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Official Surprised by Grain Export Ban Talk

By The Moscow Times

September 22, 2012



Top officials are at odds over the possibility of a ban on grain exports. **Maxim Stulov**

Deputy Agriculture Minister Ilya Shestakov said he was surprised by a sudden statement by Economic Development Minister Andrei Belousov that the government could limit grain exports, and said neither a ban nor protective tariffs were under discussion.

"To be honest, Andrei Removich's statement was a surprise for me too," Shestakov told reporters in the Black Sea resort town of Sochi at an economic forum.

"We have not even discussed limiting exports, and it sounded very strange," he added. "In all the meetings that have happened, the issue of a ban has never been raised and the Economic Development Ministry has not promoted that idea this year."

He said export tariffs were not under discussion and the Agriculture Ministry was sticking to its plan to manage the domestic market through intervention sales, which would be subject to

a decision by the ministry in October.

He said the 72 million to 73 million ton harvest forecast announced by the Agriculture Ministry in recent days was unlikely to change and did not suggest a "catastrophe" on the level of the 2010/11 harvest, when Russia reaped 66.9 million tons and banned exports.

On Friday, Belousov said that restrictions could come if domestic prices continued to rise after a severe drought.
"The issue of a grain export ban is one of domestic grain price dynamics. We are witnessing such a trend at the moment," he said. "With such a trend, it's quite possible that the government will decide to restrict grain exports."

Benchmark wheat futures immediately rose after Belousov's comments. But Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich was later quoted by his spokeswoman as saying the country still does not plan to curb grain exports.

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