



## **A Long Stride into Russia's Food Security and Sovereignty**

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### **Abstract**

Food security, and the following food sovereignty, is an important part of a state's survival in the international system. Such is the case for Russia, another growing power in the post-Cold War era. How a state maintains its food security is an interesting point to look into, hence this research is done. The guiding points that would guide the article would be the food security of Russia, the food sovereignty movement in the country, along with how the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict affects Russia's food security. The writing uses the concept of food security and food sovereignty that would be analyzed through the qualitative method of analysis. For the case of Russia's food security, it's found that the meat and industry, under Russia's Food Security Doctrine, play an important role to maintain food security. The movement for food sovereignty in Russia on the other hand is present but they do not take the form shown in other countries as a means to conform with the domestic condition of Russia. Moreover, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine not only affects the global food supply but also the domestic food production within Russia.

**Keywords:** *Russia; food security; food sovereignty; policy.*

### **Introduction**

In both peace and crisis ridden times, food is an important piece of a civilization. In modern times, how food is perceived has also remained crucial as it now also acts a commodity, an omnipresent object in international trade. States now have it in their interest the ability to secure food supply as part of their overarching national security agenda. This view that highlights the importance of food is not unfounded. There have been many instances where states were engulfed in crisis that stemmed from food problems. From the Arab Spring that also has its roots in public dissatisfaction over how the government handled food to the ongoing crisis in Sri Lanka that also has food shortages and crisis in it. Food are now not only attained through domestic production, but rather, as a reaction to the growing globalized and interdependent international system, through international trade as well. All of that are done as a means to maintain a stable supply of food, something that would make the state up and running.

Like many other states in the system, Russia also has its need of fulfilling such demand for food. In undertaking the task, Russia certainly has its own way and resources. Geographically, the region is known to have huge lands which unfortunately doesn't amount to much arable land for use. Despite that, Russia still has proven to be more than



capable of making use of such conditions. Not only that it has been producing a huge sum of its domestic food supply, Russia has also cemented itself as one of the important international actors in the overall food supply system. Today, Russia is known for being one of the world's suppliers of fertilizer and oil, two of the most important items in food production.

Recent dynamics of the international community view towards food, as in the growing attention towards the food sovereignty movement, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, that heavily disturbs the global supply chain of food, push for another look towards Russia and how it manages its food. Past researches have been done on the topic, from how Russia shaped its doctrine/policy towards the matter of food to how such policy it goes with may not be the best choice. This article would provide analysis over three research questions, first of how food security is being handled in Russia, second of how food sovereignty movement is present in Russia, and finally of how the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict Later down the road, the article will provide analysis over the three guiding points mentioned before through qualitative analysis from the secondary sources like news coverages and past literatures.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Understanding food security and food sovereignty**

Food security is part of many problems related to national security that states must take care of. Food security, according to the UNDP Human Development Report, is a condition where both physical and economic access to basic food are ensured (Acharya, 2014). The economic access in food security refers to the price or the amount of money necessary to obtain food that has adequate nutrition. As for the physical access, it refers to the availability of food supply (for example in the market) for the people to get. Both accesses are interconnected where the inadequacy of one could lead to a breakdown of the other. For example, where there is a food shortage (lack of physical access) there would also be rising prices coming (lack of economic access). Nowadays, the issue of food security has been connected to a wide range of issues, from how the food is produced, the impact of mass production on the environment, to how the current regime makes things difficult for small farmers.

Food sovereignty on the other hand is a movement that is concerned in promoting freedom of the people to define their own food along with how it should be made and regulated in their respective country. The idea also seeks to challenge the current food regime, especially that of neoliberalism that supports mass production and other aspects accompanying it. Food sovereignty has been famously carried out by civil society movements, La Via Campesina is a prominent example of it (Pimbert, 2008). The huge value it has makes it necessary for the movement to take place across the globe instead of being confined in a single country.



## **Discussion**

### **Food security in Russia**

Before diving into the more analysis of how Russia attains its food security, an understanding of the food industry in Russia needs to be laid out. In Russia, the main food industry that mainly supplies the food staple would be that of meat/dairy industry (which involves the meat and dairy production) and the grain production, the two industries stand along other complementary ones like that of oil (which is important in the food production scheme) (Karanina, et al., 2017). In handling those food industries and other relevant matters, Russia has its own way of defining aspects towards food security. Such a definition Russia uses is present in its food security doctrine, one of which was adopted back in 2010, that dictates what Russia's concern in that matter and how it shall pursue it. Nevertheless, Russia places a lot of priority over food security due to its vital position and negative consequences if it's failed to be accomplished (especially the domino effect as in a food insecurity caused by supply shortage may lead to rising price which may lead to an increase of hunger and reducing life expectancy).

Unlike the common definition provided in either the Rome Declaration of 1996 or FAO's Concept of Food Security, Russia's definition is different. Russia defines its food security as a state of social and economic development of the country that ensures food independence of the Russian Federation, guarantees to every citizen of the country the physical and economic availability of foodstuffs that comply with the mandatory requirements, in quantities no less than the balanced food consumption rates required to support active and healthy lifestyle (Filobokova, 2019). Instead of making the best use of import as a means to provide food (as laid out in FAO's Concepts of Food Security), Russia has been trying its best to minimize its use. This would also affect how Russia fulfills its domestic food availability or access where in that, it would try to have its self-sufficiency trait to kick in.

Securing food supply for a state's domestic need is always an important task for states, including Russia. It can be done through numerous means both in the domestic or international stage. For Russia, it has always longed for a self-sufficiency state of its food provision. The longing has been made clear in Russia's food security doctrine along with other policies it has made to attain that end. Apart from aiming its food industry to contribute to global trade, it also doesn't take the food supply coming from imports with no further thought. Russia is aware of the risk posed by relying on imports like the risk of spiking prices or a global supply shortage, hence it's making its way for self-sufficiency. An example of it would be Russia's protectionist policies towards food imports which could be done through means like import substitution. Unfortunately, such policy has left some negative consequences on Russia's part. The consequences could be in the form of the decline of nutrition consumed through the available food (which was proven to grow along the enactment of protectionist policies) and a huge state spending



to maintain the domestic food industries afloat. A way to see this phenomenon is by seeing it as the way Russia defines its food security. A food security where the emphasis is put on the availability of food rather on the price/economic access and quality or nutritional values.

As mentioned before, grain is one of the main food staples produced in Russia. Russia has reached a point in grain production where its production has already gone beyond its domestic consumption, hence giving more surplus for its export. How Russia managed to reach that stage despite its geographical problem of having huge amounts of land though most of them are not arable is a proof of how well it's being handled. The huge focus can be attributed to not only the huge potential grain export could contribute to Russia's international trade but also how grain production is also essential in Russia's domestic meat and animal husbandry production. The government, through the food security doctrine, has shown their interest in developing the field. In the doctrine, they already set a huge target for grain production, that is around 95% of minimum production. Such a target has been kept consistently by Russia as the target still remains the same until 2020. The same condition is also present in meat production where it has exceeded the production target of 85%.

Unfortunately, the same condition cannot be said of Russia's domestic dairy. Under the food security doctrine, milk and dairy goods production have a minimum production target of 90%. Despite having a lower target than that of grain production, until 2020, the target has yet to be met. The domestic milk and dairy production is still 81.7%. In supporting the industry to attain the target, the means Russia (especially looking at the political and structural condition), would be another state support (as in the handing of subsidy) to the relevant production actor.

Another noteworthy development in the way Russia's handling of food security would be the recently adopted new food security doctrine (Popova, Skiter, Ponomarchenko, Popova, & Dugina, 2016). The new food security doctrine was adopted back in January 2020 which replaced or updated the previous food security doctrine that was adopted way back in 2010 (Ayala, 2020). In the new doctrine, there has not been any major changes in the handling of food security. The new points it brought would be the prohibition of genetically engineered organisms (for both seeds and breeding animals). The prohibition is at least applied to prevent the imported seeds from getting into the production cycle within Russia. Uses of such items are still allowed though limited to the field of research or examination purposes. Aside from that, the new doctrine only accentuates Russia's path towards its ideal food security that is the attainment of an independent and self-sufficient Russia (Ivanovich, 2014). This is shown in how the doctrine supports further exploration of Russia's export potential (in food staples) and the extension of self-sufficient indicators to other food staples. The new extension is now present on the production of seeds (75%), fruits & berries (60%) and vegetables, melon & gourds (90%) which now seeks to reach the respective amount. The recent adoption



showed how Russia is still willing to advance in its path towards self-sufficiency. As mentioned before in its doctrine, Russia seeks to set itself free from potential threats rising from the international system (especially given some sanctions it's currently under and the volatility of the free market). It is at the core of its belief that through self-sufficiency, it can meet its domestic demand and at the same time perform and gain incentives in the global market.

With that, it can be understood that Russia has self-sufficiency at its end of the food security agenda. Making sure that its domestic production can supply a huge percentage, if not all, of its domestic food supply. This goal towards food independence, as in self-sufficiency, is also motivated by the motivation to avoid threats emanating from the international system.

### **A call for food sovereignty**

Unlike in other countries, the move for food sovereignty in Russia takes a form that is a lot less conspicuous. The reason for this can be attributed to the stark difference that Russia's domestic political condition provides from that of other countries. Any huge movement of food sovereignty, as in those happening in a more democratic setup where civil society movement is a lot stronger, may fall victim to the government's negative response. Not only that such a movement, where it has a call for change in the handling of food production, would also clash with Russia's food security doctrine.

Another thing that needs to be taken into account would be the substance that would drive the food sovereignty movement. In many movements across the world, the voice to depart from corporate supply of genetically engineered seeds has been one of the loudest to be present. A variant to that would be a call for the government to take a more active role in supporting domestic food producers of all scales so that they may thrive better or level the ground against the imports or corporate giants. To bring forward such a movement with such ideas on a huge scale in Russia would not even be that relevant. This is because unlike other countries who are entangled in the seamless and huge network of international trade (especially in import), Russia has been one of the countries that has been working on minimizing its dependence on import and strengthening its domestic production. With such domestic conditions, it would certainly be redundant for such a movement to take place.

But at last, the movement still exists in Russia though it is different from that found in other countries. Instead of focusing on a huge mass of the Russian public, the movement would rather grow in the rural areas. It also does not seek structural changes in the way food production or security is being handled (as in the influence of Russia food security doctrine, but rather it seeks to co-exist with it (Visser, Mamonova, Spoor, & Nikulin, 2015). It also limits its aims to individual food provision, economic benefits and a more ecologically sustainable production.



### **What the ongoing conflict brings to the table**

As shown in numerous reports of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine Crisis, the crisis has shown to have a global impact on the overall food security of the world. Noting how the two countries are the main exporters of grain, meat, and fertilizers, any conflicts that occur among them would surely disrupt the global supply chain. This disruption would surely prove to be a terrible surprise to the international system that has interdependence as its norm, as in the case of the global supply chain (Aljazeera, 2022).

How bad the conflict affects states in the system varies according to how strong their ties with Russia and Ukraine. Indonesia, despite having Ukraine as a source of its wheat, is not heavily affected as they can quickly cover the shift of source to another country (especially as the amount is not enormous). Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries are examples of countries that also suffered as a result of the conflict. The aforementioned countries have been relying on Ukraine and Russia for their supply of wheat, grain and fertilizers. All three items are important pieces to maintain their respective food securities. With the two countries currently out of the conventional trade system, those countries would have to look for alternatives quickly before the problems arising from food shortages take place.

Despite the global impact of the conflict, attention must also be shifted to the impact on Russia's part. One of the ways food producers in Russia have been affected is through the sanctions handed to Russia (Wengle, 2022). Despite the sanctions not directly given to the food producers, sanctions that remove Russia from the international finance or payment system obviously also affects those working on the food production. Farmers who usually have the ease of access for payment (especially in USD) now found themselves cut out from the system. This would certainly make it harder for farmers to earn their income given how they have been relying on international trade.

Another possibility worth noting is how the government may make some policy changes to the food production scheme. This is to say that now the entire food production system would be directed to the war effort to support the Russian army's special military operation. The army's need for food supply is shown to be an urgent one especially considering the gigantic nature of the operation (that involved the mobilization of numerous units from some point of entrance into Ukraine) and the recent negative development, at least in the logistical part, that resulted in countless supplies of food reaching the army late or not at all. As a response to this, the government may decide to shift a huge percentage of the food produced to the army. This would later cause food shortages that lead to food security, both in the lack of physical access (shortages of food items in the market) and economic access (the price spike that happens as a response to a supply drop).



Another more impact is the price hike that happens on countless food products within the Russian market. Food staples like dairy products, tomatoes, and potatoes that are the main products of the Russian food industry even deal with the negative consequences of the war. The consequences are vividly shown in the rising price the Russian public has to pay for them where at times the price could rise from a quarter more to even double the original price. This new impact poses a food insecurity issue on economic access. The presence of such economic hindrance leads to people buying less food as a response to the rising price. Another thing that happens is

## **Conclusion**

Through the discussion, it can be understood how Russia manages its food security through a set of doctrine. Russia would take the necessary steps to attain its own definition of food security, one that emphasizes self-sufficiency through enhancing domestic production and minimizing imports. The three food industries that hold the main food production of Russia (dairy, meat and grain) have also come under government support of all kinds to ensure the attainment of their domestic production target. The food security doctrine of Russia is essential in deciding which industry or food staples that can be improved or to track the overall progress made by all the relevant industries. Moreover, the food sovereignty movement is also present in Russia though it shouldn't be confused with how silent the entire movement is. Such a difference the movement has is an adaptation it made in response to the domestic and political conditions in Russia that make it hard for civil society movement to thrive. Finally, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine also has its share of impact on Russia. This is done through numerous price increases suffered by many food staples and how some sanctions have disrupted Russia's food production actor from their payment network.

In the end, Russia as another sovereign state in the international system possesses its own view towards food security which also generates a different food sovereignty movement among the people. From this research, there are still many spaces to explore. On the matter of Russia's food security, a new focus can be brought to how the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict may affect the Russia food security doctrine or how the conflict could either break or strengthen Russia's trait of strong domestic production and minimum import dependence. Upcoming researchers could also bring more relevant concepts or theories to the table.



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