

Approved Feb. 18, 1992
Date

MINUTES OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

The meeting was called to order by Representative Lee Hamm at
Chairperson

9:05 a.m./~~p.m.~~ on Friday, February 14, 1992 in room 423-S of the Capitol.

All members were present except: Representative Garner, excused

Committee staff present: Raney Gilliland, Legislative Research
Lynne Holt, Legislative Research
Pat Brunton, Committee Secretary

Conferees appearing before the committee: Anthony Hensley
State Representative
District 58
Topeka

Victor Chernyy
First Secretary of the Russian
Federation Embassy
Washington, D.C.

Representative Anthony Hensley, on behalf of the House Leadership, introduced Victor Chernyy, who is first secretary of the Russian Federation Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Chernyy informed the committee "Russia is not an enemy of the United States, it's a friend." Mr. Chernyy said that House Speaker Marvin Barkis and he felt that Russia and Kansas should establish a sister-state relationship for trade and educational purposes. Mr. Chernyy suggested Kansas also establish a sister-state relationship with Ukraine, which borders Russia.

The procedure of installing a market economy is "an area where we don't have any experience," said Mr. Chernyy. He then suggested that teams of experts could go to Russia and teach "how to make privatization, how to create a stock exchange."

Senior citizens in Russia are a great source of discontent, he said. Often they try to live on a monthly pension of 200 rubles, which is impossible when one loaf of bread costs 5 rubles, and a kilogram of good ham commands 1,000 rubles.

He stated that the Russians are still having problems with efficiently harvesting, storing, transporting, processing and distributing food.

Mr. Chernyy said technical assistance is needed, maybe teams to help fix the market economy, to help write legislation.

A copy of an article entitled "Russia's Radical Farm Plot" was provided to the committee members from Mr. Chernyy. (Attachment 1).

A question and answer period followed the presentation.

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 a.m. The next meeting of the House Agriculture Committee will be at 9:00 a.m., Tuesday, February 18, 1992, in room 423-S, State Capitol.



BY CAROL GUZY—THE WASHINGTON POST

Masha Gribkova works as a cook on Vladimir Plotnikov's private farm. Plotnikov expects to lose the farm soon.

Russia's Radical Farm Plot

New Privatization Plan Meets Resistance From Collectives

By Margaret Shapiro
Washington Post Foreign Service

BALASHIKHA, Russia—Vladimir Plotnikov had few illusions but many hopes when he set out four years ago to bring private farming back to Russia.

That was before someone poured gasoline on the roof of his barn and burned it to the ground. It was before the local government denied him land on which to grow food for his pigs. And it was before the collective farm that leased him his tiny plot decided to break the contract and take everything back.

Now Plotnikov, the 48-year-old descendant of a Siberian farmer, is simply tired. "I was so naive. I thought common sense would prevail. Such were my dreams," he said, looking older than his years as he drank tea inside his small, rundown farmhouse, full of torn wallpaper and dusty furniture. "I just don't see any light at the end of the tunnel."

For decades, the Soviet Union, despite its huge expanse of arable land and natural resources, has been unable to feed itself, its agricultural system foundering under the weight of massive and inef-

ficient state-run farms. Joseph Stalin's deadly collectivization plan of the late 1920s destroyed private farming and farmers, led to years of agricultural chaos and starvation, and left an ideological legacy of suspicion toward those who wanted to profit from the land.

Now the leaders of Russia and other republics want to resurrect private farming on a large scale, hoping to lure others like Plotnikov back to the land so they can make good on seven decades of unfulfilled promises of full shelves and plentiful food. Private plots, by some estimates, recently have produced almost one-third of the country's food on a mere 3 percent of its land.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin has declared that unprofitable state farms will be disbanded and private farmers given land, assistance and the right to buy and sell their plots. Yeltsin's agriculture minister, Viktor Khlystun, described the reforms last week as the most ambitious and radical ever put forward, and said the government hopes that as

See FARM, A16, Col. 1

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ATTACHMENT I

Russia's Radical Farm Privatiz

FARM, From A1

many as 150,000 new private farms would be created this year alone.

But if Plotnikov's experience is any guide—and others have complained of confronting similar obstacles—the path toward private farming will not be easy. "I have heard all these things before. They are just words," said Plotnikov.

As the head of Russia's central bank put it in a recent interview, "There is a whole class of people opposing this trend. There is no way to persuade chairmen of the collective farms and their entourages who are sponging off our villages that we must get rid of these collectives."

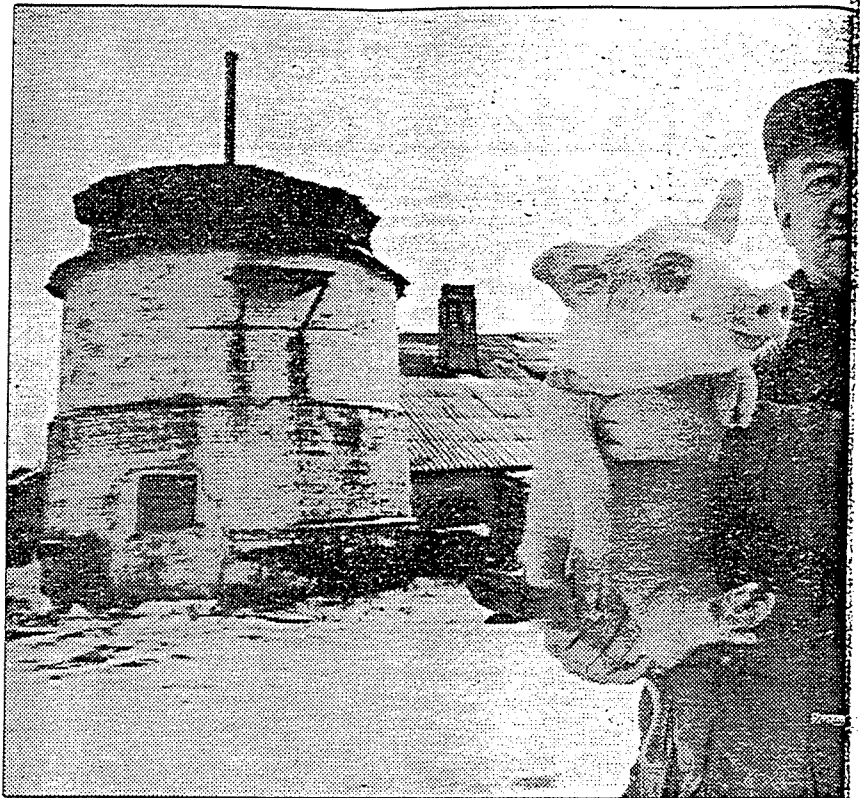
Maybe it was growing up in the gritty, industrial Siberian city of Keremovo that made Plotnikov yearn for a plot of his own, or maybe it was knowing that his grandfather had prospered on his own farm until Stalin's collectivization. But when Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev declared in the summer of 1987 that unused village and state farm lands should be leased for use as small-scale private farms, Plotnikov was one of the first to respond.

His wife had died a few years before and he was ready for a change from Moscow, where he had lived and worked for many years. "I was full of energy and desire," he said, recalling his excitement about trying to live off the land. "I thought when I got a farm, I'd build a house and find a wife and we'd be able to live happily, like rich people."

His friends, recognizing the stigma against anyone trying to better themselves in this society, thought he was crazy. And outsiders, including the apparatchiks who staffed the local agricultural bureaucracy, looked upon him and others who heeded Gorbachev's call "as freaks," he said.

Grudgingly, the Balashikha city government outside Moscow agreed to provide him with a small plot of unused land. It was essentially a dump, full of debris and rusty equipment. For three solid months, he and several men whom he hired cleared the land. Using his meager savings plus loans from a bank, they built a simple barn.

Then one spring night, just as



things were getting easier, someone doused the roof of the barn with gasoline and set the place on fire, burning it and the pigs inside to the ground. Everything was lost. "I didn't know what to do," Plotnikov recalled. "I had borrowed a lot of money and had a lot of debts." He estimates the fire cost him about 25,000 rubles, a sum equivalent to what the average Russian worker earned in five years.

Local Communist Party authorities were uninterested in pursuing the case and told him it was an accident; the police investigation went nowhere.

Frustrated, Plotnikov took a step that many others would not have: He contacted a leading liberal newspaper, Moscow News, and described his plight. When it printed a story, one highly placed reader—Gorbachev—reacted and sent word down through the Communist Party, which then controlled even the smallest matters throughout the country, to help Plotnikov. A few days later, local officials offered him a new plot of land owned by the Kirov collective farm.

The place was far from perfect:

The barns were small and decrepit; the four-room farmhouse had suffered severe fire damage and needed to be rebuilt almost from scratch; much of the land was unsuitable to grow anything. Abandoned by the collective farm several years before, it had become a local hangout for drunks. Having no choice, Plotnikov took the place, and in the summer of 1988 he signed a five-year lease with the Kirov collective giving him exclusive rights to about 30 acres. In exchange, Plotnikov would pay the collective and offer for sale some of the meat he raised.

He renovated the place, borrowed to buy more pigs and began scratching a meager livelihood out of his usable land. It was never easy.

Residents of the small town near the farm at first viewed it favorably. "They were delighted to see meat from the farm in the local stores," he said. But then old attitudes resurfaced, and people began to whisper that he was a "rising capitalist," trying to buy the land and become rich by exploiting them. Plotnikov now has several watchdogs prowling the premises.

Some of the people he hired to

Poland Faces Energy Crisis as Gas De

By Blaine Harden
Washington Post Foreign Service

present, except one. This drastic limitation is happening for the first

1992. In return, Poland promised \$500 million worth of food. in ad-

Plotnikov's Plan Meeting Resistance



BY CAROL GUZY—THE WASHINGTON POST



BY DAVE COOK—THE WASHINGTON POST

Private farmer Vladimir Plotnikov holds one of the pigs he raises. Fodder shortages forced him to slaughter two-thirds of the animals.

muck out stalls and clear land found the work too back-breaking, and they quit. Some showed up drunk or stole food and equipment.

Then, about a year ago, nationwide shortages of fodder began. Plotnikov decided to try to grow his own, but local officials would not provide more land.

"We asked for it in other areas, even 100 kilometers from here, but they said no," Plotnikov recalled. He approached the director of one nearby state farm and offered to pay for a weedy, untilled patch. The director made clear that he would consider the deal only for a bribe. And when the Kirov farm's managers recently decided to lease another unused farm near him, they gave it to a cooperative that promised to make bricks for them but eventually turned the land into a car repair shop.

"It's crazy. A garage, when in this country there is no meat!" Plotnikov said. "A year ago there was a new law passed saying farmers have a right to private land—but how to get this land, it doesn't say."

At one point Plotnikov sent an impassioned plea for help to Gorbachev. "You saved me once, Mikhail

Sergeyevich. Don't let me down this time. Help me get land," he wrote. But this was after the failed August coup that left Gorbachev little more than a figurehead, and "unfortunately, Mikhail Sergeyevich did not have enough power and couldn't help me," Plotnikov said.

Unable to expand or to find enough fodder, Plotnikov began slaughtering his pigs. Today he has 200, or one-third of the number he began with. Still, he must spend his days "running around state organizations [which even now control food and grain distribution] begging for fodder."

Plotnikov said he could buy fodder at the new private commodity exchanges, but individual farmers simply do not have the large sums of money needed to pay the free-market prices demanded there.

So, instead, every day Plotnikov sends his two farm trucks to Moscow, stopping at food factories, restaurants and groceries, looking for garbage to feed his pigs. Even that has been a headache, however. With food scarcer for everyone, less is being thrown out as garbage.

The final blow to Plotnikov's

hopes was delivered about a month ago. As winter settled over the region, covering Plotnikov's small plot with snow and making it difficult to keep his two muddy pigsties warm, officials from the Kirov farm informed him that he would have to move out. They wanted their land back and intended to break the five-year lease they had signed with him.

"The farm will be demolished, I'm sure," Plotnikov said, shrugging. "Maybe it'll be in a month, maybe it'll be at the end of the year. Who knows?" He said he will continue to fight back, even now, but gives the impression of a man worn out who sees little point to it anymore.

Plotnikov spends most nights now at his Moscow apartment, about a 40-minute drive from the farm. During the day, he and a few farmhands, hired from the neighboring high-rise complex, continue to work in the two muddy and poorly heated barns. Someone sleeps in the house at night, but the place has a depressing, uninvited-in air about it.

What started as a great adventure has become a daily grind, not just against nature but against a system that has not yet changed.

"Whom can I go to? The court is also part of the local government and would never act against its own people," Plotnikov said. And many of these people worked on behalf of the Communist system and now "have simply changed their colors from the [Communist Soviet] red flag to the [democratic Russian] tricolor."

Plotnikov said he has little hope that Yeltsin or his advisers can make things easier. The resistance in local areas is just too great, he said. And the government does not seem to be doing anything to replace recalcitrant bureaucrats. The result, he said, is that all the new policies will end up being "simply words."

"We have such a vast expanse of good land in this country. When you fly across it, you're just surprised at how much land we have. Yet we don't have food," said Plotnikov. "If I had my own land, I would've found the money and persuaded subcontractors to build a proper farm. And equipped it properly. You could have a lot of farms like that in our country. And in such a way we could have solved the problem of food in this country. This is our tragedy."