

Spring Grain Sowing Delayed

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The spring grain sowing campaign, which normally starts in mid-March, has been delayed about two weeks because of the late onset of spring weather, the Grain Union said Tuesday.

"This may allow us to better prepare for the sowing," Arkady Zlochevsky, the lobby's president, told a news briefing. "But we may miss the best window of opportunity for the sowing."

Late spring sowing could delay the harvest and leave crops to mature in colder fall weather, risking a lower yield. Russia, previously a major wheat exporter, banned grain exports after a severe drought last summer. It harvested 60.9 million tons of grain in the current crop year versus 97 million tons in 2009-10 and 108 million in 2008-09.

Russia aims to increase the area sown to spring grains to 31 million hectares this year from 28 million last year because of a decrease in the winter grain area.

Zlochevsky said farmers continued to struggle with shortages of agricultural machinery, seed, fertilizers and financing.

"The main problem is money," Zlochevsky said.

Russia has pledged 220 billion rubles (\$7.7 billion) in financing for drought-stricken farmers to carry them through the new agricultural year, but Zlochevsky said they currently have less cash on hand than they did a year earlier.

"As of today, the money supply [for spring sowing] is some 24 billion rubles, while a year ago the sum was 26.32 billion. ... With this money we will not be able to sow an equal acreage."

An Agriculture Ministry database showed that 30 billion rubles in subsidies had been issued for the 2010 spring sowing campaign.

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