

Radio Free Europe/Munich
Non-Target Communist Area Analysis Department
Background Information USSR

9 October 1963

VIRGIN LANDS DEBACLE

The first definitive report from Kazakhstan on the grain harvest in the strategic Virgin Lands territory leaves no doubt that the grain failure is disastrous.

Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, 27 September, with the typical understatement adopted by the press for bad news from the harvest front, reports:

"Kustanai grain growers are carrying out the harvest in a faster tempo than the mechanizers of the other oblasts in the Virgin Lands territory. Grain deliveries here are also better - over 35 million poods of grain have been delivered to the state, more than any of the other oblasts in the territory."

The Virgin Lands territory (Tselinnyi Krai) consists of five immense political administrative regions (oblasts) in north Kazakhstan, of which Kustanai is the largest. The territory has the land area of France, Belgium, and Denmark combined. It grows over 15 million hectares of grain, of which 85 percent is spring wheat. In good years, it supplied one-fourth of the total USSR grain deliveries; in recent years, because of the repeated crop reverses, its share has dropped to 10 - 12 percent. Nonetheless, the territory was assigned the highest marketing ratio for 1963: 71 percent of the grain crop was to be delivered to the state.¹

It would appear that Kustanai oblast had the best yields in the Virgin Lands territory this year. As a measure of the debacle in current grain harvest, the following table compiled from official sources offers a devastating documentation of the disaster in the New Lands.

KUSTANAI OBLAST - GRAIN DELIVERIES²

1956	-	277 million poods*	
1958	-	103	" "
1959	-	146	" "
1960	-	124	" "
1961	-	62	" "
1963	-	40	" "

*61.05 poods = 1 metric ton

With the Kustanai harvest now practically completed, it is assumed that a few more million poods will be added to the 35 million indicated above; certainly an estimate of 40 million poods appears liberal.

The exact description for this steadily deteriorating performance can perhaps be best formulated from Khrushchev's own evaluation of other harvests in Kazakhstan: the 1961 harvest was "wrecked" by the Kazakh party boss, Kunaev,³ and the 1962 harvest he termed "tantamount to failure".⁴ With this year's output likely to be on the order of 60 percent of last year's "failure", the description, disaster, is not extreme.

The contrast between plan and performance for the ranking Kustanai oblast is equally striking. Obkom first secretary, Borodin, set the immediate goal for the region at 470-480 million poods of grain a year, of which 300 million would be delivered to the state. Thus, this year's performance represents a 13 percent fulfillment of the plan. Such abject failures are the seed-bed for the short tenure of office among ranking Party officials in the new grain areas. The harvest among such officials may well be plentiful this year. It is in this area, too, that Khrushchev's own reputation stands or falls.

CZ

¹Ekonomika selskogo khozyaistva, #3, 1963, p. 7.

²Selskoye khozyaistvo SSSR, 1960, p. 634. Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, October 12, 1956, October 2, 1960, September 30, 1961. Data for 1957 and 1962, both bad harvest years, are unavailable.

³Izvestia, November 22, 1961.

⁴Pravda, November 13, 1962.

⁵Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, September 30, 1961.