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Investigations Uncover Russia's Alleged Ukrainian Grain Smuggling

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SERGEI ILNITSKY / EPA / TASS

Satellite images and GPS data indicate that Russia could be exporting grain smuggled out of occupied Ukrainian territory, investigations by the BBC and the Financial Times have revealed.

Russia has been accused by Western powers of using food as a weapon in its war with Ukraine by targeting the country's grain storage facilities and blockading its Black Sea exports.

The Financial Times said its analysis of satellite photographs and port records indicated that Russia had exported around 140,000 tons of grain in eight shipments from annexed Crimea to Syria and Turkey in May.

The figures mark an unseasonal increase in the volume of grain exports at the sanctioned Crimean port compared with previous years.

The publication also tracked activity consistent with the smuggling of looted goods, such as

vessels switching off their transponders in violation of international law, using ship-to-ship transfers at sea and forging paperwork to obscure the origins of its cargo.

It stressed, however, that there was no hard evidence that the tracked vessels carried grain stolen from occupied Ukrainian territories.

In a similar investigation published earlier this week, the BBC monitored stolen grain trucks fitted with GPS trackers as they traveled to Crimea earlier in June.

Satellite images showed that one grain terminal in the Crimean port of Sevastopol processed far higher levels of cargo throughout June than in previous years, the BBC reported.

A separate investigation by BBC's Russian and Ukrainian services revealed that Ukrainian farmers in occupied territories had also been forced to sell grain to Russia at knockdown prices.

Moscow-installed authorities in occupied Ukrainian territories announced earlier in June that rail cars carrying Ukrainian grain from the area had departed for Crimea.

But the Kremlin has repeatedly denied smuggling grain out of captured Ukrainian territories and has called on Western governments to lift economic sanctions against Moscow in order for the Russian military to lift its Black Sea blockade.

Russia and Ukraine accounted for more than 25% of international grain exports in 2021, according to the UN Food and Agricultural Organization.

Millions of tons of stranded grain have fueled concerns about hunger and food prices in import-dependent countries in Africa and the Middle East.

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