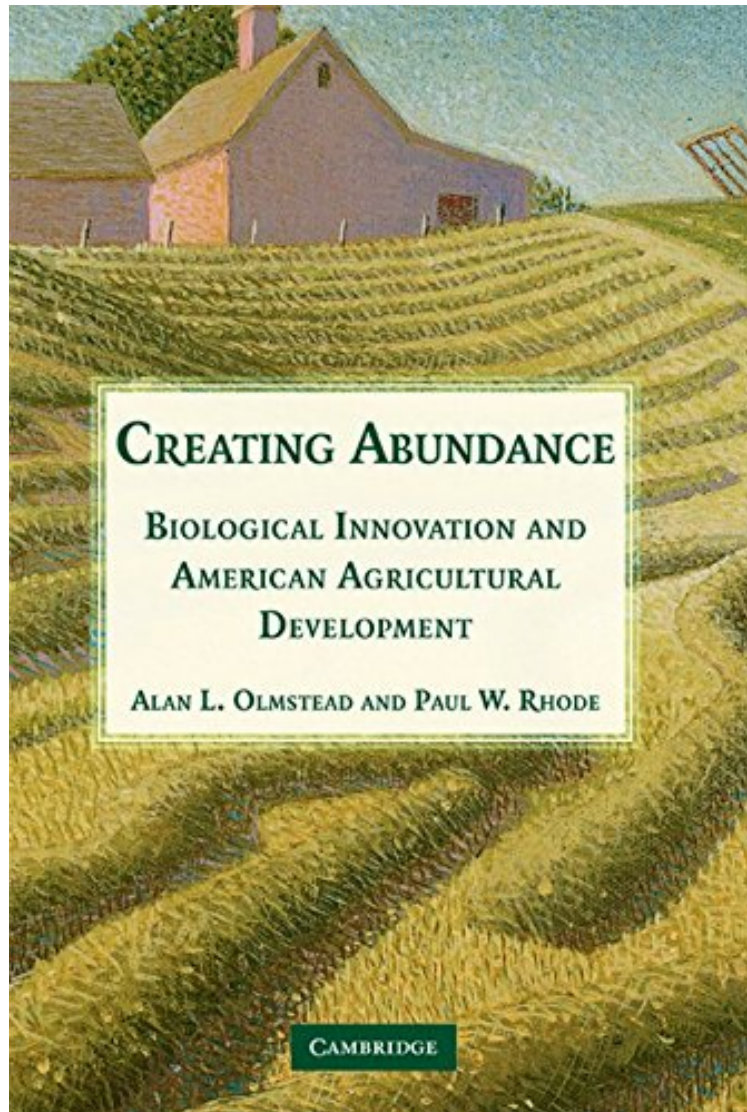


# Creating Abundance: Biological Innovation and American Agricultural Development

*Alan L. Olmstead, Paul W. Rhode*  
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**Alan L. Olmstead, Paul W. Rhode : Creating Abundance: Biological Innovation and American Agricultural Development** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Creating Abundance: Biological Innovation and American Agricultural Development:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. creates a new history of agriculture in the US By Robert The theme of the book is that biological and institutional innovations were as important as mechanical innovations in making

American agriculture so productive. Improvements in wheat, corn, cotton, tobacco, vegetables and fruit trees plus new breeds of livestock and dairy cows enabled individual farmers to fight off insects, diseases, and weeds in the original colonies and gradually expand production into challenging new climates and conditions in the South, Midwest, the plains and the far west. After the Civil War, the new agricultural colleges and efforts by the USDA increasingly contributed to the development and adoption of new seeds, breeds and techniques. Collectively these long forgotten accomplishments were as significant as the much better known machines--cotton gin, mechanical reaper and tractor--in creating agricultural abundance. This impressive and provocative book will likely have a profound and far-reaching impact on scholarship. By revealing the incompleteness of the prevailing narrative of agricultural development through mechanization, *Creating Abundance* offers a new paradigm for examining the history of agriculture in the U.S. The book convincingly demonstrates that creating new varieties of crops and farm animals was crucial for maintaining productivity in settled areas and for expanding agriculture to new geographic areas. Written not by historians, but by economists, the book also reveals flaws in some basic economic concepts and ironically this may prompt changes in the field of economics!

This book demonstrates that American agricultural development was far more dynamic than generally portrayed. In the two centuries before World War II, a stream of biological innovations revolutionized the crop and livestock sectors, increasing both land and labor productivity. Biological innovations were essential for the movement of agriculture onto new lands with more extreme climates, for maintaining production in the face of evolving threats from pests, and for the creation of the modern livestock sector. These innovations established the foundation for the subsequent Green and Genetic Revolutions. The book challenges the misconceptions that, before the advent of hybrid corn, American farmers single-mindedly invested in labor-saving mechanical technologies and that biological technologies were static.

"This is an important book! It traces the stream of biological innovation that over a period of two centuries has transformed the technical landscape of American agriculture. It demonstrates that biological innovations were essential for the movement of agriculture to new lands with more extreme climates, for maintaining and enhancing productivity in the face of evolving threats from pests, soil degradation and depletion, for creating modern livestock breeds, for enhancing feed efficiency, and for protecting animal and human health. It will be the standard against which the next generation of research in the history of agricultural technology will be evaluated." Vernon W. Ruttan, Regents Professor, Emeritus, University of Minnesota

"In *Creating Abundance* Alan Olmstead and Paul Rhode examine an important, but often neglected, aspect of American economic growth over the course of several centuries. Based on extensive research in a large variety of primary and secondary sources, including numerous state and national agricultural reports and related private documents, they describe in great detail the important biological developments influencing crop and livestock productivity. This is an original and superb work of scholarship. This book should be of interest to all economic historians, historians, and agricultural economists." Stanley L. Engerman, John H. Munro Professor of Economics and Professor of History, University of Rochester

"In an era focusing on sustainability and climate change, *Creating Abundance* should be required reading for environmentalists, economists, and policy makers, as well as for economic, environmental and technological historians (and their students). This is so because even as virtuous cycles of biological innovation have overcome tough constraints, in agriculture biological contingencies and unanticipated consequences persist. The culmination of nearly two decades of extensive, patient, and inclusive research, *Creating Abundance* combines theoretical sophistication with a supple writing style to illuminate both a host of planning/policy advances and errors and the centrality of engaged practitioners' efforts in building flexible and responsive relationships with the natural world. A profound and compelling corrective to generations of scholarship on American agricultural development." Philip Scranton, Editor-in-Chief, *Enterprise and Society*

"Olmstead and Rhode's brilliant new book, *Creating Abundance*, is the most significant work on the economic history of American agriculture to appear in a generation. In emphasizing the early role and persistent importance of biological innovation in American agricultural development, the authors fundamentally recast the story of our farm sector. Rigorous in theoretical terms, well argued, and deeply researched, *Creating Abundance*, upon publication, becomes not merely the standard, but the indispensable work in the field. Peter A. Coclanis, Albert R. Newsome Professor of History, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

"*Creating Abundance* is a panoramic survey of American agricultural development, dramatically altering the standard narrative focused exclusively on mechanization. In the process, Olmstead and Rhode relocate farming from the periphery squarely into the mainstream of American economic history. Anyone looking for the lessons of the American experience for developing economies should read this book." Gavin Wright, William Robertson Coe Professor of American Economic History, Stanford University

"This brilliant book challenges one of the dominant interpretations of history. The standard story of the industrial revolution holds that rapid economic growth came from replacing people and animals with machinery. Olmstead and Rhode show that the standard story is only half right. Agricultural yields soared in the age of industrialization because farmers and scientists updated plants and animals just as much as machinery. This book provides a fresh and exciting interpretation of economic,

technological, and agricultural history that should inspire others to look for other arenas in which biological innovation has played a more important role than we have suspected." Edmund Russell, University of Virginia "Creating Abundance presents an in-depth evaluation of the biological innovation in US agriculture dating back to the Colonial period. Highly recommended." Choice "... this book will remain essential reading in the field for decades to come." Mark Finlay, History: s of New Books "I strongly recommend this volume to readers with any interest in US economic history or the history of agriculture." Lee A. Craig, EH.net "Olmstead and Rhode illustrate richly the contributions of biological innovations with reference to the historical development of productivity increases associated with a variety of crops and animals." Jack Kloppenburg, The Journal of American History "[Creating Abundance will] become a touchstone of agricultural information that historians will use for years." Andrew P. Duffin, Western Historical Quarterly "Creating Abundance is an enjoyable and informative read for those interested in the development of US agriculture from colonial times to 1940." Paul D. Mitchell, Agricultural History "This book is essential for scholars of this period and beneficial to all who are interested in US history and the state of affairs today." Orville Vernon Burton, American Historical "This is a timely and impressive book, offering a radically new perspective on American agricultural history. It should engage both scholars and students for many years to come." Laura B. Sayre, Journal of Southern History "This collection of provocative essays will doubtless stimulate more debate about how scholars can ... read lessons from the past in order to address contemporary problems." Patrick V. Kirch, Journal of Anthropological Research

About the Author Alan L. Olmstead is Director of the Institute of Governmental Affairs, Professor of Economics, and member of the Giannini Foundation of Agricultural Economics at the University of California, Davis. He is one of the six editors-in-chief of Historical Statistics of the United States: Millennial Edition (2006), and his writings appear regularly in the leading economics and history journals. Paul W. Rhode is McClelland Professor of Economics at the University of Arizona and Research Associate at the National Bureau of Economic Research. He is co-editor (with Gianni Toniolo) of The Global Economy in the 1990s: A Long-Run Perspective (2006). He is a frequent contributor to prominent economics and history journals.