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“That the Price of Bread Be Always in My Hands”: Catherine II and Formation of the Grain Storage System in Russia

Abstract

Historically, national food supply for population in time of crop failure and famine came within state interests during the reign of Emperor Peter I. Then, national food supply acquired its status of a separate branch of the government. Under Peter I, a whole set of preventive measures was developed to combat crop failure and famine. However, Peter I's idea of grain stores remained unrealized. Only after accession of Catherine II the question of creating Russian grain stores system as a main mechanism for dealing with crop failures and famine was re-introduced. Over the entire period of her rule, much legislation was issued aimed at

preventing hunger in case of crop failure. Crop failure in Russia always led to a rise of bread prices. To combat this, grain stores were introduced throughout Russia. Catherine II personally drafted the Charter on Bread, which, however, was not implemented. What differed the Charter on Bread from subsequently adopted rules for creating, maintaining, and spending grain supplies, was that the state itself was responsible for their replenishment. It had to enter into contractor's agreement or supply contract and to supply the bread to the store. By the end of her reign, consistent policy of Catherine II led the creation in Russia of a sustainable food supply mechanism, which continued until 1917. Catherine II's legislature also improved preventive measures and promoted national and international grain trade.

Keywords

Archive, historical source, crop failure, famine, famine prices, food security, grain stores system.

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