

# No one but us

The new political and economic reality in which we all find ourselves has not so much raised new questions and problems that require adequate answers as it has highlighted weaknesses and vulnerabilities in our vast “household,” many of which have long been known and have already been discussed. This concerns both the country’s economy as a whole and its constituent sectors and, even more so, the territories scattered over a colossal space. On the pages of “ECO” we have repeatedly noted that the view of the domestic economy as a uniform and spatially uniform system is not only unproductive, but also unpromising from the point of view of realizing the opportunities that different territories and sectors of the economy have. It is extremely important to move from an isolated vision of the features and advantages of individual economic activities and territories to the formation and development of interaction between them. The result of such interaction can become a new quality of both economic activity and living conditions of the country’s population in its vast expanses.

One of the most important prerequisites for the formation and development of effective socio-economic interaction, including “a significant number of territorially fragmented rural settlements”<sup>1</sup> is to ensure transport accessibility and the availability of modern means of communication.

In the case of underdevelopment or lack of transport communication, what we clearly observe in the agrarian sector of the country – the slow but sure degradation of “unpromising” rural areas – is taking place for many years. This process was greatly accelerated in the framework of hasty and unsystematic market reforms. “In the early 1990s, it was expected that the land reform would put an end to the dominance of the state and allow a new class of private owners to come into existence, which would ultimately ensure more efficient use of land. In reality, however, the reform brought it to a dead end.

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<sup>1</sup> Smirnov, V. D. (2013). Agriculture of Russia. Its peculiarities. Textbook. Novosibirsk: ARTA. 40 p. [P. 32].

Out of 12 million citizens only one third was able to fully formalize their rights legally”<sup>2</sup>.

Complex, systemic, multidimensional work on the formation and development of modern agricultural sector in vast areas of the country was replaced by accelerated entry into the system of “mutually beneficial international division of labor. As a result, the Russian agro-industrial complex is now dominated by large agricultural holdings controlled from abroad. This allowed, on the one hand, to ensure favorable dynamics of macroeconomic indicators of the development of the agricultural sector, and on the other hand, has formed enormous risks for the sustainable functioning of the sphere of food supply of the country (R. R. Gumerov’s paper).

In the author’s opinion, one of the biggest problems of the domestic model of food supply and the agricultural sector in general is the neglect of the interests of the rural population. The main emphasis and in the process of Soviet “industrialization” of the village, and in the transition to a market economy in subsequent years was made on the “economy of scale” effect and simplicity of administration. Large farms, more than significant investments, large volumes of production – the basis of high economic efficiency of the products produced, as well as a convenient organizational environment for relatively simple and uniform forms of state regulation. The latter include, for example, the policy in the field of pricing for the products of the fishing industry on the principle of net-back – i.e. based on the prices of the external market (see the paper of A. M. Vasiliev and E. A. Lisunova). The result of this approach, in particular, was a sharp decline in the purchasing power of the population for fish products, with all the ensuing consequences in terms of diet and disposable income of Russians.

Does this mean the need for a transition to direct state regulation of food prices? Rather, no. We should talk about finding more flexible and adequate methods of taking into account the specifics of production and sale of food products – both in the context of its various types, and in terms of territorial features. World practice – including in countries with developed market economies – knows

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<sup>2</sup> Bystrov, E., Sheludkov, A. Introduction // Fadeeva, O., Bystrov, E., Zbanatsky, O., Sheludkov, A. (2021). Native lands. Essays on the transformation of land relations in Russia. Moscow: Social Research Support Fund “Khamovniki”: Common Place. 208 p. [P. 9].

many examples and precedents of flexible (or rather, adaptive) pricing of food.

The above does not mean a call for any form of discrimination against large firms and multi-sectoral complexes of industrial type. Rather, it is necessary to talk about the establishment and development of interaction between large business structures and private subsidiary plots (PSPs) and peasant farms.

Widespread distribution of PSPs was once a kind of response to low efficiency of agricultural production: “The level of wages of workers was very low. And, of course, it was not enough to feed the family at its expense. But in order for the peasants to survive, they were allowed to have a personal plot of land for their own production of vegetable and livestock products”<sup>3</sup>. Today, in a certain sense, the practice of assigning “Far Eastern” and even “Arctic” hectares to the population is following the same path.

The inclusion of such forms of personal participation of the population of remote territories in agricultural production involves not only the organization of interaction with large companies and business structures, but also the creation of effective forms of support and maintenance of their activities (including various forms of cooperation – from consulting to providing production and marketing services of various kinds).

The potential and capabilities of PSPs and farms in solving the problems of food supply consist not only in relying on their own strength and import substitution (especially with the further strengthening of sanctions), but, above all, in their active use for the development and strengthening of the cooperative movement (the paper by I. V. Shchetinina and Yu. O. Derevyanko). However, the realization of this potential is impossible outside the formation and development of a modern system of transport support and streamlining of land relations.

The time of simple and obvious solutions has passed. The basis and guarantor of the possibility of movement of the agricultural sector on the way of realization of modern and socially and economically effective approaches in solving the problems of food security

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<sup>3</sup> Smirnov, V.D. op. cit. P. 6.

is the experience and knowledge of those who live and work on the land – peasants (farmers), agricultural workers, people of agricultural science and education. The task of all others – first of all, is not to interfere and, if they participate in the solution of emerging problems, doing it with an understanding of the peculiarities of the domestic agricultural sector.

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