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Ukraine Questions Legality of Crimean Grain Exports

By The Moscow Times

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Ukraine protested over recent grain exports from Crimea on Thursday, questioning their legal basis following Russia's annexation of the region and fueling tensions between the two countries.

Russia and Ukraine are the region's main global grain exporters and rivals to supply customers in North Africa and the Middle East. Russia announced export deals from Crimea earlier on Thursday to Saudi Arabia and Cyprus.

Crimea has supplied 22,648 tons of barley to Saudi Arabia and 4,603 tons of barley to Cyprus for the period starting from June 23, Russia's Veterinary and Phytosanitary Surveillance Service, or VPSS, said in a statement on its website.

VPSS did not name the supplier or whether other exports were planned from the region during the 2014 to 2015 marketing year, which started on July 1.

Ukraine questioned the legality of the exports.

"How they managed to export I don't know, because it is a sovereign territory of Ukraine," Ukraine's news agency Unian quoted Agriculture Minister Ihor Shvaika as saying.

"One can't do it without our phytosanitary certificates."

Crimea, which has several ports, is ready to export 400,000 to 500,000 tons of grain this year, or about half its expected harvest, the regional arm ministry has said.

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