

Resource Review

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Russia's Role in the Contemporary International Agri-Food Trade System

Edited by Stephen K. Wegren and Frode Nilssen (2022).
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The interaction of various national and international forces in recent decades has caused gradual and unforeseen changes in the way that agri-food markets operate and are organized globally. In order to properly manage a global agri-food market that can accommodate anticipated population expansion, a shift to sustainable agriculture and food systems has become necessary. Additionally, it is claimed to guarantee widespread access to enough, secure and nutrient-dense food, as well as to improve food system governance and consumption habits (Borsellino *et al.*, 2020).

One of the key stories in the last 10 years has been the rise of Russia as a major exporter of grains in particular. This is due to the enormous increase in agricultural productivity that Russia has seen since 2004 which led to food security, import substitution and increasing food self-sufficiency. *Russia's Role in the Contemporary International Agri-Food Trade System's* objective is to evaluate Russia's current position in the global fish and seafood agri-food chain. The book's editors gave a fascinating account of how the idea for the book originated and made possible with the help of numerous generous donations from various institutions. The book was originally scheduled for publication in 2021, but an intriguing aspect is that it was written before the Russia–Ukraine war, which caused a crisis in the world's agri-food supply chain and demonstrated Russia's standing within the global agri-food systems.

The book may be significant for a variety of audiences, including international and regional communities, policymakers, the corporate sector and academicians, among others, since it offers greater insight into current concerns relating to international agri-food trading systems. Apart from the introduction chapter, the book has two parts filled with empirical papers. The first part focuses on agri-food trade policy and practices, followed by Russia's regional agri-food trade. The introduction chapter covers a variety of topics, including prospects for sustainability as an importer and exporter of agri-foods, and a critical study of them from the viewpoint of politics, economics, policy environments and institutions. Other factors include the impact of climate change and its effect on food production, trends in global demand for imported food and population growth.

One of the key points from the opening chapter is that wheat will continue to be Russia's most profitable food export for the foreseeable future. Russia's wheat exports are also impacted by competing nations, including the United States, Canada, Australia, France and Argentina. Russia competes for market share as a prominent player in the world grain market. An exceptionally good harvest for one or more rivals intensifies competition for Russia's exporters, just as a notably poor harvest for one or more rivals creates opportunities for Russia's exporters. Grain prices and the size of global reserves are both influenced by producer countries collectively. This may change in the future since, as a result of the Russia–Ukraine war, the majority of nations have now made significant investments in the production of wheat to prevent unanticipated shortages in supplies. Unfortunately here the authors failed to establish a clear connection between Russia's agri-food trade and developing nations that are presently increasing their agri-food production. In line with the majority of earlier research, Wegren and Nilssen (2021) noted that the rising imports, expanding populations and declining yields in developing nations are business opportunity for nations that export grains, such as Russia.

The first five chapters of the book provide a good historical and contemporary perspective of Russia's agri-food system. Fascinating is the thorough historical overview of Russia's foreign food trade, highlighting how Russia's role in the global food trade dates back to the time before World War I, when it was Europe's top exporter of grains, particularly wheat. In addition, starting in the 1970s, the USSR had an impact on the global grain trading system during the Soviet era by entering the market to make up for domestic grain shortages. In recent years, Russia has surpassed the United States as the world's top exporter of wheat in 6 of the last 7 years. The liberalization of Russia's economy after 1992, the rise of private sector

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entrepreneurs who drive economic growth, a significant increase in agricultural production, the state's aspirations for international prestige and the emergence of mega-farms that are contemporary, globally competitive and employ cutting-edge technology to achieve high efficiency have all contributed to this.

The book offers a useful framework for analyzing agri-food trade systems, which were categorized into four categories: (1) frequency of entry into the global food market; (2) level of food trade protectionism; (3) level of integration with Western global trading institutions and (4) level of involvement in the global food market. Moreover, the subsequent sub-section highlights agricultural trading behaviors in different years from 1970s to 2014. Based on the four previously mentioned factors, this section's conclusion emphasized that Russia would continue to play an important part in the global agri-food systems. Despite the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic was only briefly discussed, in my opinion, the chapter should also discuss the impact of climate change on Russia's adaptation measures since the country hopes to continue to be a major player in the global agri-food system.

Chapters 6–10 focus on the regional agri-food trade in Russia. These chapters emphasized Russia's participation in the markets of the European Union and how it developed into a greater exporter in the area. The major argument provided here is that free-trade pacts are not expected to be reached anytime soon given complexity in trade structure. Moreover, the overall geostrategic balance of the world, as well as Russia's trade relations, the

size and direction of its agri-food commerce, and other factors are all significantly impacted by the country's move to the East. However, an intriguing aspect is revealed when the rising Chinese market is discussed. China's demand for Russian soy, for example, would undoubtedly be influenced by its trading relations with the United States and the fulfillment of the Phase One Trade Deal. On the Russian side, funds will be required to address a number of issues, including infrastructure that will make it easier to improve agri-food trade. The final chapter of part two examines the agri-food trade between the United States and Russia from the standpoint of divergence to irrelevance. This chapter examined how US agricultural exports to Russia have altered over time, going from being a major contributor to the USSR's food security to being essentially unimportant now.

Overall, this book provides a solid understanding of both the technique employed to analyze the global agri-food trade systems, as well as Russia's position in those systems from a current perspective.

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