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Moscow Strawberries Rot in Fields After Trade Near Metro Banned

By The Moscow Times

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Moscow region had its traditional method of selling strawberries on trays outside Moscow metro stops banned this year.

Russia's biggest strawberry farm is allowing part of its crop to rot in the fields after local authorities banned it from selling its fresh produce at Moscow street stalls, news agency Interfax reported Thursday.

The "Sovkhoz Imeni Lenina," or Lenin State Farm, in the Moscow region had its traditional method of selling strawberries on trays outside Moscow metro stops banned this year by the local branch of Russia's Federal Anti-Monopoly Service, the report said. The report did not specify why the Federal Anti-Monopoly Service stopped the sales.

Without access to Moscow's millions of consumers, the farm is selling its strawberries at weekend markets along roadsides in the much more sparsely populated Moscow region,

the farm's director, Pavel Grudinin, told Interfax.

The resulting plunge in sales has forced the farm to cut its daily harvest to less than 40 tons of strawberries compared to 102 tons per day last year, according to Interfax. And instead of the normal 5,000 pickers employed to man the farm's 130 hectares of strawberry plants, the farm is now employing only 2,500, the report said.

Grudinin said multiple appeals to lift the restriction had been unsuccessful.

"We are now waiting for a decision from the Moscow government," he said.

The news comes as Russian authorities trumpet measures to boost local agricultural production. Prime Minister Medvedev on Thursday extended a ban on imports of a number of foods, including fruit, from countries that had sanctioned Russia over its role in the Ukraine crisis.

Officials have painted the ban as a golden opportunity for Russian farmers.

But despite the slogans, Grudinin said retail chains were "unenthusiastic" about selling strawberries from the Moscow region, according to Interfax.

They want "tasteless, 'rubber' berries" that can sit on the shelves for weeks at a time, he said.

"The fact that they have to sell [our strawberries] within 24 hours puts them off."

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