

Public Abstract

First Name:Leonid

Middle Name:Evgenievitch

Last Name:Sharashkin

Adviser's First Name:Michael

Adviser's Last Name:Gold

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

Graduation Term:SP 2008

Department:Forestry

Degree:PhD

Title:THE SOCIOECONOMIC AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF FOOD GARDENING IN THE VLADIMIR REGION OF RUSSIA

Russia's family gardens currently produce *over half* of the country's agricultural output, while using only 6% of agricultural lands in the country. The collective output of family gardeners represents 2.3% of Russia's GDP and over \$14 billion worth of products each year. With over 30 million families (approx. two thirds of the Russian population) -- both urban and rural -- owing a garden-plot, the Russian gardening movement represents what may be the most extensive self-provisioning effort anywhere in the industrially developed world.

Despite this prominence, household gardening has been viewed as a fairly recent phenomenon, a mere adjunct to the country's industrial agriculture, and a temporary response to the economic hardships of Russia's transition to capitalism and market-based economy.

I argue, however, that contemporary gardening is Russia's *primary* agriculture -- both in its economic significance and as a practice based on a millennia-long tradition of living a simple and self-sufficient, land-based life. A study of the current status of family agriculture, Russia's agrarian history, and the results of my 2006 survey of 1,500 families in the Vladimir region of Russia confirm that the significance of gardens goes well beyond the production of foodstuffs, and that gardens perform a wide range of economic, social and cultural functions.

My survey in the Vladimir region offers detailed information on the garden-plots used by households, on families' growing practices and the variety of crops they produce, on the costs and benefits of tending a garden, on the utilization of the harvest (including personal consumption, sharing, and market sales), as well as on the cultural values Vladimir residents attach to gardening and agriculture at large. Based on the results, family gardening can be seen as a highly sustainable, diversified and culturally important practice, which needs to be given due consideration by scholars and policy-makers alike.

The results of this research are highly relevant for America and other industrially developed countries. Russia's example shows that a highly decentralized, small-scale, sustainable, and culturally rich food-production system is possible today on a national scale. Russian gardeners are not dependent on government subsidies, petroleum availability, hired labor, or complex and industrialized food distribution networks, and demonstrate the viability -- and the benefits -- of family agriculture. The application of similar approaches could yield similar benefits in countries other than Russia.