The Moscow Times
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Ex-Agriculture Minister Questioned by Investigators

February 13, 2013



Former Agriculture Minister Yelena Skrynnik was questioned by police investigators Wednesday as a witness in a criminal investigation into a $16 million fraud at a state-owned company.

A police representative told Interfax without elaborating that Skrynnik was being questioned. No further details were immediately available.

Investigators say senior officials at the farm-equipment-leasing firm Rosagrolizing defrauded the state of 500 million rubles ($16 million) between 2007 and 2009, when Skrynnik was its head.

The officials issued fake contracts to make it look as if they had supplied equipment to farms and factories for the money, investigators said.

Accusations of fraud at the state-owned firm were first aired during an exposO on state television. Skrynnik has called the accusations libelous.

(MT)

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