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Russians Turn to Pasta and Bread Amid Record Potato Price Increases

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Dmitry Feoktistov / TASS

Russian consumers are increasingly substituting basic staples for once-affordable vegetables amid surging food prices and shrinking household budgets.

The most striking example is potatoes, a longtime dietary cornerstone in Russia, whose average retail price rose by 173% year-over-year by the end of May, the steepest annual increase in the past 23 years.

In response, consumption of potatoes fell by 8% in the first quarter of 2025 compared to the same period last year, according to an analysis by the Center for Development at the Higher School of Economics.

Bread sales rose 6% in the same period, pasta sales increased by 5% and grain purchases climbed 3%, the pro-Kremlin newspaper Nezavisimaya Gazeta reported, citing retail data.

Svetlana Misikhina, deputy director of the Center for Development at Moscow's Higher School

of Economics, estimated that the affordability of potatoes has declined by nearly 45% over the past year.

Other key products are showing similar trends: the average price of onions rose 41% year over year, while butter became 34% more expensive. As a result, the affordability of onions and butter fell by 17% and 15%, respectively.

By contrast, the affordability of products like grains and pasta has improved by 12 and 14%, respectively, reflecting both relatively stable prices and increased consumer demand, Misikhina said.

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Despite official attempts to frame this dietary shift as a choice for "higher-quality foods," the data paints a picture of economic strain.

According to state statistics agency Rosstat, average food prices in the first four months of 2025 were 12% higher than during the same period last year, with vegetables showing the most dramatic increases.

By May, the average retail price for potatoes reached 84.7 rubles per kilogram. Onions jumped to 72.3 rubles (an 87.2% increase), cabbage rose to 75.2 rubles (up 56.8%) and beets saw a more modest 11.9% increase. Even tomatoes edged up by 1.2%.

On June 11, the Industry and Trade Ministry proposed state price controls for the most in-demand vegetables.

The plan calls for long-term contracts between suppliers and retailers that would include fixed pricing ranges for vegetables in the so-called "borscht index," a reference to the ingredients of the traditional Russian soup which include potatoes, cabbage, carrots, onions and beets.

While consumer demand for food remains the only segment of the consumer market showing consistent growth, other sectors have stalled.

The Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute for Economic Forecasting reported that sales of non-food items — including cars, electronics, refrigerators and washing machines — have flattened. Overall, retail turnover growth slowed to 3.2% in the first quarter of 2025.

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