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Contribution of the Geographic Research Area, ORR, to
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Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and
Policies, 1958-1963

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II. D. Developments in Agriculture (Corn Program)

Since 1953, Krushchev has launched a series of forced-draft programs to increase agricultural production. One of the most recent and radical, the Soviet Corn Program, which calls for the planting of 28 million hectares of corn a year by 1960, was formally initiated in 1955. This program introduced the radical shift from emphasis on the production of corn for grain to production for green fodder and silage in an attempt to guarantee the success of the ambitious livestock program of the USSR. Corn acreages rose sharply from 10.6 million acres in 1954 to 44.2 million in 1955 and 59 million in 1956. Thereafter, acreages dropped to 45.2 million in 1957 and to somewhat less than this in 1958. Acreages in excess of the 1956 level can be achieved only by (1) increasing the corn area within established corn-producing areas, or (2) expanding into new and climatically marginal areas. The first involves diversion of land from other crops to corn or the reduction of land in fallow, thus introducing problems of soil deterioration or erosion. The second involves extension into (and possibly beyond the limits of) areas where corn can be grown only for silage or green fodder. To the north, low summer temperatures and late spring and early fall frosts limit the practical corn-producing area. In European USSR and

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Central Asia to the southeast and east, summer droughts of major magnitude are limiting factors. On the basis of climate, it therefore seems unlikely that the acreage goal set for the profitable production of corn can be attained.

Under the current Corn Program, the USSR has sharply increased the over-all harvest, primarily of silage and fodder corn, by introducing large-scale corn production into entirely new, more northern areas in which corn can be grown for these purposes only. In 1956, when corn acreages reached their peak, only about half of the total was planted where corn would ripen as grain. Of the remainder, about 28 percent was planted in areas where only low-quality green fodder could be expected.

The rapid and, to a degree, arbitrary expansion of cultivation produced very spotty results that varied with the region and the year under consideration. By contrast with the extensive corn belt of the United States, only small sections of the USSR are capable of high sustained grain yields. These include the piedmont regions of the Carpathian and Caucasus Mountains, the Georgian Lowlands, and irrigated areas in southern Central Asia. In the remainder of the established corn-growing area, yields tend to be good; but they become less reliable in the southern Ukraine and the Lower Don -- Lower Volga regions. Yields in the new silage- and fodder-producing regions have been fair to poor, reflecting the fact that corn has been planted in areas that are marginal

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for dependable corn growth. Large crop losses resulted from unexpected frosts and low temperatures throughout much of central European USSR in 1956 and by severe drought in North Caucasus -- Lower Volga Region in 1957.

The Soviets, however, are heavily committed to the Corn Program, particularly since it plays a key role in their even more ambitious livestock and dairy goals. Although major emphasis will continue to be placed on the production of silage and fodder, unsatisfactory yields in the greater part of the fodder-producing regions will force them to rely heavily on production from the silage-corn areas. The most critical feed-consuming regions, the central part of the European USSR and the Baltic-Belorussian Region, yield low-quality fodder only. Up to 1958, fodder production as a whole fell far short of needs, as attested by Krushchev's statement that fodder production must be increased four- or five-fold if the Soviet Union is to achieve its livestock and dairy goals. Fodder yields of a magnitude sufficient to meet requirements of the planned livestock and dairy industries for 1961 cannot be obtained by solely increasing the corn acreage in the USSR.