



RUSSIA'S WAR EXACERBATING GLOBAL FOOD CRISIS

Bottom Line Up Front:

- Russia's war of aggression has nearly halted grain exports from Ukraine's Black Sea ports, destabilizing a fragile world food market already stressed by the pandemic and recent droughts.
- Prices of grain and other staple crops are up 50 percent on world markets, which the UN estimates could drive hundreds of millions into food insecurity and provoke famine in the developing world.
- Food instability will continue to drive up costs for Americans here at home and could destabilize countries in the developing world, exacerbating the risk of conflict and terrorism.

Background:

Ukraine is one of the breadbaskets of the world. Before Russia's invasion, Ukraine was the [#3 exporter of corn](#), the [#4 exporter of barley](#), and the [#5 exporter of wheat in the world](#). Every year, the country exports enough calories to feed [400 million people](#). Ukraine's agriculture ministry reports that grain exports are [down 60 percent from last year](#) and that [20 million tons of harvested grain are stuck in Ukraine](#) due to Russia's blockade of Ukraine's Black Sea coast.

Russia is also a top-five exporter of wheat and other staple crops in addition to being one of the world's leading producers of chemical fertilizers. While sanctions do not directly target food exports, the war is making it difficult to do business in Russia. Many countries are dependent on these two exporters—[for instance, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, and Lebanon import between half and two thirds of their grain from Russia and Ukraine](#).

World food markets were already in a delicate position before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, [with drought and failed harvests affecting crops across Eurasia and North America in recent months](#). Even with prices rising worldwide, it is difficult for farmers to plant more crops to meet demand, because the cost of fertilizer, fuel, and other inputs is rising even more rapidly. Already, many countries such as India have imposed bans on food exports in anticipation of constrained supply in coming months, and [China has curbed the export of fertilizers since Fall 2021](#).

Key Issues:

- **Worldwide Risk of Famine & Instability:** The United Nations is concerned that the blockade of Ukrainian grain ["threatens to tip tens of millions of people over the edge into food insecurity followed by malnutrition, mass hunger and famine, in a crisis that could last for years"](#) in parts of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. Food shortages are historically associated with civil unrest, the rise of extremism & terrorism, upheaval, and revolution, such as in the 2012 Arab Spring or the French Revolution.
- **Rising Prices for American Families:** Because grain is traded on a world market, constraints in the global supply will drive up prices for Americans at home. Food prices are already a major driver of last year's record inflation. With the price of wheat and other staples [up as much as 53 percent since January](#), this is unlikely to change any time soon, including for meat and other products fed with grain.
- **Getting Grain Out Of Ukraine:** Ukrainian victory—liberating Ukraine's port cities and breaking Russian control of the Black Sea—is the only permanent solution to the inability to export Ukrainian grain. We must empower Ukraine to fight *and quickly win* the war. Stalemate and protracted conflict will only make matters worse. In the meantime, the United States must exercise its global leadership role to help ease the food crisis, including by negotiating an agreement for Ukrainian grain to be exported from the Black Sea on neutral vessels.