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**FUNCTIONS OF THE RUSSIAN RURAL AREAS AND THEIR FULFILLMENT**

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**Abstract**

In the article the natural, material, and human potential of the Russian rural areas has been defined. Their national and internal functions aimed at life support, preservation, and development of the population have been analyzed. The imbalance between the fulfillment by the rural areas of their main national production function (ensuring food security and independence of the country) and the standard of the population's life has been noted. The comparative analysis has been made in relation to the goals of the *State Program for the Integrated Development of the Rural Areas and Its Resource Support*. The measures to legally prioritize the development of the rural areas have been suggested.

**Keywords**

Natural – Material – Development of the rural areas

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## Introduction

Rural areas are a natural and anthropogenic (reproducible by the human labor) habitat outside the administratively determined city line. They include the entire resource potential of the suburban territory: agricultural land, forests, ponds, minerals, buildings and constructions, livestock, machinery and mechanisms, roads, utility lines, etc., as well as human resources – the population permanently residing in the rural areas. As a socioterritorial subsystem of the society, they are an economic and cultural society characterized by economic, architectural, planning, and social features and fulfill both external (national) functions aimed at the urban population and the society as a whole, and internal ones aimed at its own population.

## Methods

The abstract-logical method, the method of systems analysis, the sociological method, and the method of expert assessments were used in the study.

The statistical base of the study included the data from the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation on the natural, material, and human potential of the rural areas of the Russian Federation at the beginning of 2019, 2020, the dynamics (for 1995 – 2019) and the forecast of the rural population for the period until 2036, fertility and mortality in the rural areas, changes in the rural settlement network between the All-Russian population censuses of 1989 and 2010, income of the urban and rural population, the development of the labor market, the spread of poverty in the urban and rural areas, as well as the provision of rural residents with the social infrastructure.

In order to characterize the dynamics of the ratio of the income obtained by the urban and rural population, the following indicators were used:

- The average monthly nominal accrued wages in agriculture and in the whole economy of the Russian Federation,
- The resources that were available for rural and urban households on average per one member of the household, including all money and in-kind receipts in the household in the current period, borrowed funds, and the savings of the past years used for the current consumption.

The retrospective period of the income analysis was 2010 – 2018.

The development of the urban and rural labor market was characterized by average annual indicators of employment and unemployment of the population aged 15 – 72 years old for 2010 – 2018.

The comparative assessment of the spread of poverty in the urban and rural areas was made according to the 2017 poverty level interpreted as the ratio of the population with the money income below the subsistence level approved by the Government of the Russian Federation for this period. The poverty level among the rural population was assessed by sociodemographic groups of the population and depending on the number of residents in the settlement.



In order to characterize the dynamics of the social infrastructure development, the authors used the indicators of average radius of the population's accessibility to the main social facilities: kindergartens, schools, clubs, hospitals, outpatient clinics, medical and obstetric centers in 1990 and 2018, calculated according to the data on the number of these facilities on the populated territory of the Russian Federation.

## Results

The rural territories (rural areas) of Russia occupy almost 1/6 of the land on the planet Earth. They have rich natural, material, and human resources. The land fund is 1.7 bln ha, including the agricultural land – 222 mln ha, and the forest fund – 870.7 mln ha. The water fund of the rural areas is 227 mln ha. The fixed assets of the main types of the economic activity in the rural areas – agriculture, forestry, hunting, fishing, and fish farming – make up 3 % of the fixed assets in the Russian economy. 37.2 mln people live in the rural areas (25.3 % of the Russian population), including 53 % of the employable age, 63 % having professional education and being able to make a worthy contribution to the socioeconomic development of the rural areas and the country as a whole (Figure 1).

NATURAL RESOURCES	MATERIAL RESOURCES	HUMAN RESOURCES
Land resources <b>1,712.5</b> mln ha  Agricultural lands <b>222</b> mln ha  Forest resources <b>870.7</b> mln ha  Water resources <b>226.7</b> mln ha	Fixed assets of the rural and forest sector, hunting, fishery and fish farming <b>RUB 6,462</b> bln (3.1 % of the total value of the fixed assets of the Russian economy)  Working assets of the rural and forest sector, hunting, fishery and fish farming <b>RUB 2,034</b> bln  Social, utility, and road and transport infrastructure	Rural population 37.2 mln (25.3 % of the Russian population)  Average age <b>40</b> years old  People of the employable age <b>19.8</b> mln ( <b>53</b> %)  Ratio of people who have professional education <b>63</b> %

Figure 1  
Modern Russian Rural Areas

The Russian rural areas fulfill the following national functions<sup>1</sup>:

*The production function* (meeting needs of the society in food and raw materials for industry, ensuring food security and independence of the country, needs in forest, hunting, fishing and fish farming products, as well as other nonagricultural products),

*The labor support function* (ensuring the citizens' employment in the I and III areas of the agro-industrial complex (AIC),

<sup>1</sup> L. V. Bondarenko, *Rossiyskoye selo v epokhu peremen* (Moscow: Departmental Security Service of the Ministry of Agriculture of Russia Federal State Unitary Enterprise, 2003)

*The demographic function* (expanded reproduction of a physically and spiritually healthy generation and compensation for the narrowed reproduction of the population in cities),

*The labor-resource function* (providing the city with the labor force that migrated from the rural areas and, first of all, in jobs that are not demanded by the urban population; the use of employable rural people living in the suburbs at urban enterprises; involvement of the employable rural population to work at enterprises located in the rural areas by urban economic entities (branches),

*The sociocultural function* (preservation of a specific rural lifestyle and national spiritual mentality – moral postulates, customs, ceremonies, folk traditions, natural monuments, architecture, other historical and artistic values located in nonurban territories, replenishment of the national cultural heritage with new spiritual values),

*The environmental function* (maintaining the ecological balance throughout the country, preserving, restoring and improving the potential of wildlife – soil, water, vegetation, atmosphere, preserving natural and cultural landscapes, maintaining nature reserves, wildlife reserves, national parks, neutralizing and disposing of municipal wastes),

*The recreational and agro-recreational function* (placement of recreational, health and tourism establishments, summer houses and garden plots of the urban population in the rural areas, other forms of outdoor recreation, provision of recreational facilities and citizens with the rural social and engineering infrastructure to be used during rest periods),

*The housing function* (placement of residential houses (cottages) of the citizens who have gainful employment in a city in the rural areas, providing them with the rural social and engineering infrastructure),

*The spatial and communication function* (placement and maintenance of roads, power lines, communications, water supply, and other utilities), and

*The social control over the territory function* (assistance to state authorities and local self-government in ensuring the public order and security in poorly populated territories and settlements, protection of border zones, subsoil, land, water and forest resources, flora and fauna).

In terms of importance and determining impact, this is the production function of the rural areas in the system of functions that is absolutely primary (with the highest priority).

The internal functions of the rural areas in the aggregated form can be defined as life support, preservation and development of own population. Not only the rural, but also the urban areas and the whole society are objectively interested in fulfilling them, because the external and internal functions of the rural areas are closely interconnected and interdependent like production and consumption. At the same time, in the context of technical and technological modernization of production, the increase in the impact of fulfilling introverted rural functions on the fulfillment of its extravert functions is an objective regularity. In other words, the implementation of increasingly complex tasks on the life support for the rural population and bringing closer working and living conditions in the urban and rural areas are becoming increasingly important factors when fulfilling production and other external functions by the rural areas.

In this regard, it is possible to say that the definition of *internal rural functions* has a rather conditional nature. It does not mean at all that improving the living conditions of rural producers is an internal affair of the agricultural sector. The state that is meant to create the necessary economic conditions for the adequate functioning of the agrarian subsystem is also responsible for their provision.

It is important to note that the rural functions are not something frozen and unchanging. They change, as well as social needs, interests, productive forces, and production relations do. Thus, this is an objective trend to improve the role of the rural areas in processing agricultural products and fulfilling other nonagricultural production functions and organizing the recreation of the population. At the same time, it is necessary to reduce the extrovert labor-resource function of the rural areas and its role as a donor of labor for the urban areas. When creating socially equal conditions of work and life in the urban areas and the widespread development of nonagricultural activities, the migration of the rural population to the urban areas will cease, although the number of people employed in agriculture will decrease.

The use of the rural areas for the neutralization and disposal of urban wastes has a transient nature. This function of the rural areas should disappear when new technologies for the neutralization and disposal of wastes are developed and introduced.

Currently, in Russia there is a considerable imbalance between the contribution of the rural areas to ensuring the country's food security and independence and the level of its own life support. Over the recent years agriculture has become one of the fastest growing sectors of the Russian economy. Over the period from 2014 to 2018, the growth in the physical volume of gross agricultural output amounted to 14.4 % while the Russian GDP index was 3.4 %. National agricultural producers almost completely provide the country with the main types of food products. For a number of main commodity items, the standards established by the *Food Security Doctrine* have been exceeded.

The agricultural export is growing. Over the recent five years, with a steady decline in agricultural import, the exports have grown by 30 %. In 2018, agricultural products and food worth USD 25.8 bln were delivered abroad. In 2019, this figure was forecasted in the amount of USD 25 bln. Today, Russia is the world leader in wheat supplies. Russian agricultural products are supplied to 160 countries. They are represented in the markets of the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Africa, the European Union, CIS countries.

At the meeting of the State Council (December 26, 2019) dedicated to the state agrarian policy, V.V. Putin, the President of Russia, pointed out that in the future the Russian AIC would not be able to successfully develop, go to new levels, attract young qualified personnel capable of techno-technological modernization of production if the rural areas continued to lag behind the urban areas in terms of social amenities, household comfort, and infrastructure development<sup>2</sup>.

There are many reasons why the rural areas are not attractive as a place for life and work. They determine the overflow of human resources from village to city and prevent the formation of a labor potential in the rural areas that is adequate to the requirements of the

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<sup>2</sup> Zasedaniye Gosudarstvennogo soveta po voprosu "Gosudarstvennaya agrarnaya politika – effektivnoye selskokhozyaystvennoye proizvodstvo i razvitiye selskikh territoriy". December 26, 2019. Retrieved from: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62418>

scientific and technological revolution. However, according to the authors' long-term mass sociological studies carried out as part of the annual monitoring of the state of the rural areas, the main one is low income. A general indicator of the material well-being of the population is the average per capita disposable resources. The convergence of this indicator in the rural and urban areas is slow and unstable. The maximum numerical value of the ratio of indicators in the rural and urban areas for 2010 – 2018 had been achieved in 2017, but in 2018 the situation changed again – up to 64.9 % (Table 1).

Years	Rural households	Urban households	Ratio, %
2010	10,128.6	16,265.1	62.3
2011	11,745.8	18,291.1	64.2
2012	13,320.3	20,405.0	65.3
2013	14,191.7	23,645.0	60.0
2014	15,802.3	25,347.5	62.3
2015	16,639.5	25,525.7	65.2
2016	16,971.0	26,719.7	63.5
2017	18,309.1	27,206.8	67.3
2018	19,188.5	29,556.9	64.9

Table 1

The Resources that are Available for Rural and Urban Households in the Russian Federation (Average per Household Member, RUB per Month)

Taking into account the fact that the agricultural production is the main area of employment in the rural areas, payment for the agricultural labor is fundamental for the rural family income. However, it remains extremely low, the relative convergence with the level of wages in the economy as a whole is unstable and insufficient, and the absolute gap determining the difference in the purchasing power of families is increasing. In 2018, the average monthly nominal accrued wages in agriculture was only 59.2 % of the average Russian level. The absolute difference in the amount of the average monthly wage in agriculture and on average in the economy increased from RUB 10,757 in 2010 up to RUB 17,846 in 2018 (Table 2).

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2018 as to 2010, %
In the entire economy, RUB	20,952	23,369	26,629	29,792	32,495	34,030	36,709	39,167	43,724	208,7
Agriculture	10,195	11,973	13,511	15,146	17,150	19,222	21,345	23,565	25,878	253,8
Correlation to the average Russian level, %	48.7	51.2	50.7	50.8	52.8	56.5	58.1	60.2	59.2	x
Absolute difference, RUB	10,757	11,396	13,118	14,646	15,345	14,808	15,364	15,602	17,846	165.9

Table 2

Average Monthly Nominal Accrued Wages for Workers of the Russian Federation

In 2017, every fourth resident of the Russian village lived below the poverty line that was RUB 10,088 per month, while among the urban population the share of the population with money income below this line was 8 %. Among the rural children under 18, 45 % belonged to the category of poor ones. Among the young people aged 18 – 24, there were 30 % of the poor ones. The lowest number of the poor people (5.7 %) was among the people aged 65 and older. They were paid pension money and had a farm household. The poverty level is differentiated depending on the number of people living in a rural settlement. This indicator is the highest in the rural areas with the population of 201 – 1,000 people, being 29.4 %.

Intersettlement differences in the levels of employment and unemployment considerably contribute to the inequality of the rural and urban areas in terms of income and the incidence of poverty. During 2011 – 2018, in both the rural and urban areas there had been a tendency to increase employment. However, in the urban areas it is more stable and dynamic than in the rural ones. As a result, the arrearage of the rural areas in terms of employment is growing. During the period under analysis (2010 – 2018), the gap between the urban and rural areas in terms of unemployment ranged from 1.6 times in 2015 to 1.9 times in 2012 (Table 3).

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Employment rate</b>									
Rural area	57.8	59.4	60.2	60.2	60.6	60.7	60.7	59.7	59.6
Urban area	64.4	65.4	66.5	66.3	66.9	66.8	67.3	67.4	67.5
<b>Unemployment rate</b>									
Rural area	10.6	9.6	8.5	8.3	7.9	7.9	8.0	8.0	7.3
Urban area	6.3	5.5	4.5	4.6	4.3	4.8	4.8	4.4	4.1

Table 3  
Employment and Unemployment Rates in the Russian Federation  
(aged 15 – 72 y.o., on average per year, %)

Insufficient investments in the social area of rural settlements and the so-called “optimization” of this area providing the closure of costly social facilities of low capacity decreased the density of organizations and institutions providing social services and, as a result, increased the radius of their accessibility (Table 4).

	1990	2018
Kindergarten	13.7	22.0
School	12.6	16.4
Club	11.1	14.2
Hospital	36.9	88.0
Outpatient clinics	28.8	39.5
Medical and obstetric center	12.8	15.1

Table 4  
The Average Radius of Accessibility to Social Facilities in the Russian Rural Areas, km

The rural housing stock remains mainly undeveloped. Water supply is provided in 60.6 % of the total area of residential premises (in the urban areas this indicator is 91 %), sewage – in 49.5 % (88.8 %), and hot water supply – in 37.5 % (81.6 %). In terms of provision with all types of improvement, the rural housing stock is 2.3 times lower than the urban one (34.2 and 79.1 %, respectively). The share of the residential premises with the degree of wear of more than 70 % is 3.2 % as compared to 0.9 % of the urban areas.

Unsatisfactory life support of the rural population affects the national functions of the rural area, especially the functions of social control over the territory and demographics. Due to the natural decline and migration outflow, over the recent 25 years (1995 – 2019) the rural population had decreased by 2.9 mln people. According to the forecast of the *Federal State Statistics Service*, by the beginning of 2036, the rural population will have decreased by another 2.8 mln and will amount to 34.4 mln.

For the period between the All-Russian Population Censuses in 1989 and 2010 the rural settlement network had lost more than 9 thous. settlements. The number of rural settlements without any population had increased by more than 10 thousand. There is a process of reducing the rural settlement network that causes a rise in the cost of social arrangement of the rural areas (Figure 2).

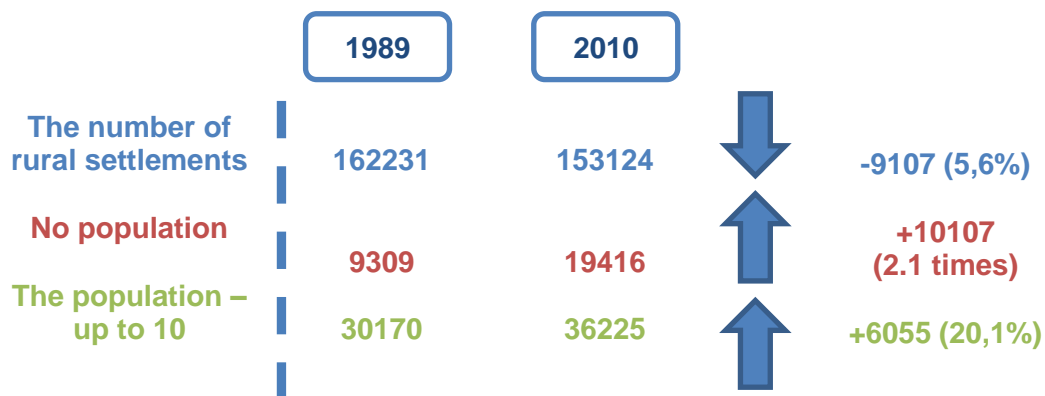


Figure 2  
Rural Settlement Network of the Russian Federation (Based on the Census Data)

The depopulation of the Russian rural areas is also proved by the data of the All-Russian Agricultural Census. In 2016, the share of personal subsidiary and other individual households of citizens located in rural settlements with the abandoned land and empty houses amounted to 13.7 %. In the Bryansk, Ivanovo, Kostroma, Smolensk, Tver, and Pskov Regions, the share of escheated farms reaches 30 – 36 %. The peak indicator is 44 % in the Sakhalin region. The demographic function is also declining. Since 2015, the traditionally higher birth rate in the rural areas had dropped below the urban level. In 2018 it amounted to 10.7 births per 1,000 inhabitants as compared to 11 in the urban areas. During 2000 – 2018 the peak of fertility in rural settlements (14.7) occurred in 2012 with the indicator of 12.8 among the urban citizens. Mortality in rural settlements, although declining, remains above the urban indicator. As a result, the rural areas considerably exceed the urban ones in intensity (per 1,000 inhabitants) of the natural population decline. Thus, in 2018, they were three times higher than those of the cities. In order to solve systemic problems in the social development of the rural areas and to achieve the national goal on creating a highly productive export-oriented sector in the AIC developing on the basis of modern technologies and provided with highly qualified personnel<sup>3</sup>, as ordered by V.V. Putin, the President of Russia, *the State Program for the Integrated Development of the Rural Areas for 2020 –*

<sup>3</sup> Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiyskoy Federatsii No. 204 "O natsionalnykh tselyakh i strategicheskikh zadachakh razvitiya Rossiyskoy Federatsii na period do 2024 goda". May 7, 2018. Retrieved from: <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/43027>

2025 was developed and approved on May 31, 2019. In accordance with its passport, the volume of its resource support from all sources (the federal budget, the consolidated budgets of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation, and nonbudgetary funds) is RUB 2.3 trl, including RUB 1.1 trl from the federal budget<sup>4</sup>. Per year, this is 12 times more than was directed to the social arrangement of the Russian rural areas under the two previous programs. The goal of the *State Program for the Integrated Development of the Rural Areas* is to create comfortable living conditions in the rural areas and to bring the level of life comfort of the rural population to the urban one. However, its resource provision is far from adequate to achieve this ambitious goal, taking into account that the need in funds to solve only top-priority tasks in the rural areas is estimated in the amount of RUB 6 trl. This figure was mentioned by the Minister of Agriculture of Russia at the offsite meeting of the Government Commission on AIC and Sustainable Development of the Rural Areas in Voronezh on May 21, 2019<sup>5</sup>. The assessment was based on the analysis of the state of rural settlements, covering 133 thous. rural settlements with the population of more than 37 mln people (99 % of the total rural population of Russia). At the same time, RUB 2.3 trl provided by the *Program for the Social Development of the Rural Areas* allowed to considerably advance on the way of anticipating the rural and urban areas in terms of the life level and quality. However, in accordance with the *On the Federal Budget for 2020 – 2022 Federal Law*, the resource support for the *Program* from the federal budget decreased to 24.3 % of the amount provided for by the passport, with a decreasing trend from 45.3 % in 2020 down to 18.1 % in 2022. Even if to assume that in the second triennium of the *Program* implementation it will be financed from the federal budget, the total deviation from the passport will be 30.9 % (Figure 3).

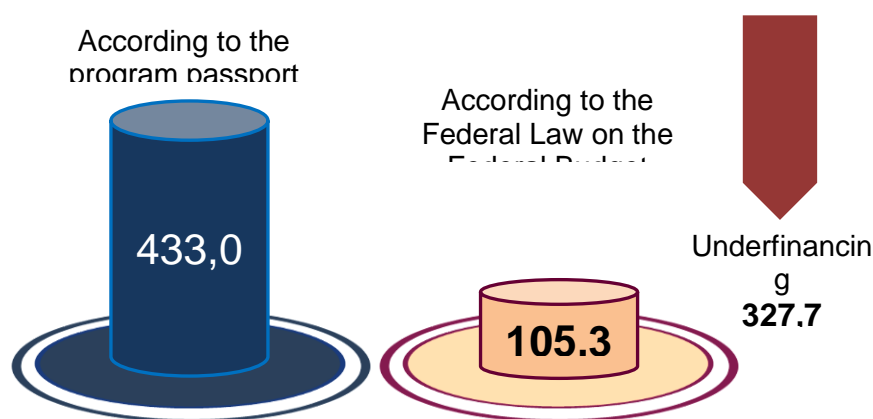


Figure 3  
Financing the *State Program for the Integrated Development of the Rural Areas* from the Federal Budget in 2020 – 2022, RUB bln.

<sup>4</sup> Postanovleniye Pravitelstva Rossiyskoy Federatsii No. 696 “Ob utverzhdenii gosudarstvennoy programmy Rossiyskoy Federatsii “Kompleksnoye razvitiye selb skikh territoriy” i o vnesenii izmeneniy v nekotorye akty Pravitelstva Rossiyskoy Federatsii”. May 31, 2019. Retrieved from: <http://government.ru/docs/36905>

<sup>5</sup> Zasedaniye Pravitelstvennoy komissii po voprosam agropromyshlennogo kompleksa i ustoychivogo razvitiya selskikh territoriy. May 21, 2019. Retrieved from: <http://government.ru/news/36712>

## Conclusion

At the meeting of the *State Council on the State Agrarian Policy* on December 26, 2019, V.V. Putin, the President of Russia, defined the development of the rural areas as a priority of the country's socioeconomic development at the present stage<sup>6</sup>. In order to immediately achieve this goal, it is necessary to legalize the priority of rural development. This will create conditions for the rural areas to fulfill their internal function on life support, to preserve and develop their own population, and based on this, to optimize the fulfillment of national functions and, above all, the main one – ensuring food security and independence of Russia. A practical step in this area should be the development and adoption of the Federal Law *On Sustainable Development of the Rural Areas*, where in order to accumulate and efficiently use the funds allocated for the rural development, it is necessary to create a system of nonbudgetary rural development funds (federal, regional, and municipal) formed by using the federal budget and the consolidated budgets of the Russian constituent entities.

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<sup>6</sup> Zasedaniye Gosudarstvennogo soveta po voprosu “Gosudarstvennaya agrarnaya politika – effektivnoye selskokhozyaystvennoye proizvodstvo i razvitiye selskikh territoriy”. December 26, 2019. Retrieved from: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/62418>