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Eurasian Center for Food Security

Contents

- Seven Research Studies on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Food Security and Nutrition in the Eurasian Region 1
- Virtual Event: Discussion of the Implications of the *Global Food Policy Report 2021* for Eurasia2
- Event Calendar 2021.....3

Food Security in Eurasia 2020

Case studies



Seven Research Studies on the Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Food Security and Nutrition in the Eurasian Region

By Sergey Alexeyevich Shoba

ECFS has published the fifth annual series of case studies on food security in Eurasia.

This year’s studies are produced by 15 scientists from four countries (Armenia, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, and Uzbekistan) analyzing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security and nutrition in Eurasia. The publication is now available online.

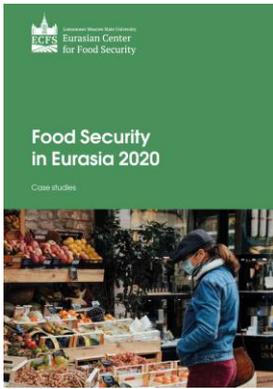
The response of Eurasian countries to the COVID-19 pandemic aimed at ensuring food security and improving nutrition was discussed by experts from IFPRI during the virtual discussion on the implications of the findings in the *Global Food Policy Report 2021* for Eurasia.

Don’t forget to check the new events of 2021—see our updated Event Calendar!

[Food Security in Eurasia 2020](#) is the result of joint work carried out by researchers from the countries of the Eurasian region and experts of the World Bank and the Eurasian Center for Food Security (ECFS) of Moscow State University. It is the fifth such publication of case studies, which are conducted every year to improve regional knowledge, support cooperation in scientific research, and generate evidence-based policies related to the development of sustainable food systems with the goal of

improving food security in Eurasia. Thanks to the success of this approach, case studies have become a regular element of our contribution to the body of regional knowledge and the understanding of policy implications for food security in the region.

The relevance of these case studies is supported by the fact that they bring up the most pressing issues for improving mechanisms to achieve food security in the region.



They analyze the current situation in the agricultural sector in each of the countries, enabling the authors to propose specific recommendations aimed at improving food security.

The case studies included in this volume have been prepared by 15 scholars from Armenia, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, and Uzbekistan. The studies cover various aspects of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security and nutrition. In this respect, it is necessary to highlight the fact that, among the Eurasian countries, Russia and the Kyrgyz Republic carry the highest incidence of COVID-19 and the highest number of newly confirmed cases and deaths, which is a very alarming situation. Moreover, Russia still has the world's sixth highest number of newly confirmed COVID-19 cases, following the United States, India, Brazil, France and Turkey.

The pandemic has triggered an economic downturn and reduced demand for energy commodities and services in sectors such as transportation, tourism, and HoReCa (hotels, restaurants, and cafés/catering/casinos). It has affected prices of energy resources and led to the depreciation of national currencies in the countries of the Eurasian region; it has also disrupted supply chains, reduced labor migrants' remittances from Russia, and increased unemployment and poverty. In turn, because of higher unemployment and poverty rates, along with the use of export restrictions by some countries (Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan) and disrupted value and supply chains, the food security situation and the nutrition status in the region have deteriorated.

Responding to these challenges, the authors of the case studies have examined issues such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the nutrition of the population and on urban food systems in Uzbekistan and Armenia; measures to ensure uninterrupted organization of school meals in

Armenia amid the pandemic; viable options for transforming systems of agricultural sales, taking the case of the Semeynaya Eco-Farm in the Leningrad region as an example; measures to reinforce food chains in vegetable farming and fruit growing in Armenia; proposals for streamlining the regulation of Russian wheat exports when facing price shocks; and methods for supporting the sustainability of animal husbandry, taking the Ak-Talaa district of the Kyrgyz Republic as an example.

Taken together, the case studies demonstrate the sustainability of agricultural production amid the pandemic outbreak despite temporary difficulties in accessing resources and finance faced by producers, and despite the shortage of seasonal labor. Rapid adaptation of the agrifood systems has been largely encouraged by more active use of innovation technologies—in particular, digital technologies.

Besides, in the context of the pandemic, regional trade in agricultural products has increased against the background of reduced imports from third countries. Practically all Eurasian countries have increased supplies within the region. Therefore, higher volumes of regional trade have helped to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on food security and nutrition in these countries.

However, the food systems of Eurasia are facing new challenges; among these are an economic slowdown, an increase in food prices, a reduction in household income, and trade restrictions. Under these conditions, food security will depend on how successfully these countries will be able to put in place a social assistance system to protect their vulnerable populations and to support the competitiveness of their products and the digital transformation of agri-business. All this demonstrates the need to intensify joint efforts to find responses to new challenges and work out recommendations for food policy makers.

We hope that the case studies [from this book](#) will be useful for experts and policy makers and will make a useful contribution in addressing many issues of food security.

Virtual Event: Discussion of the Implications of the *Global Food Policy Report 2021* for Eurasia

The response of Eurasian countries to the COVID-19 pandemic aimed at ensuring food security and improving nutrition was discussed by experts from IFPRI during the virtual discussion on the implications of the findings in the *Global Food Policy Report 2021* for Eurasia.

During the pandemic, the countries of the Eurasian region took urgent measures to contain the spread of the virus, strengthen the level of social protection of the population, and provide economic support to businesses. In addition, export restrictions were introduced in Kazakhstan and Russia, which negatively affected producers in these countries as well as trade with other countries in the region. The panelists agreed on the need to develop approaches to responding to regional emergencies such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report suggests that efficient integration with regional trade partners such as Russia and China are important. Regional trade yields economic growth for the whole region, while policy harmony and planning across borders will limit harm caused by shocks. The need for regional cooperation was made clear during the pandemic, when Central Asian economies suffered because of decreased remittances from migrant laborers. "Declines in remittances to Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were comparable to those resulting from the 2015 Russian financial crisis, but remittances to Uzbekistan appeared to be relatively resilient," said **Roman Romashkin**, Deputy Director of the Eurasian Center for Food Security (ECFS). "Special policies and procedures should be developed to promote labor mobility within countries and across the region, especially during crises," he added.

At the same time, the pandemic showed that the use of innovative solutions can make food

systems more resilient. Thus, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) introduced measures to promote the development of start-ups and companies working on technological solutions to problems in the field of agriculture. "The COVID-19 pandemic yielded lessons and triggered creativity in actions and thinking. A global sense of urgency and willingness to think beyond traditional barriers, combined with major international summits in 2021, creates an unusual opportunity to make reforms possible," said **Johan Swinnen**, Director General, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI).

The past year has been unquestionably difficult, but the lessons learned, globally and within the Eurasian context, are immensely valuable. Never before have countries been so universally tested, with strains put on almost every sector and supply chain. The research community can contribute to recovery and preparation for future shocks by analyzing the efficacy of policy measures, developing technologies, and fostering cooperation between stakeholders. In this regard, "it is important to have public support for applied policy research that helps address challenges and problems of food systems transformation in the Eurasian region in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic," said **Sergey Shoba**, Director of ECFS.

In addition to global and regional issues, the webinar reviewed the experience of adapting the food systems of Armenia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan to the pandemic. The event took place on May 27 and attracted 225 participants. The discussion was organized by the ECFS, Westminster International University in Tashkent, the Armenian National Agrarian University, the World Bank, and IFPRI. The recording of the event can be found here

Event Calendar 2021

Date	City, Country	Event
January 12–June 17	ONLINE	Agricultural and Resource Economics Seminar, hosted by Marc Bellemare or Jeffrey Bloem
May 26–June 23	ONLINE	Webinar Series Building Evidence for Transforming Agricultural Innovation Systems under Climate Change
June 3	ONLINE	SE3 Scaling Up Agricultural Innovation – Opportunities to Deliver for People, Nature and Climate at COP26
June 21–23	ONLINE	8th World Congress on Conservation Agriculture (8WCCA)
August 23–27	ONLINE	EUROSOIL 2021
October 20–22	Tashkent, Uzbekistan	FAO Global Symposium on Salt-Affected Soils
November 1–12	Glasgow, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Glasgow Climate Change Conference (COP26 UN climate change conference)
December	Tokyo, Japan	Nutrition for Growth Summit