

AGRICULTURE

Feeding The People In The Arctic

If trade is an "indicator" of the state of things in the agro-industrial complex, then after a brief examination of the store shelves in Murmansk, one can see that this indicator is shining green, even though it flickers from time to time. Pork, mostly fat, sells for two rubles a kilo. Locally produced chickens, on a par with imported ones, cost at least 3.40 rubles a kilo. Beef is found only in co-operative stores, and costs at least 4.50 rubles a kilo.

Fresh and pickled cabbage, carrots, bulb and spring onions, potatoes, beets, turnips - these can all be found on the shelves. But the ration-card system is still retained in the region for butter and sausage products. There is a shortage of beef at two rubles a kilo, and nobody knows whether the potato supply will last until summer. Most likely not.

One could ask: what does the local agro-industrial business have to do with this? Where could it come from in the region located entirely beyond the Arctic Circle, in the permafrost, where there is nothing other than bogs, lakes, and rocks?

This is all true. The bogs; the rocks; the four months of polar night; and the unavoidable snowfall in the third week of June, right on the blossoming plants.

Nevertheless, in 1987, the region produced over 30,000 tonnes of meat products, 73,000 tonnes of milk, and more than 300 million eggs.

I can give you more figures: the productivity of one agricultural worker is 16,000 rubles per year (the average in the Russian Federation is about 8,000). A 15,000-head dairy herd averages 4,600 kilos of milk per cow. There is a waiting list for milkmaids at many farms. Two-shift