

The End of Peasantry?: The Disintegration of Rural Russia (Pitt Russian East European)

Grigory Ioffe, Tatyana Nefedova, Ilya Zaslavsky

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The End of Peasantry? examines the dramatic recent decline of agriculture in post-Soviet Russia. Historically, Russian farmers have encountered difficulties relating to the sheer abundance of land, the vast distances between population centers, and harsh environmental conditions. More recently, the drastic depopulation of rural spaces, decreases in sown acreage, and overall inefficiency of land usage have resulted in the disruption and spatial fragmentation of the countryside. For many decades, rural migration has been a selective process, resulting in the most enterprising and self-motivated people leaving the rural periphery. The new agricultural operators representing nascent but aggressive Russian agribusiness have difficulty coopting traditional rural communities afflicted by profound social dysfunction. The contrast between agriculture in proximity to large cities and in their hinterlands is as sharp as ever, and some vacant niches are increasingly occupied by ethnically non-Russian migrants. All of these conditions existed to some degree in pre-Soviet times, but they have been exacerbated since Russia took steps toward a market economy.

Understudied and often underestimated in the West, the crisis facing Russian agriculture has profound implications for the political and economic stability of Russia. The authors see hope in the significant increase in land use intensity on vastly diminished farmland. The lessons gathered from this thoroughly researched study are far-reaching and relevant to the disciplines of Slavic and European studies, agriculture, political science, economics, and human geography.



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