



Productivity in Natural Resource Industries: Improvement through Innovation (Resources for the Future)

R. David Simpson

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Several senior natural resource analysts study the role played by innovation, particularly technological innovation, in the pursuit of heightened productivity. Increasing the output of a given input improves a firm's bottom line, makes it more competitive internationally, and reduces the potential for resource depletion and shortages. Thus, high productivity is a necessary ingredient of economic prosperity. This book illustrates the importance of technological innovation in achieving an acceptable level of output and efficiency.

In this important new offering, a team of resource scholars describes and chronicles the development of recent innovations in selected natural resource industries. The authors also reveal the causes, sources, and net effect of such innovation on productivity. In all of these sectors productivity has increased considerably since the early 1980s, although the level of improvement varies across industries. To what degree did technological innovation contribute to that increase? Individual detailed case studies detail important innovations in America's coal, petroleum, copper, and forest industries. The primary focus is on extraction and production technologies, although the existence and importance of innovation in other areas such as management technique also enter the picture. For example, the combination of new technology with restructuring seems to have breathed new life into a floundering U.S. copper industry. The authors describe the origin and diffusion of important innovation, and the concluding chapter quantifies the net effect of such innovation on productivity.

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