

Russia Uncovers 'Buckwheat Cartel' Amid Virus Outbreak

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Alongside toilet paper, buckwheat has been a staple of choice for Russian shoppers to stockpile as the number of Covid-19 cases has climbed. **Sergei Kiselyov / Moskva News Agency**

Russia's antitrust agency said it has uncovered signs of price-fixing in the buckwheat market amid the country's panic-buying spree fueled by the coronavirus pandemic, news agencies reported Friday.

Alongside toilet paper, [buckwheat](#) has been a staple of choice for Russian shoppers to stockpile as the number of Covid-19 cases has climbed, with sales of buckwheat [jumping](#) 66% on March 9-15 compared to the same period last year. The Federal Anti-Monopoly Service [said](#) it has received more than 600 complaints of price gouging on food products including buckwheat over the past week.

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Its head Igor Artemyev told reporters Friday that his agency found signs of price-fixing

among buckwheat producers following 11 unscheduled onsite inspections.

“There are elements of complicity between manufacturers who tried to behave in bad faith,” Artemyev was [quoted](#) by the state-run RIA Novosti news agency as saying.

If suspicions of price-fixing are proven, he said the buckwheat producers could face up to six years in jail.

The Russian Grain Union said it noticed a “not entirely justified” spike in buckwheat prices last week, its deputy chief Alexander Korbut [told](#) the pro-Kremlin Izvestia newspaper.

Russia’s State Statistics Service said the average buckwheat price rose by 2.8% last week.

Average wholesale prices for buckwheat jumped by 27% in February and March compared with December and January, the Vedomosti business daily [reported](#) Saturday. This follows an almost doubling in the price of the traditional staple between March 2019 and March 2020, according to the outlet.

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