

Arctic agriculture

Agriculture in the Arctic and in Greenland is an old story. In the last decades of the 900s the Vikings, as we now call the Norsemen, settled on the west coast of Greenland.

The Norsemen established many farms and survived in Greenland until the 1500s. Today, numerous ruins of Norse farms have been discovered in the coastal landscape in southern Greenland.

The Norse farms were active in what is called the Medieval Warm Period. The Norsemen adapted to the Arctic climate, but it required that they change their living conditions. At first they lived by approximately twenty percent fish and seal just as the Norwegian Vikings as they came from. But the composition of the food was in the period in Greenland changed to consist of eighty percent fish and seal similar to the Inuit population.

Today the Norse agriculture is continued. The coasts of South Greenland are many places home to small farms whose primary production is sheep farming. But agriculture is developing in these years to include cattle and cultivation of various vegetables, e.g. potatoes.

This farm bears the name Issormiut. In addition to the grass fields near the farm, the sheep farmers use the great wasteland surrounding the farms. The farm's approximately 400 ewes with lambs are staying in the wilderness all through the summer. In this period the animals take care of themselves. The huge wilderness west of the farm is shared by ten sheep farmers whose animals move freely between each other until they are gathered in August.



Issormiut, South Greenland, July 2015