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Russia Mulls Ban on Norwegian Salmon Imports

By The Moscow Times

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Russian authorities said Thursday they were considering a ban on salmon imports from Norway if they confirm that specialists were barred from inspecting fish farms, a charge which Norwegian authorities and farmers deny.

Norway is the world's largest exporter of salmon, and Russia one of its biggest markets.

"The situation is rather serious," said Alexei Alekseyenko, spokesman for Russia's Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance Service, or VPSS.

"Some firms did not grant access for our specialists to their farms, so we are considering restricting all [salmon] imports [from Norway]," he said, but declined to elaborate.

In 2012, Norwegian companies exported salmon, trout and pelagic fish to Russia worth 5.5 billion crowns ($900 million), but sales could decline by 20 percent this year because

of higher prices, Norwegian authorities said.

Major farmers include Marine Harvest, the world's biggest fish farmer, Cermaq and Salmar.

VPSS, also known as Rosselkhoznadzor, may impose the ban from Jan. 1, Sergei Dankvert, head of the service, told Interfax news agency earlier.

"Preliminary feedback shows that our specialists have not been given access to fish farms. If this is confirmed then we will proceed as planned," Dankvert said. "If they are not letting us in, it means they have something to hide."

Norwegian authorities said Russian inspectors were welcome and the difficulties arose because they changed their plans "at the last minute."

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