

Agriculture by Denise Henderson

Soviet farming lacks basic inputs

A spring planting failure now looms alongside already empty shelves in city food markets.

‘Alone with their fields—that is how peasants risk finding themselves this spring, and once again we will find empty shelves’ is the title of a Feb. 14 *Pravda* interview with N.V. Krasnoshchekov, deputy chairman of the U.S.S.R. Council of Ministers’ State Commission for Food and Purchases.

The 1990 Soviet wheat crop was a record 240 million tons. But though the weather was favorable last year, the decay of the Soviet economy in storage, transport, and processing facilities caused empty shelves. With the 1991 planting season just ahead, there are prospects for empty fields as well. Soviet officials have been warning for months of the worsening danger to crops and livestock.

Krasnoshchekov details the situation of the peasant: “It is expected that in the spring, tens of thousands fewer tractors will be working in agriculture than in any of the preceding 25 years. Farms will have at their disposal 20-25% fewer essential implements such as cultivators, plows, and harrows than a year ago. Industry as a whole received 1.4 billion rubles less toward the production of agricultural machinery than was proposed last year.” Pesticides are also widely unavailable, and, “There is a most acute problem with the supply of seed grain to farms. [The republics of Kazakhstan and Ukraine] are keeping them at home in contravention of established inter-republic ties.”

According to the Jan. 19 *Torgovaya Gazeta* (*Trade Gazette*), 67 million tons of grain from the 1990 harvest went to state grain procurement

facilities, 8.7 million tons more than in 1989. But there were procurement declines of 13% in Ukraine; Belorussia, 7%; Lithuania, 16%; Moldova 49%; Latvia, 33%; Kirghizia, 42%; and Estonia, 34%. Less grain was harvested in these republics as well as Georgia and Tadjikistan than in 1989.

Weather patterns are also unreliable for the coming crop season. The Soviet publication *Selskaya Zhizn* (*Village Life*) reported on Feb. 13 that although there may be “‘February windows of opportunity’ . . . favorable conditions are not being created everywhere and in everything.” The paper warned that “not only are crises possible, but in the event of severe drought, [the crisis will extend to] supplying the population with produce from crop farming.” Winter crops have either not been harvested or have been lost or damaged.

The problems in planting and harvesting have also meant loss of feed for livestock. One of the largest mixed-feed factories in Vologod has announced that it is on the verge of closing down because its storing and processing facilities (up to 150,000 tons of grain) are empty. Animal husbandry and poultry farming in the Vologoda Oblast region are in a disastrous state, and in the next few days, the report warned, dairy farming and pig breeding will suffer disastrous losses as well.

What is to be done? Although the maverick President of the Russian Republic, Boris Yeltsin, has proposed land reform with individual peasants taking ownership of the land and cultivating it, as an incentive to produce

more, it is unlikely that this view will prevail over the Stalinist “Fortress Russia” view.

The West, paralyzed by its “free market” rhetoric, took no sound initiatives over the 1989-90 period to further production capacity in the Soviet Union, which the LaRouche “Productive Triangle” development program for the European heartland would accomplish.

Those, particularly in the Russian Republic, still calling for expanding privatized agriculture as a means of increasing production, may soon be forced out of power.

Germany has continued its food trade commitments, but the “Big Six” grain cartel companies (Cargill, Continental, Bunge, André/Garnac, Louis Dréyfus, ADM) may or may not continue Western food flows. The Soviets have not paid up for food shipments, and the sweetheart deals for operations inside the U.S.S.R. by the Ferruzzi group and others, may no longer be secure. Soviet hardliners can be expected to penalize those in Moscow who entered into cozy deals with the cartel companies in the first place.

Soviet concerns were signaled in a radio commentary by Viktor Levin, for example, who warned that continued Western food aid would be a prerequisite for preventing instability. The West, said Levin, must “understand that if the Soviet Union begins to fall to pieces, then the internal chaos may very easily take on an international character.”

“Moreover, the ambitions of individual [Soviet] politicians thinking only in categories of fighting, only in categories of enemies, may create great unpleasantness for the West, since the Soviet Union’s military power remains dominant, and if it falls into the hands of irresponsible people, it will be impossible to predict what will happen.”