with the Industrial Revolution; profitability depends on (i) **physical factors** — size, grade and mode of occurrence of deposits, and (ii) **economic factors** — demand, technology, capital for infrastructure, labour and transport costs (NCERT §Mining, p. 32).
- **Methods of mining** — (a) **surface / open-cast (strip) mining** — easiest, cheapest, low overhead costs, large and rapid output for near-surface ores; (b) **underground / shaft mining** — vertical shafts with radiating galleries for deep

ores; needs lifts, drills, haulage, ventilation; risky (poisonous gases, fires, flooding, caving in) (NCERT p. 33, Fig. 4.19).

- Developed economies are retreating from mining-processing-refining stages due to high labour costs; developing countries with large labour forces are gaining importance — several African and some South American/Asian countries earn over 50% of revenue from minerals alone (NCERT p. 33).
- **Hunting as the earliest livelihood:** NCERT notes that the kill from primitive hunting using stones, twigs and arrows was small, hence early humans had to combine hunting with gathering of nuts, fruits, roots and tubers from nearby forests. Hunting societies survive today only in remote pockets — the Bushmen of the Kalahari, the Pygmies of the Congo, the Bindibu of the Australian outback. As populations grew and game numbers fell, hunting transitioned first into domestication of animals (pastoralism) and then into cultivation of plants (agriculture), giving the broad evolutionary sequence taught in this chapter (NCERT §Hunting and Gathering, pp. 22–23).
- **Modern commercial gathering vs subsistence gathering:** Subsistence gathering is restricted to the harsh high-latitude tundra and the deep low-latitude tropics where it remains the only viable economy. Modern commercial gathering, by contrast, supplies global markets with valuable forest products — bark for quinine, tannin and cork; leaves for beverages, drugs and fibres; nuts for food and oils; tree trunks for rubber, balata, gums, resins and chicle from the zapota tree (NCERT pp. 23–24).
- **Distribution patterns of nomadic herding:** The three core regions of nomadic herding form a recognisable belt — (i) a long swathe from the Atlantic shores of North Africa across the Arabian Peninsula into Mongolia and Central China; (ii) the tundra fringe of Eurasia; (iii) limited tracts in south-west Africa and Madagascar. Animals reared shift by climate — cattle in tropical Africa, sheep, goats and camels in the Sahara and Asiatic deserts, yaks and llamas on the Tibetan and Andean highlands, and reindeer in the Arctic and sub-Arctic (NCERT p. 24, Fig 4.4).
- **Commercial dairy belts ranked:** North-Western Europe is the largest dairy belt in the world (Denmark, the Netherlands, France, northern Germany, the UK); the second belt is Canada; the third is South-Eastern Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania. All three lie close to large urban markets where milk and processed dairy can be sold quickly. Mediterranean agriculture's viticulture specialisation, by contrast, ships its product (wine, raisins, olives, figs) globally because the finished product is non-perishable (NCERT pp. 29–31).
- **Co-operative vs collective farming — the political contrast:** Co-operative farming is voluntary and individual farms remain intact (Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Italy) — the model that India adopted post-Independence under AMUL and IFFCO. The Kolkhoz of the erstwhile Soviet Union was a collective farm based on social ownership of the means of production and pooled labour; farmers

retained only small kitchen plots. NCERT pairs these two as opposites on the ownership-control spectrum (NCERT p. 32).

2.2 Definitions to memorise

| Term | Definition | Page |
|----------------------------|---|-------|
| Economic activities | Human activities which generate income | 22 |
| Red-collar workers | People engaged in primary activities, named for outdoor work | 22 |
| Chicle | Chewing-gum base obtained from the milky juice of the zapota tree | 23 |
| Transhumance | Seasonal movement of herders from plains to mountain pastures in summer and back in winter | 24 |
| Pastoral nomadism | Primitive subsistence activity where herders move with livestock seeking pasture and water | 24 |
| Jhuming | Shifting cultivation in North-east India | 26 |
| Milpa | Shifting cultivation in Central America and Mexico | 26 |
| Ladang | Shifting cultivation in Indonesia and Malaysia | 26 |
| Slash and burn agriculture | Another name for shifting cultivation (vegetation cleared by fire) | 26 |
| Plantation agriculture | Large estate, single-crop, capital-intensive farming introduced by European colonists in the tropics | 28 |
| Viticulture | Cultivation of grapes; a speciality of the Mediterranean region | 31 |
| Truck farming | Specialisation in growing vegetables, named after the overnight distance a truck can cover to market | 31 |
| Factory farming | Stall/pen rearing of livestock (poultry, cattle) on manufactured feedstuff with scientific breeding | 31-32 |
| Kolkhoz | Model of collective farming introduced in the erstwhile Soviet Union | 32 |
| Open-cast (strip) mining | Surface mining of near-surface ores; cheap, large output | 33 |
| Shaft mining | Underground mining via vertical shafts and galleries for deep ores | 33 |
| Subsistence agriculture | Farming where output is consumed largely by the farming household with little surplus for sale | 25 |
| Commercial agriculture | Farming where the bulk of the output is produced for sale in markets | 25-28 |
| Mediterranean agriculture | Specialised commercial farming on either side of the Mediterranean Sea, dominant crops being citrus, grapes, olives, figs | 30 |

| Term | Definition | Page |
|----------------------|--|------|
| Mixed farming | Farming combining crops and livestock on the same holding with crop rotation | 29 |
| Dairy farming | Most advanced and efficient rearing of milch animals; capital- and labour-intensive | 29 |
| Market gardening | Small intensive farming of high-value vegetables/fruits/flowers for urban consumers | 31 |
| Fazenda | Brazilian coffee plantation | 28 |
| Co-operative farming | Voluntary pooling of inputs/processing/sales by farmers retaining individual ownership of land | 32 |
| Quaternary activity | Research-based knowledge sector — beyond the tertiary, often cited alongside primary as part of the four-fold classification | 22 |

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

- **Fig. 4.1** Women gathering oranges in Mizoram — example of modern commercial gathering (p. 23).
- **Fig. 4.2** Areas of subsistence gathering — high-latitude (N. Canada, N. Eurasia, S. Chile) and low-latitude (Amazon, tropical Africa, N. Australia, interior SE Asia) (p. 23).
- **Fig. 4.3** Nomads taking sheep up the mountains at onset of summer — visual of transhumance (p. 24).
- **Fig. 4.4** Areas of nomadic herding — Sahel-to-Mongolia belt, Eurasian tundra, SW Africa and Madagascar (p. 25).
- **Fig. 4.6** Areas of commercial livestock rearing — New Zealand, Australia, Argentina, Uruguay, USA (p. 26).
- **Fig. 4.7** Areas of primitive subsistence agriculture — tropical Africa, Central & South America, SE Asia (p. 26).
- **Fig. 4.8** Areas of intensive subsistence farming — wet-rice dominant vs. other-crop dominant in monsoon Asia (p. 27).
- **Fig. 4.11** Mechanised grain farming — combine harvesters across very large farms (p. 28).
- **Fig. 4.12** Areas of extensive commercial grain farming — Eurasian steppes, Prairies, Pampas, Velds, Downs, Canterbury Plains (p. 29).
- **Fig. 4.14** Areas of mixed farming — NW Europe, Eastern N. America, parts of Eurasia, southern temperate continents (p. 30).
- **Fig. 4.16** Areas of dairy farming — NW Europe (largest), Canada, SE Australia–NZ–Tasmania (p. 31).
- **Fig. 4.19** Methods of mining — diagram showing open-cast (strip) mining and shaft mining side by side (p. 33).

2.5 Key data / regional anchor table (NCERT figures and pairings to memorise)

| # | Topic | Anchor | NCERT page |
|----|--|--|------------|
| 1 | Shifting cultivation in NE India | Jhuming | 26 |
| 2 | Shifting cultivation in Central America & Mexico | Milpa | 26 |
| 3 | Shifting cultivation in Indonesia & Malaysia | Ladang | 26 |
| 4 | Chewing-gum base source | Chicle from zapota tree | 23 |
| 5 | Indian Himalayan transhumant groups | Gujjars, Bakarwals, Gaddis, Bhotiyas | 24 |
| 6 | Major commercial livestock countries | NZ, Australia, Argentina, Uruguay, USA | 24 |
| 7 | Extensive grain belts | Eurasian steppes, Canadian/American prairies, Pampas, Velds, Australian Downs, Canterbury Plains | 29 |
| 8 | Largest dairy belt | North-Western Europe | 30 |
| 9 | Mediterranean speciality | Viticulture (grape cultivation) | 31 |
| 10 | Tulip/flower market-gardening specialist | Netherlands | 31 |
| 11 | Soviet collective farming model | Kolkhoz | 32 |
| 12 | Co-operative farming success countries | Denmark, Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Italy | 32 |
| 13 | Brazilian coffee plantation system | Fazenda | 28 |
| 14 | Mining methods | Open-cast (surface) and Shaft (underground) | 33 |
| 15 | Cyclical period of primitive plot cultivation before abandonment | 3–5 years | 25–26 |

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **Transhumance ≠ pastoral nomadism in general.** Transhumance is the seasonal vertical movement (plain ↔ mountain); pastoral nomadism is the broader subsistence activity that includes horizontal long-distance migration too.
- **Shifting cultivation names.** Easy to swap: Jhuming = NE India; Milpa = Central America & Mexico; Ladang = Indonesia & Malaysia.

- **Extensive commercial grain farming yields.** "Low yield per acre but high yield per person" — NTA flips this; tractor-mechanisation, not soil fertility, drives the high per-person output.
- **Dairy farming traits.** Both highly capital-intensive and highly labour-intensive, with **no off-season**. Students often pick only one.
- **Plantation crops trap.** Tea, coffee, cocoa, rubber, sugarcane, cotton, oil palm, bananas, pineapples are plantation crops. **Wheat is not** — it belongs to extensive commercial grain or intensive subsistence systems (Exercise Q1 (i), p. 34).
- **Kolkhoz vs Co-operative.** Kolkhoz = collective farming, USSR, social ownership of means of production. Co-operative = voluntary pooling, individual farms remain intact, Denmark/Netherlands example.
- **Where extensive grain farming is NOT practised:** Amazon Basin (tropical, dense forest) — distractor in NCERT exercise itself (Q1 (v), p. 34).
- **Monoculture check.** Plantation, commercial grain and dairy farming follow monoculture/specialisation; **mixed farming does NOT** (Exercise Q1 (viii), p. 34).
- **Subsistence wet-paddy vs other-crop subsistence:** Wet-paddy subsistence dominates monsoon Asia (Ganga delta, Mekong, southern China, Java) — high man-to-land ratio, high yield per unit area, low yield per labour. "Other crops" subsistence (wheat, soyabean, barley, sorghum) is practised in northern China, Manchuria, northern Korea, northern Japan, where rice will not grow because of the dry, cool climate.
- **Open-cast vs shaft mining selection:** Open-cast (strip) mining is preferred when the ore lies near the surface — output is large and cost per tonne is low. Shaft mining is used for deep ores and is risky because of poisonous gases, fires, flooding and roof collapse. NTA mixes these traits as distractors.
- **Plantation crops list — exclude wheat and grapes:** The plantation list is tea, coffee, cocoa, rubber, cotton, oil palm, sugarcane, bananas and pineapples. Wheat is not a plantation crop (it goes to extensive commercial grain), and grapes are not plantation crops either — viticulture under Mediterranean agriculture is highly specialised commercial farming, not a plantation.
- **Red-collar workers:** People engaged in primary activities are labelled "red-collar" because of the outdoor nature of their work — not because they work with red soil or red ores.

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

Primary Activities is one of the highest-yield CUET Geography chapters — typically 6-9 MCQs per CUET (UG) cycle since 2023. Frequent question types include matching shifting-cultivation names with regions, "which is NOT a plantation crop" (lifted from NCERT exercise), definitions of viticulture/transhumance/truck farming/Kolkhoz, identification of extensive grain farming regions, and assertion-reason items on dairy and market gardening. For solved CUET PYQs on Primary Activities, see [/pyq/geography](#) .

CUET 2025 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.9 (CUET 2025) Among the following identify the primary economic activity:

- A) Education B) Forest safari C) Fishing D) IT industry Tests: Classification — primary activities (fishing, hunting, gathering) Answer: Not in extracted key

Q.12 (CUET 2025) What are the different names of shifting cultivation? (A) Jhuming (B) Chinook (C) Milpa (D) Plantation agriculture

- A) (A), (B) and (D) B) (A) and (C) only C) (B) and (C) only D) (A), (C) and (D) Tests: Regional names for shifting cultivation worldwide Answer: Not in extracted key

CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.10 (CUET 2024) Identify correct statements regarding intensive subsistence agriculture dominated by wet paddy cultivation. (A) Land holdings are very small due to high population density. (B) Farmers use family labour intensively. (C) Farm yard manure maintains soil fertility. (D) Yield per unit area is low but labour productivity high.

- A) A, B, D only B) A, C, D only C) A, B, C only D) B, C, D only Tests: Features of intensive subsistence agriculture (wet paddy) Answer: Not in extracted key

Q.11 (CUET 2024) Arrange agricultural regions from equator to pole. (A) Commercial grain farming in Prairies (B) Reindeer rearing by Eskimos (C) Tea plantations of North-East India (D) Primitive subsistence farming in Indonesia

- A) C, D, A, B B) D, C, A, B C) D, C, B, A D) C, D, B, A Tests: Latitudinal distribution of agricultural systems Answer: Not in extracted key

CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.4 (CUET 2023) Katanga–Zambia copper belt is located in:

- A) Asia B) Africa C) Australia D) North America Tests: Major mining belts of the world (Katanga–Zambia copper belt — Africa) Answer: Not in extracted key