

Radio Free Europe/Munich
Office of the Policy Advisor
Background Information USSR

13 November 1959

SOVIET GRAIN HARVEST 1959 (IV)

This year's grain harvest in the Soviet Union will be considerably less than last year's record yield. While no official announcement on the dimensions of the primary component in the national economy is anticipated until the December plenary session of the Central Committee, the accumulated reports in the press provide positive bench-marks to appraise the grain output.

During good harvest years the results have in recent times been given special emphasis by the keynote speakers at the ceremonies of the October revolution anniversary. Last week's honors were done by Presidium member A.B. Aristov, who omitted any reference to the grain output but did compare the present procurements with those of the pre-virgin land reclamation program, when twenty million less hectares were sown to grain.

"Notwithstanding the drought in several regions of the republic, more grain was harvested this year than in the best yielding years before the new lands program. By November 1, 825 million poods more grain had been purchased and procured than the average of procurements in the years 1949-1953"

Pravda, 7 November 1959.

This is an adroit stacking of statistics, an example of "otchkovtirateľstvo" (wilful deception by officials), as it actually covers almost a 20 percent decline from the 1958 deliveries and a larger drop if comparable average years are compared. Average procurements for 1949-53 were 2 billion poods (32.76 million tons),¹ so the 825 million poods cited (13.4 million tons) would indicate a 19 percent procurement receipts at 46.2 million tons.² This is a 19 percent decline from the 1958 total of 57.4 million tons, the peak for procurements following the bumper harvest of that year.

As the level of grain procurements is nominally determined by the volume of the harvest, it follows that the 1959 harvest is proportionately less than the yield in 1958. Or specifically, the actual grain output is estimated as within the 110-115 million ton range. This in terms of kernel grain, excluding silage equivalents.

Among the three primary grain regions, the Ukraine and the RSFSR lagged behind their record output of 1958. The Ukraine,

¹ Narodnoye Khozyaistvo v 1958 godu, p. 358.

² Late deliveries and adjustments may likely increase this by a few percentage points.

which normally accounts for about a third of the USSR's total grain but only 10-15 percent of the national deliveries since the opening of the virgin lands,³ this year turned over to State procurement centers 450 million poods grain compared to 552 million poods last year,⁴ or 20 percent less. Drought reduced the Ukraine's sugar beet crop from 33 million tons in 1958 to 27 million to date this year,⁵ an 18 percent decline despite an expansion of 70,000 hectares in the area. As corn for grain is grown primarily in the beet regions of the republic, it is almost certain the corn harvest (as grain) suffered a corresponding set-back. Drought reports have appeared dominantly from the winter wheat areas of the USSR, which are also natural corn regions, so the indicated smaller corn crop will not have the decisive weighted influence on the total grain harvest this year as it did in 1959.

The RSFSR, which provided 58 percent of the national grain deliveries last year, and where 8 regions yielded two thirds of the crop,⁶ this year reports only 3 of the oblasts with good harvests (Altai, Orenburg, and Omsk). The rich Kuban (Krasnodar krai) had a 29 per cent drop compared to 1958.⁷ The dimensions of the reductions in Stalingrad, Rostov, Stavropol, Saratov are not documented but Khrushchev admitted them as "considerable"⁸. No other principal grain areas in the federated republic turned in good yields.

The eastern new lands have, on the basis of the procurement reports, enjoyed a relatively good harvest although deliveries are later than last year's schedule. Kazakhstan, of its pledged 1 billion poods, had delivered 662 million by mid-October with no further progress report to date. Rain and snowfall held up the speed of harvesting resulting in damage and loss to the crop. Available reports, however, indicate that no record yield comparable to 1956 is expected and that it may be on the order of last year's yield of 1.324 billion poods.⁹ Yet the delay in reporting may well indicate a somewhat smaller yield or larger losses in preservation. This aspect will be examined in subsequent studies.

Thus, on balance, the grain harvest is estimated at 110-115 million tons, with more weight on the former, in line with the pre-season estimate in Background Information, 23 May 1959. So in the first year of the Seven Year Plan no forward progress - rather a retreat - has been made toward Khrushchev's goal of 164-180 million tons grain by 1965.¹⁰

As the normal domestic utilization of the grain crop is approximately 100 million tons a year and with Soviet livestock still on short grain rations, the outlook for raising the volume above the 5 or 6 million tons normal export rate is rather unlikely. This year's Soviet crop will not disturb the world grain market.

cz

³Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, 15 January 1959.

⁴Selskoye Khozyaistvo, 5 November 1959.

⁵Pravda Ukraine, 5 November 1959, 6 January 1959.

⁶Izvestia, 6 November 1958.

⁷ibid; Selskoye Khozyaistvo, 6 November 1959.

⁸op. cit., 1 September 1959.

⁹Kazakhstanskaya Pravda, 15 January 1959.

¹⁰The 1960 goal of 9.3 billion poods (151 mil. Tons) as announced by Kosygin before the Supreme Soviet is unrealistic. Pravda, 28 October 1959.