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Skrynnik: Russia Back on Grain Market

By The Moscow Times

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Russia expects to reprise its role as a leading grain exporter this season thanks to a good harvest after last year's severe drought forced it to impose an export embargo, Agriculture Minister Yelena Skrynnik said.

Russia sees grain exports of 18 million tons in the 2011-12 crop year that began this month, Skrynnik was quoted as saying Thursday.

"We shall return to our position on the world grain market," Interfax quoted Skrynnik as saying. "This year's export will total 18 million tons."

This is in line with the export estimate from leading Russian agricultural analysts SovEcon, which recently revised its forecast upwards by 3 million tons to 18 million tons.

"Of this, some 16 million [tons] will be wheat and some 1.5 million — barley," SovEcon's chief executive and president Andrei Sizov said.

Russia exported 18 million tons of wheat in the pre-drought 2009-10 season and 2.8 million tons of barley.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced the lifting of a ban on grain exports from July 1, bringing what was formerly the world's third-largest wheat exporter back to world grain markets.

First Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Zubkov said last week that customs officials had already received requests to clear 6.5 million tons of grain for export, of which the country expected to export 1.5 million in July.

Russia exported 770,000 tons of grain between July 1 and July 13, Zubkov said.

Skrynnik confirmed that Russia might reap 85 million to 90 million tons of grain this year, up from 61 million in 2010.

"This is enough to cover internal needs and build up an exportable surplus," she said.

Favorable weather at the end of June and beginning of July has led SovEcon to raise its crop forecast to 87 million to 92 million tons from a previous 82 million to 86 million tons.

The Institute for Agricultural Market Studies think tank has raised its crop forecast to 87 million tons from 85 million to 86 million.

The State Statistics Service said on its web site that farmers had increased the area sown with grains by 1.2 percent year on year to 44.1 million tons.

The latest Agriculture Ministry harvesting progress report showed that, although the harvesting campaign was lagging behind last year's, average grain yields rose by a third to 3.7 tons per hectare.

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