The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

"No Money? Eat Less!" United Russia Lawmaker Advises

By Anna Dolgov

January 23, 2015



People gather near a stall with meat at an open-air food fair in Krasnoyarsk, Siberia, Jan. 14, 2015.

A lawmaker from the ruling United Russia party has offered his advice to Russians struggling to pay for food amid the country's soaring inflation: "Eat less."

Food prices in the Urals' Sverdlovsk region have increased by around 25 percent compared to the same period last year, figures cited by regional lawmaker Ilya Gaffner indicate, but he said it was "not that bad," according to video footage posted online Thursday.

Food price inflation in Russia has peaked over a sharp devaluation of the ruble currency and bans imposed on a range of European food imports in response to Western sanctions. Inflation is expected to accelerate even more this year.

During a televised visit to a local grocery store in Yekaterinburg, Gaffner suggested that Russians should draw inspiration from the most devastating periods in their country's history

and enjoy the supposed health benefits of going hungry.

"We are all Russians, we have lived through hunger and cold," Gaffner told Novy Region television station.

"If supposedly there isn't enough money, people should think about their health and somehow eat less," he said lightheartedly.

The advice from the lawmaker, who heads the local legislature's agricultural policy committee, has sparked outrage from online users, some of whom accused Gaffner of having bankrupted an array of local farms and food-processing factories, Novy Region reported.

During the interview at the grocery store, Gaffner conceded that going without food may be difficult, but argued that New Year's feasts would supposedly tide Russians over for a while.

"The New Year's frenzy is over, people have all eaten their fill, and now it's time to engage in sports activities," he said in the video.

Some local inhabitants may be hard-pressed to appreciate the advice.

"I have a disabled son, he is constantly asking for sugar," a woman in the store told Gaffner. "I am forced to deny him, because there is simply no money at all anymore."

Party comrades from the regional United Russia branch responded to the criticism by praising the work of price monitoring panel Public Control — which Gaffner also heads — and by reproaching the lawmaker for not thinking through his statements.

"To Ilya Gaffner, who allowed himself an inappropriate remark, I would recommend to think seven times before saying something," local United Russia chief Viktor Shepty said in a statement on his party's website, under a headline that read: "Doing good deeds, one should be proper in one's remarks."

But Gaffner defended his statement, calling for Russians to "unite" in face of economic problems, local Ura.ru news portal reported.

"People should recall the old times. Should recall labor, should take care of vegetable gardens," he was quoted as saying. "I don't think I have said anything improper."

Gaffner made headlines last year when MK tabloid accused an agricultural firm linked to the lawmaker of misappropriating state funds allocated for the support of local dairy farmers.

A website run by supporters opposition activist Alexei Navalny responded to the incident by calling Gaffner the "best lawmaker of United Russia, who embodies that party."

The anti-corruption website added that Gaffner owned three apartments in Yekaterinburg.

"So he probably won't have to make changes in his eating habits," Navalny.com writers quipped.

Gaffner's biography on the local administration website said he had four sons and is an avid sports fan.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/01/23/no-money-eat-less-united-russia-lawmaker-advises-a43166