

On the return of unused land into circulation

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Abstract. The purpose of the study was to determine the regional characteristics and tasks for the return to circulation of unused agricultural land in the conditions of the North-West. The research was based on a generalization of the provisions of the theory of institutionalism on the role of the institution of property and rent relations in the use of the potential of land resources. Methods of economic and statistical analysis of territorial problems of land relations were applied in the Russian Federation as a whole and in the context of the regions of the Northwestern Federal District (NWFD). **The scientific novelty** lies in determining the vector of dynamics of land use area change in the agricultural sector of the Northwestern Federal District and assessing the prospects for the return to circulation of previously retired agricultural lands. **Results.** It is shown that in the North-West, against the background of other federal districts, remain the higher rates of reduction in crops, the areas of which in six of the nine regions of the NWFD in 2021 amounted to only 28.6–49.9 % of their level in 2000, including in three subjects of the Federation – less than 40 %. The interregional dynamics and changes in the share of the area of unused arable land, in general, agricultural land are analyzed, a conclusion is made about the insignificance of the volume of land put into circulation and the reasons for the current situation. With regard to specific conditions, there are considered possible effective measures to use the land potential of rural areas of all regions included in the Northwestern Federal District, which will significantly increase their contribution to the country's food balance. The conclusion is made about the need to increase budget support for agricultural producers and more active participation of the state in the regulation of land relations.

Keywords: unused land, sown areas, return of agricultural land to circulation, North-West.

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Introduction

Modern global changes in the world food market significantly modify the organization of their agro-food systems that has developed in countries. At the same time, the development of national agro-industrial complexes has been greatly influenced by the increasingly rapid spread of digital technologies, which are “used throughout the food chain..., introducing new forms of control and value extraction based on the use of data, and paving the way for large technology companies to capture market share...” [1].

The domestic agricultural sector is currently operating in the context of unprecedented international sanctions, and at the same time, with a fairly noticeable positive dynamics in the growth rate of production volumes and the need to solve a set of ambitious tasks in the field of import substitution, increasing the volume of exports of products, improving their quality, including basis of digital transformation. Therefore, the problem of increasing the efficiency of using the potential of available agricultural land is of particular relevance.

Meanwhile, according to the Ministry of Agriculture of the Russian Federation, as of January 1, 2021, 20 million hectares of arable land remained unused in the country, which have long been out of economic circulation, are degrading, overgrown with shrubs and even forests. These lands are geographically distributed unevenly, and the most significant share of the area of abandoned lands is characteristic of the regions of the Non-Black Earth Region, including the Northwestern Federal District (NWFD), where the disposal of land due to the characteristics of agricultural production proceeded at a faster pace. Suffice it to note that, for example, from the beginning of the land reform (1991) to 2010, the sown area of agricultural crops in Russia as a whole decreased by 35 %, and in the North-West – by 56 %, of which in Arkhangelsk and Kaliningrad regions – by more than 64 %, and the Pskov region – by almost 66 %.

Active state measures to prevent a decrease in the area of land used in the agricultural sector began to be taken in 2016, as in the Message of the President

of the Russian Federation V. V. Putin, the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation of December 3, 2015 was given the task: “to put into circulation millions of hectares of arable land that are now idle ..., by June 1, 2016, prepare specific proposals, including draft regulations, amend the legislation over the next year and in the autumn session of next year to adopt appropriate laws” [2]. As you know, in this direction, in 2021, a special “State program for the effective involvement of agricultural land in circulation and the development of the reclamation complex of the Russian Federation” for 2022–2031 was adopted. Its goal is to put into circulation by the end of 2031 13.2 million hectares of unused land, as well as a set of other measures to increase the area of land for agricultural activities. In this regard, a scientific analysis of the trends, factors, mechanisms accompanying these processes is required, which will make it possible to predict the situation and make the necessary corrective decisions in a timely manner.

In the economic literature, you can find quite a lot of research on the problems of putting agricultural land into economic circulation, which affect a wide range of issues: their land management and legal support [4–6], the implementation of strategies and program activities [7; 8], the analysis of the structure land use and its efficiency [9; 10], as well as many others. The territorial aspect of the problem is less studied, meanwhile it is quite obvious that the effectiveness of the Program for the return to circulation of agricultural land will be determined by the success of its activities in the context of specific subjects of the Russian Federation, and, first of all, where there are significant areas of unused land. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to determine the regional characteristics and tasks for the return to circulation of unused agricultural land in relation to the conditions of the North-West.

Methods

The research methodology was based on the provisions of the theory of institutionalism on property rights and rent relations, as well as the use of the methodological arsenal of regional agroeconomic studies [11], in particular, cluster analysis to determine the commonality of conditions and territorial problems of land use that affect the rate of disposal of land resources and their return. into circulation. The studies were carried out in the whole Russian Federation and in the context of the regions of the Northwestern Federal District using statistical data from Rosstat, Rosreestr, the Ministry of Agriculture of the Russian Federation, Rosinformagrotech and information from regional authorities. Economic and statistical methods of information processing were used, and Microsoft Office and Excel software products were used as technical means.

Results

On the basis of the conducted studies, it can be concluded that many existing problems in land use,

including the withdrawal of agricultural land from the reproduction process in the agricultural sector, are due to the inefficiency of the established institutional environment. Douglas North, a well-known representative of institutional theory, Nobel Prize winner in 1993, characterized the institutional environment as a set of fundamental political, social and legal rules that form the basis for production, exchange and distribution. In his opinion, it is difficult to assess the quality of the institutional environment due to the specifics of the institutions that determine it, since institutions act as the “rules of the game”, organize relationships between people and structure incentives for exchange in all its areas, but they cannot be seen, felt, touched and even measured are structures created by human consciousness [12, p. 137].

In the field of land relations, institutions can be defined as incentives and restrictions on the distribution and use of land resources that regulate the relationship between the subjects of land relations, the state and society with the help of the legal framework and market infrastructure. Among them, of course, such institutions as property, the state, rent, the market, and the firm are of great importance.

In our country, the formation of the institutional environment of land relations took place for a rather long period, starting in 1990 (the Law of the RSFSR “On Land Reform”, November 1990), when a transition was made to their new model by eliminating the monopoly of state ownership of land and recognizing the right of private ownership in its two types: individual and collective-share. However, an essential feature of the beginning of agrarian reforms was that the evolutionary development of land reform took a very short period of time – from 1990 to 1991, due to the events of August 18–21, 1991. After that, the process of perestroika began to take on a radical character, as evidenced by Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 323 of December 27, 1991 “On urgent measures to implement land reform in the RSFSR” and Decree of the Government of the Russian Federation No. 86 “On the procedure for reorganizing collective farms and state farms”.

It should be noted that the accelerated implementation during this period of the policy of egalitarian allotment of land, in the hope of forming its “effective” owner, later led to the emergence of precisely those conflicts in land relations that could not be eliminated over the next 30 years after the start of reforms. Therefore, when implementing the planned Program for the introduction of previously retired agricultural lands into economic circulation, it is quite objectively required to take into account and at the same time consistently solve such problems as:

- preservation of significant arrays of land resources in the status of land shares, not transformed into land plots and not registered in ownership;

Table 1
Dynamics of sown areas of agricultural crops, in farms of all categories, thousand ha

Regions	2000	2005	2010	2015	2021	2021 to 2000, %
Russian Federation	84 669.6	75 837.0	75 187.9	79 319.0	79 905.1	94.4
Northwestern Federal District	2 489.7	1 840.5	1 497.7	1 429.6	1 326.1	53.3
Republic of Karelia	64.8	46.9	38.4	32.5	25.1	38.7
Komi Republic	80,0	52.7	40.5	40.7	32.9	41.1
Arhangelsk region	206,8	134.5	104.4	77.0	59.1	28.6
Vologoda region	686,1	541.6	451.8	372.4	337.0	49.1
Kaliningrad region	257,9	217.9	148.1	245.5	296.6	115.0
Leningrad region	373,2	293.3	250.5	229.9	228.5	61.2
Murmansk region	11,5	7.8	7.1	7.7	5.8	50.4
Novgorod region	270,3	180.6	181.4	178.5	134.8	49.9
Pskov region	539,2	365.3	275.5	245.3	207.2	38.4

Source: Bulletins on the state of agriculture (electronic versions). Bulletin "Cown areas of the Russian Federation in 2022 (spring accounting)". URL: <https://rosstat.gov.ru>.

Table 2
Dynamics and share of the area of unused arable land

Region	Square, thousand ha		Share of area of unused arable land, %				
	2017	2020	2017	2018	2019	2020	2020 to 2017, +, – p. p.
Russian Federation	19 398.4	18 798.3	16.6	16.8	16.6	16.1	–0.5
Northwestern Federal District	1 473.5	1 445.8	49.7	49.3	50.4	48.6	–1.1
Republic of Karelia	17.9	17.9	25.4	24.9	25.4	25.4	0.0
Komi Republic	35.5	39.4	47.4	47.7	50.0	53.1	+5.7
Arhangelsk region	198.8	187.6	71.9	70.3	70.3	68.1	–3.8
Vologda region	347.0	355.8	48.5	48.8	51.1	51.1	+2.6
Kaliningrad region	101.2	91.3	27.9	26.6	25.6	25.1	–2.8
Leningrad region	132.4	126.9	36.9	29.0	35.9	35.5	–1.4
Murmansk region	10.8	2.0	59.2	60.9	39.3	11.7	–47.5
Novgorod region	222.6	204.9	51.5	56.8	56.5	45.8	–5.7
Pskov region	407.0	410.0	62.1	61.8	61.7	62.5	+0.4

Source: Report on the state and use of agricultural land in the Russian Federation. 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021.

Table 3
Change in the share of the area of unused agricultural land, %

Regions	2017	2018	2019	2020	2020 to 2000, +, – p. p.
Republic of Karelia	41.9	42.0	42.0	42.0	+0.1
Komi Republic	51.7	51.7	51.1	43.8	–7.9
Arhangelsk region	70.7	70.6	70.6	72.4	+1.7
Vologodda oblast	4,4	55.1	61.7	51.9	2.5
Kaliningrad region	37.8	31.2	34.1	40.0	+2.2
Leningrad region	17.8	17.4	18.0	17.8	0.0
Murmansk region	1.9	3.5	1.0	0.5	–1.4
Novgorod region	62.0	63.9	60.8	56.8	–5.2
Pskov region	66.3	66.3	60.5	60.2	–6.1

Source: Report on the state and use of agricultural land in the Russian Federation. 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021.

– lack of necessary information about the location, area, owners of unused land, including unclaimed land shares;

– misuse of agricultural land;

– the location of a large part of unused land resources in state ownership, a significant part of which is not divided into federal property, property of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation and municipal property;

– lack of reliable information about the quality of agricultural land and others.

It is no coincidence that the objective difficulties and significance of the forthcoming work cause certain assumptions about the risks of not achieving the planned results in the implementation of the planned activities of the Program. Therefore, one should join the opinion expressed that “This requires the right

Table 4

Area of agricultural land involved in the turnover, thousand ha

<i>Regions</i>	<i>2017</i>	<i>2018</i>	<i>2019</i>	<i>2020</i>	<i>2020 to 2017, %</i>
<i>Russian Federation</i>	<i>1 866.831</i>	<i>1 909.805</i>	<i>1 602.673</i>	<i>1 691.599</i>	<i>90.6</i>
<i>Northwestern Federal District</i>	<i>43.387</i>	<i>31.746</i>	<i>39.739</i>	<i>52.295</i>	<i>120.5</i>
<i>Republic of Karelia</i>	<i>0.351</i>	<i>0.510</i>	<i>0.487</i>	<i>0.282</i>	<i>80.3</i>
<i>Komi Republic</i>	<i>0.207</i>	<i>0.832</i>	<i>0.345</i>	<i>0.988</i>	<i>477.3</i>
<i>Arhangelsk region</i>	<i>0.825</i>	<i>6.000</i>	<i>0.396</i>	<i>0.178</i>	<i>21.6</i>
<i>Vologdda oblast</i>	<i>2.634</i>	<i>1.400</i>	<i>1.400</i>	<i>4.670</i>	<i>177.3</i>
<i>Kaliningrad region</i>	<i>10.203</i>	<i>8.242</i>	<i>5.923</i>	<i>13.492</i>	<i>132.2</i>
<i>Leningrad region</i>	<i>2.171</i>	<i>4.319</i>	<i>4.260</i>	<i>5.827</i>	<i>268.4</i>
<i>Murmansk region</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0</i>	<i>0.0</i>
<i>Novgorod region</i>	<i>15.581</i>	<i>4.438</i>	<i>6.208</i>	<i>14.483</i>	<i>93.0</i>
<i>Pskov region</i>	<i>11.415</i>	<i>6.000</i>	<i>20.720</i>	<i>12.375</i>	<i>108.4</i>

Source: Report on the state and use of agricultural land in the Russian Federation. 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021.

choice of priorities and the development of economically sound projects, which should become the basis for the organization of rational land use” [13, p. 3], and it is also required to “be sure to calculate the feasibility and economic efficiency of the development of each specific land plot” [13, p. 4].

The scale of such tasks for the return of unused land into circulation in relation to the conditions of the North-West, the dynamics of the reduction in sown area in the regions of the North-West Federal District as one of the indicators of the process of disposal of arable land here from circulation, against the background of other constituent entities of the Russian Federation and the country as a whole, is indicated by the data of Rosstat. Thus, by 2022 in the North-West, compared with other federal districts, the decrease in the area of crops in all categories of farms was the largest and reached more than 46 % compared to 2000, against 5.6 % in the whole country. Moreover, if the decrease in sown areas in 2021 compared to 2015 also occurred in the Urals and Siberian Federal Districts, nevertheless, in the North-West Federal District it amounted to a larger amount – 7.2 % against 2.2 % in the Urals and 4.9 % in Siberia. This situation, of course, is related to the peculiarities of those reproduction processes [14] that occur in the agricultural sector of specific regions of the District and determine the vector of dynamics of changes in sown areas, which can be judged from the information in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, in 2021, the level of crop area of 2000 was not restored – both in the whole of the Russian Federation and in all regions of the North-West, with the exception of the Kaliningrad region. At the same time, out of 9 constituent entities of the Federation of the North-West Federal District, in six of them, the sown areas in 2021 amounted to the indicator of 2000 from 28.6 to 49.9 %, including less than 40 % in the Arkhangelsk and Pskov regions, as well as the Republic of Karelia.

The processes of reduction of sown areas in the regions directly determine the scale of arable land not

used in them. Although in the past few years, both in the country as a whole and in the North-West, there has been a downward trend in their rates, however, in 2020 (Table 2) in three regions of the NWFD (the Komi Republic, the Vologda regions and Pskov regions), the disposal of arable land continued and amounted to 0.4 to 5.7 percentage points.

The above processes with land use in the agricultural sector correlate in the regions of the Northwestern Federal District with the volume of reduction in the total area of agricultural land and the preservation of these indicators to date. So, for example, more than 500 thousand hectares are still excluded from use in the Novgorod region, and in four subjects of the NWFD their area exceeds 800 thousand hectares, including in the Pskov region – 1.4 million hectares, the Arkhangelsk region – 1.6 thousand hectares, which indicates a fairly significant scale of work in the near future on the return of agricultural land to economic circulation. Moreover, in recent years, it has not been possible to reduce the high proportion of unused agricultural land (over 50 % of their available area) in five out of nine regions of the NWFD (Table 3).

Meanwhile, as can be seen from the data in Table 4, the annual areas of their input are not sufficient for an accelerated increase in agricultural production in the conditions of the North-West. In general, in the District from 2017 to 2020, from 32 to 52 thousand hectares of agricultural land annually returned to economic circulation, while in regions with the largest areas of their disposal, these figures were less than 500 hectares, despite the increase in growth rates in individual subjects Federation.

The Kaliningrad, Novgorod and Pskov regions were notable leaders in these processes in 2020, however, here, too, the scale of putting land into circulation is not significant, which affects the overall situation. So, if in general in the Russian Federation the share of the area of agricultural land involved in the turnover to the total area of land of this category was 3.8 % in 2020, then in the NWFD it was only 0.9 %. The situation in the

Republics of Komi and Karelia, as well as the Arkhangelsk region, is especially noteworthy, where this figure was less than 0.5 %.

The reasons for this current situation are, first of all, the high labor intensity of work to identify unused lands, large areas of which are in the status of unclaimed land shares and not registered as land plots, as well as their further transfer to municipal ownership. The unsatisfactory ameliorative state of agricultural lands, their waterlogging, overgrowing with shrubs and forests play a significant role, which leads to significant financial costs (from 10 to 250 thousand rubles per 1 ha, depending on the region and specific land mass) for the return them into circulation for the purpose of entrepreneurial activity in agriculture.

This confirms the conclusion about the relevance and significance of the activities of the Program implemented until 2030 to return retired lands to circulation, including the need to conduct a complete inventory of all lands. Without this work, it is difficult to determine further directions for land use and incentives to attract those who want to acquire them.

As studies have shown, in the current economic conditions, when, on the one hand, there is significant budgetary support for agricultural producers, including separately allocated funds for putting agricultural land into circulation, and on the other hand, resource constraints are growing, it is necessary to develop and implement in each region of programs that ensure the demand for land. This is what will allow us to take into account the peculiarities of the processes of differentiation of agricultural production under the influence of the modern institutional environment [15; 16]. Moreover, the implementation of measures to ensure the efficient use of agricultural land should be constant, i. e. it is important to prevent overgrowth of newly plowed lands. Therefore, a thorough study is required for the future of specific areas of their use, which depends on many factors, including the reclamation state of the land, rental potential, location, possible profitability of entrepreneurial activity, etc. but also environmentally justified, taking into account the current natural and climatic realities" [17, p. 139].

In general, only 9 % of meliorative systems in the Northwestern Federal District are currently in good condition. The experience of the Leningrad region in implementing measures to reanimate the reclamation infrastructure, increase land fertility and the efficiency of their use clearly indicates the intensification of work only if there are appropriate opportunities from the regional budget and a source of extra-budgetary resources. At the same time, the further expansion of agricultural land use is hindered by the high costs of funds and time for clarifying the boundaries of land plots and their cadastral registration, while the amounts of support for involving land in circulation are insignificant. So, for example, in 2021, only 1 002.6 thousand

rubles were allocated from the budget of the Leningrad Region as subsidies for cadastral registration of land on an area of 1982.1 hectares, under an agreement to conduct cadastral work on the formation of land plots from agricultural land with 9 municipalities, as well as 4 farmers for a total amount of 312.3 thousand rubles for their cadastral registration of 90.4 hectares of land. Considering that in this region the area of unclaimed land shares that need to be converted into land plots and put on the cadastral register was more than 26 thousand hectares in 2020, we can conclude that the likelihood of delaying the timing and duration of the period of these works, if not support measures will be increased. The same is relevant for all subjects of the Federation in the Northwestern Federal District, so it can be predicted that the use of digital technologies will contribute to reducing the labor intensity of work on land management for putting land into circulation.

The creation in 2013 of the "Electronic Atlas of Agricultural Lands" showed the importance of improving the information support of the agro-industrial complex, including the software platform in the context of the accumulation of significant amounts of data and the requirements for their accelerated processing. Therefore, it seems relevant to further increase the capacity of the Unified Federal Information System on Agricultural Land and Land Used or Granted for Agriculture as part of Land of Other Categories. Therefore, we can talk about the strategic importance of not only economic, but also organizational factors [18] in the implementation of the Program for putting land into circulation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study allows us to conclude that it is necessary and possible to implement a system of measures to ensure sustainable import substitution in the food market on the basis of a special State program for the return to circulation of previously abandoned agricultural land. Sufficiently low rates of reduction in the area of unused land in the conditions of the North-West are of an objective nature and are determined primarily both by the haste of agrarian reforms to transform the structure of land ownership in the 90s of the twentieth century, and by the preservation of unfavorable conditions of the market environment for quite a long time. This does not allow an efficient use of the existing natural, including the land potential of rural areas of all, without exception, regions included in the Northwestern Federal District, and significantly increase their contribution to the country's food balance. Given the scale of the forthcoming work on the collection and verification of data on the actual location of agricultural land in economic use for each land plot, carrying out cadastral and land management activities, organizing competitive production, an increase in budget support and more active state regulation of land relations at the present stage are objectively required.

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