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Putin Appoints Regional Governor Tkachev as New Agriculture Minister

By The Moscow Times

April 22, 2015



Alexander Tkachev

President Vladimir Putin has appointed the governor of one of Russia's key wheat-producing regions as agriculture minister, the Kremlin said Wednesday, charged with strengthening the sector.

Alexander Tkachev, governor of the southern Krasnodar region since 2000, takes over from Nikolai Fyodorov as Putin seeks to boost domestic food production after he banned many Western imports in retaliation to U.S. and EU sanctions imposed on Russia for its role in the Ukraine crisis.

"We need to fill our market with our own products, the products of domestic producers, and we need to do it quickly to ease pressure on the food market, decrease prices and so on," Putin told Tkachev at a meeting to announce the appointment.

Tkachev, 54, said he would do his best to boost Russia's domestic production to offset import shortfalls.

The appointment comes almost three months before Putin will decide whether to extend or lift the ban on Western food imports, worth about $9 billion. The ban is meant to run until early August.

Russia is one of the world's biggest wheat exporters to North Africa and the Middle East. Its Krasnodar region produces about 12 million tons of grain a year, more than 10 percent of the country's total crop, according to Tkachev.

"A true decision-maker has not been in the Agriculture Ministry for a long time," one trader said on condition of anonymity. "He [Tkachev] would be able to inform the government about farmers' troubles."

Former Agriculture Minister Fyodorov has been appointed as an adviser to Putin, the Kremlin said in a statement.

Fyodorov led the Agriculture Ministry since 2012, but most of the main decisions for the sector were made by the Kremlin or the government, where Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich is in charge of agriculture.

Kommersant newspaper quoted a source as saying a few days ago that Putin was not satisfied with Fyodorov's work. However, two sources quoted by Vedomosti newspaper said that the former minister wanted to leave the post.

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