

The Columbian Exchange

Main Idea Columbus carried new plants and animals to and from the Americas and Europe.

Columbus made three more voyages to the Caribbean and the coasts of Central and South America. Ferdinand and Isabella wanted him to start settlements and to search for gold. A **settlement** is a small community of people living in a new place. Columbus sailed a fleet of 17 ships back to the island of Hispaniola. He also explored and claimed more islands in the West Indies for Spain.

Columbus and the settlers with him brought ships filled with horses, cows, pigs, wheat, barley, and sugar cane plants to the Western Hemisphere. These animals and plants did not live in the Americas before Columbus brought them there. Some European crops were able to grow in places where local crops could not.

The arrival of Europeans in the West Indies had many harmful effects. Europeans cut down rain forests on Caribbean islands and built sugar plantations. Many American plants and animals were destroyed. The Europeans also brought diseases that the Taíno had never had before. Many Taíno died from epidemics. An **epidemic** is an outbreak of disease that spreads quickly and affects many people. Within 50 years of Columbus's arrival, almost no Taíno people were left.

Columbus returned to Spain with plants no one in Europe had seen. These included maize (corn), peanuts, potatoes, tomatoes, cacao (chocolate), and certain peppers, beans, and squashes.



Columbus Lands This woodcut from the 1500s shows Columbus meeting the Taíno people in the Caribbean.

This movement of plants, animals, and people between the Eastern and Western Hemispheres is known as the Columbian Exchange.

The Columbian Exchange benefited people all over the world. Potatoes from the Americas became an important food for most Europeans. Corn became an important crop in Africa. Sweet potatoes were grown as far away as China. Today, tomatoes, peanuts, and American beans and peppers are grown in many lands.

REVIEW How did the Columbian Exchange change the diet of Europeans?