

No Grain Import Increase

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The government on Tuesday raised its estimate for national grain stockpiles, making increased imports unnecessary, and said buckwheat was the only staple with a price that has climbed to a "critical" level.

The inventory estimate was increased to 26 million metric tons, from about 22 million tons, Agriculture Minister Yelena Skrynnik told lawmakers in Moscow. She also stuck to a forecast for a harvest of 60 million to 65 million tons in the current marketing year and said farmers have reaped 47 million tons of grain so far.

"We'll have enough grain for food and feed purposes," Skrynnik said.

Russia, the world's third-biggest wheat grower, has banned grain exports until next year's harvest after its worst drought in half a century. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin said earlier this month that the ban, set now from Aug. 15 to Dec. 31, would remain in place until next year's crop is harvested.

Outbound shipments of wheat in the last season came to 18.5 million tons, or 14 percent of global exports, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Russia may import as much as 6 million tons of grain in the current marketing year because of the drought, researcher SovEcon has said. The Agriculture Ministry estimates national consumption at 77 million to 78 million tons a year.

The country will not experience food shortages, and there are no grounds for rising food prices, said President Dmitry Medvedev, who spent recent days touring Russian farms. He ordered law enforcement agencies and the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service to monitor prices.

The drought killed 30 percent of crop plantings in the 38 regions across Russia where the government declared emergencies and 17 percent of all national sowings. Weather-related losses come to more than 39 billion rubles (\$1.3 billion), Skrynnik told lawmakers.

"Our main target is to complete winter and spring sowing so that we have enough grain to meet local demand," she said, adding that Russia must harvest at least 80 million tons of grain next year.

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