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K AGAIN ON WHEAT AND FERTILIZER

"The Soviet Union will soon occupy such a position on the international grain market which will demonstrate to the gentlemen imperialists how our agriculture is growing! (stormy applause)."

-- N. S. Khrushchev at the XXII
Party Congress, October 18, 1961.

So spoke a confident Khrushchev before 5,000 Party members at the Congress in 1961. Precisely two years later he had to admit, "when we buy wheat from capitalist countries this means that we do not have enough wheat of our own this year."¹

In his October 25th interview with correspondents at the International Press Conference² in Moscow, the First Secretary expanded on his previous rationalization for the wheat purchases. He claimed:

"We could manage with our grain reserves, taking into account grain purchases inside the country this year, if we went over to a regulated, administrative control [bread rationing by card - cz]. Even in this variation no famine would have threatened us. We have food, nutritive enough, but of lower quality than wheat and rye, to which our people are accustomed...but we resolved to take another road in order to evade unnecessary difficulties for the population, to buy wheat in the capitalist market."

To alleviate fear among the population that the wheat shortage would arise again, Khrushchev resorted to boastful exaggeration and even falsification. He asserted positively that by next year the consequences of this year's harvest failure would be

¹Pravda, 27 October 1963.

²Ibid.

overcome by the adoption of scientific measures that would guarantee the grain supplies -- a greater use of fertilizers and irrigation. He conveniently overlooked the fact that both measures take considerable time to build and put into operation. That they were costly and competitive with the requirements of other industries, he admitted, and even ventured that some branches of industry, apart from defense, may be cut-back to promote the development of the chemical industry. This issue of priorities no doubt has been decided by now at the Presidium level and may be revealed at the upcoming plenum of the Central Committee, CPSU, in November.

Thus, any noticeable improvement in the grain supplies next year, as Khrushchev indicated, or even within two or three years, will not come about through fertilizers or irrigation, but rather as a result of unusually favorable weather conditions. It will take a number of years before the two programs can show results in Soviet grain yields.

In discussing fertilizers, which are rapidly becoming Khrushchev's favorite theme, the party boss tosses statistics about like loaded dice. Twenty million tons are to be produced this year, by 1965 - 35 million or the equal of the United States output, he told the journalists. Soviet fertilizer output data are loaded with considerable ballast, like the final grain harvest figure.³ Their output is given in terms of raw tonnage, not in terms of net nutrients as the F.A.O. standards suggest. The United States concentrates on high test fertilizers, the Soviet Union on lower grade products including some of dubious value. A comparison of United States and Soviet Union fertilizer production and utilization in terms of actual plant nutrients shows the enormity of the task before the Kremlin to reach the current United States level:

<u>1961</u>	<u>U.S.A.</u>	<u>U.S.S.R.</u>
Production	6.6 mil tons	2.34 mil tons
Utilization, per hectare cropland, in kilograms	38.7 kgs.	10.3 kgs.

The State of Food and Agriculture, 1963,
United Nations Organization., p. 226.

F.A.O. Bulletin, No. 2, 1962, p. 3.
(United Nations Organization Monthly Bulletin

³Oddly enough, the Soviet Union exports 30 percent of its chemical fertilizer output at a time when its vast grain areas are virtually starved for the material; almost all fertilizer is used on the commercial-technical crops. About 13 percent of Soviet fertilizers consist of raw rock phosphate, a mineral of dubious value, which is not considered a fertilizer per se in Western reports.

Thus, the United States produces and utilizes three times more chemical fertilizer than the Soviet Union. Allowing for the latter's larger hectareage and population, it ought to produce five times as much. So the fertilizer gap is even of greater magnitude than the perennial grain problem, which has remained unsolved since collectivization over thirty years ago.

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