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Russia Restricts Fruit, Vegetable Imports From Kazakhstan

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X5 Retail Group's food distribution center in Podolsk. **Kirill Zykov / Moskva News Agency**

Russia's agricultural safety watchdog banned the import of tomatoes, melons, wheat and other food products from neighboring Kazakhstan amid ongoing trade disputes between the two countries.

"The decision was made because Kazakhstan's competent authorities failed to take measures to ensure the phytosanitary safety of [products sent to] Russian territory," Rosselkhoznadzor said Thursday.

The watchdog said shipments of peppers, flax seeds and lentils would also be temporarily banned effective immediately.

Rosselkhoznadzor said it had detected 215 cases of pests in food products that arrived from Kazakhstan so far in 2024, a fourfold increase from last year.

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Last month, Russia banned the import of Kazakh grain and flour after Astana in August banned wheat imports to protect its domestic market.

"Russia perceived our August ban on wheat imports as an unfriendly step," Yevgeny Karabanov, the Grain Union of Kazakhstan spokesperson, told local media earlier this month. "We won't be able to sell more than 1 million tons of grain through Russian ports."

Kazakhstan is a member of the Moscow-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which establishes common standards for food safety and agricultural products across all member countries.

Thursday's import restrictions also came after Kazakhstan on Wednesday said it does not plan to apply to join the BRICS group of countries in the "foreseeable future" despite offers to join, though there was no apparent connection with the fruit and vegetable ban.

Russia has a history of banning food products from both "friendly" and "unfriendly" countries during political disputes.

In 2014, Moscow imposed a ban on certain EU products as part of its countersanctions in response to Western sanctions following the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

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