

Moscow to Give Free Land to Every Russian in Far East

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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A meat vendor counts Russian Rouble banknotes at an open-air food fair in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia, Jan. 14.

A program giving every resident of Russia's Far East a free hectare of land could start this year, the minister in charge of the region said Tuesday, following a nod of support from President Vladimir Putin the day before.

"We expect this [program] to start as early as 2015," Far East Development Minister Alexander Galushka told news agency TASS, adding that, depending on recipients' proposed development plans, the giveaway "could even be bigger than one hectare."

The government owns vast tracts of under-used territory across Russia, and the scheme would draw from the 614 million hectares of state-owned land in the Far East, according to the plan's author, presidential aide on Far East policy Yuri Trutnev. The land could be used for "agriculture, business development, forestry or hunting," according to Trutnev.

However, the land will not be for resale to foreign citizens, an important consideration in the sparsely-populated and under-developed Far East, where Chinese, Japanese and South Korean companies are gradually making inroads. China in particular is betting big on the region — in April, Beijing announced it would channel \$5 billion into infrastructure projects there.

Russian law currently allows foreigners to own land not zoned for agricultural purposes, as long as that land does not border a foreign country.

Putin on Monday weighed in with full support for the plan, even citing historical precedent: "The idea is sound and was historically implemented by Russia in Siberia," Putin said, according to a transcript of his meeting with Trutnev posted on the Kremlin's website.

Land giveaways are well-worn concept in Russia, the world's largest country. Putin's allusion to Siberia may have been a reference to the Soviet Union's 1950s "Virgin Lands" campaign, which saw hundreds of thousands of young citizens volunteer to move to Siberia and Kazakhstan to farm the land — a step that was sold as a socialist adventure but that resulted in only mixed success.

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