

The Russia-Ukraine War and Food Security: Local and Global Perspectives

Presentation by Diana Mincyte, Ph.D., Social Science Department

On May 4, 2022, Sociologist Dr. Diana Mincyte presented research before an online audience, for the final Works in The Works event of academic year 2021-2022. For the group assembled, the terrifying conflict in the Ukraine was in the headlines every day, and some Ukrainian nationals present in the audience (and their families) were wished well, by the speaker, prior to the talk. The topic was the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and in particular, how food supply is impacted. Another key insight presented was of a richly interconnected, interdependent and fragile global system. The photos shown included pictures of young women in uniform, a two door Honda riddled with bullets, and a map of air raid sirens lit up in red. These helped convey the immediacy and atrocity of war.

Ukraine is a huge country. It takes 14 hours to drive from Lviv to Kharkiv. Seed oil is their main export, along with corn, wheat and iron. Dr. Mincyte stated that Ukraine has three million tons of wheat in silos, left over from 2020, but no way to export it. Under siege are four primary shipping ports, Mariupol, Kherson, Mykolaiv and Odessa, and key roads and bridges have been destroyed by Russia forces. Agricultural land is wasted by mines and cluster ammunition. Feed for livestock is subject to shortages. The invasion exacerbates existing crisis conditions for food growers (felt globally), stemming from the pandemic, drought and inflation. As a result, food insecurity prevails, especially in remote areas of Ukraine. In the words of Professor Mincyte, “the level of crisis is astonishing.”

Mincyte stated that “horizontal networks” (friends and family elsewhere) have been most effective in providing material support to those facing food shortages. Western governments have been shipping supplies to Poland, hoping that volunteers there will brave travel into war zones to deliver them to Ukrainians in need. The speaker noted that food insecurity is the best predictor of political instability, and mentioned the Arab Spring, Russian and French revolutions as examples. An intense discussion followed, with shock and concern expressed.

Review by David Lee