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COMMUNIST AREA

● USSR: Agriculture

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GRAIN HARVEST OUTLOOK - V

Recent reports from the major spring wheat regions in the Soviet Union indicate an improvement in the crop outlook such as to warrant a moderate upgrading in the grain harvest forecasts that appear periodically in these papers. It is logical that the multiplier effect of a small increase in yield on 125 million hectares of grain has a positive impact on the volume of grain harvested.

Winter Grain

For the stable winter grain regions, which normally account for 40 percent of the total harvest, a drop of 10 to 12 percent below last year's output was forecast on August 4.¹ This projection remains substantially valid to date.

With 17 of 25 Ukrainian oblasts reporting completion of their grain deliveries to the state, the trend continues to show a 7.7 percent shortfall this year from the 1966 deliveries. All but one of the prime granaries have reported by now and it can be fairly certain that the Ukraine will field an excellent harvest only about 7 percent below the near record performance of last year.

In the north Caucasus the results are spotty. The richest of all granaries in the USSR, the Kuban, reports an average yield of 25.5 quintals per hectare which is 12 percent below last year.² In the two other huge territories of the north Caucasus, an average yield seems in prospect and the region as a whole will lag behind its usually good performance.

- 1) RFE Research report "Grain Harvest Outlook - IV," by cz.
- 2) Radio Moscow, 16 August and Selskaya Zhizn, 9 October 1966.

Conditions in the lower Volga have improved appreciably. Volgograd and Saratov oblasts report near record outputs although delivery reports are not available to check such claims.

So a rather firm estimate for the winter grain harvest this year would be on the order of 10-11 percent below 1966.

Spring Grain Belt

The central press has been silent on the progress of the grain deliveries until recently. Only the provincial press had been covering the field until a Pravda leader last week finally reported that Kazakhstan would be reaping a fairly good crop of wheat this year.⁴ The Urals and western Siberia were also reported in line for a good harvest. But the Pravda article was mainly an appeal to utilize machinery and trucks effectively and gave little on the contours of the harvest. It will be fully three weeks before such claims can be corroborated by the grain delivery reports.

A tentative estimate for the strategic spring grain regions would be a harvest 15 to 20 percent below the record yield of 1966.

Balance Sheet

In the absence of official crop forecasts by any of the Communist countries, western crop specialists must rely on the progress of the weather conditions and the comparative level of grain deliveries to the state in arriving at the size of the grain harvest. But harvesting stretches out for two months in the USSR, so periodic appraisals are in order to provide perspective on the grain crop.

At present, the overall projection for the Jubilee year harvest is 15 to 18 percent lower than the all-time record of 1966. This would still be an average good harvest, sufficient to meet domestic needs, allow moderate export trade, but not add appreciably to the grain reserves.

CZ

3) Radio Moscow, 15, 16, 19 August 1967.

4) Pravda, 13 August 1967.