

Crop Data Discrepancies May Hurt Government

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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An man inspecting loaves at a bakery in Bataisk, outside Rostov-on-Don.

Inconsistencies in the Agriculture Ministry's reports on grain sowing and harvests may hurt the government, which relies on the data for policy decisions, SovEcon said Monday.

"Objective data are not just a caprice of analysts and experts, but the basis for decision making for farmers as well as the state," SovEcon, a Moscow-based agriculture research group, said on its web site. "The state relies on official data from ministries and agencies. Otherwise we could end up trailing behind events and facing 'unexpected' problems."

The government is working to contain price growth and ensure sufficient food to meet domestic demand after the worst drought in at least 50 years cut yields. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin ordered a ban on grain exports until at least Dec. 31 as the crop shrank by at least a third.

The Agriculture Ministry reported on Sept. 9 that farmers had sown 3.7 million hectares of land with winter grains, compared with 5.4 million hectares in 2009. Previously, the ministry said plantings stood at 7.3 million hectares on Sept. 8, 2009.

The ministry said last week that farmers were catching up with last year's winter grain plantings after sowing was delayed by low soil moisture. "If last year's ministry data are correct, the gap in the sowing is increasing, not narrowing," SovEcon said.

Similarly, the ministry said last week that farmers had reaped 47.5 million tons of grain as of Sept. 9, compared with 68.9 million tons a year earlier. Last year, the ministry reported that the national crop stood at 70.8 million tons on Sept. 8, 2009, or 3 percent higher than in its recent statement.

The Agriculture Ministry last week raised its estimate of grain inventories as of July 1 to 26 million tons from about 22 million tons.

Dmitry Rylko, director of the Institute for Agricultural Market Studies, said inventories were 18 million tons on that date, while the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization put the figure at 17 million tons.

This situation with data is "acceptable because the latest figures arrive from the regions and change daily until the final result is obtained," Agriculture Ministry spokesman Oleg Aksyonov said by telephone. This may cause discrepancies between last year's data with the latest figures from the current period, he said.

"Number games aren't adding any grain in the country," SovEcon, which estimated inventories at 20.2 million tons, said Friday. "But they may give the illusion that the market has stabilized and price increases have been avoided."

Russia's grain crop stood at 49.7 million metric tons as of Monday, 32 percent less than a year earlier, Interfax reported, citing Agriculture Ministry data it obtained.

Yields are 22 percent lower than last year, or 1.95 tons per hectare, the news agency said. Farmers harvested grain from 71.7 million hectares, including areas where the crop was ruined by drought, the report said.

Armenia imported some 10,000 metric tons of wheat from Iran in the past month following a Russian ban on the export of the commodity, Armenian Agriculture Minister Gerasim Alaverdyan said, Iranian state-run Fars news reported.

Armenia has also started to import wheat from Bulgaria, Kazakhstan and Ukraine, the report said.

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