

Molotschna Agricultural Census for 1917

State Archive of Zaporozhye Oblast

Fond 254 Opis 1 Files 2, 7, 7a, 42-57; Fond 255 Opis 1 Files 443, 446, 460

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Between 1916 and 1917, Russia conducted large-scale statistical surveys that provide a vital window into the country's demographics. The 1916 All-Russian Agricultural Census primarily aimed to inventory food resources. It recorded rural population sizes, livestock numbers, cultivated land, and grain reserves to manage wartime supplies. By 1917, the scope expanded into a more ambitious Agricultural and Land Census, designed to facilitate agrarian reform. This iteration added complex data regarding landownership and land-use categories.

The documentation from 1917 included the following:

- Family Structure: Head of household, kinship, sex, and age.
- Assets: Livestock types and agricultural machinery.
- Labor: Family participation in farm work and notes on military mobilization.

While these records are invaluable, they were not intended as exhaustive demographic surveys. Consequently, the names of all family members were often omitted, as was the case with the Molotschna census. Despite these gaps and the chaos of the era, these censuses remain the definitive primary sources for understanding Russia's pre-revolutionary social landscape.

Examples of the card, translated into English:

The following key population data was gathered:

1. Household composition

- Number of people in each peasant household
- Family structure (e.g., extended vs. nuclear families)
- Age and gender breakdown of members

2. Labor capacity

- How many people were able to work
- Division between:
 - Adult male workers
 - Adult female workers
 - Children contributing to farm labor
- Seasonal or hired laborers, if any

3. Social and economic status

- Whether households were:
 - Landowners
 - Tenants
 - Landless peasants
- Indicators of wealth (often inferred from land, livestock, and tools rather than income)

4. Occupation and economic role

- Primary involvement in farming

- Secondary activities (e.g., crafts, trade, or seasonal work)

5. Military absence (very important at the time)

- Number of men absent due to service in World War I
- Impact of conscription on available labor in villages

Why this population data mattered

- It showed how war had drained rural labor, leaving many farms short-handed
- It revealed inequalities between richer and poorer peasants
- It helped authorities estimate food production capacity and plan redistribution

The census treated people primarily as part of the agricultural workforce, giving a detailed picture of who lived in rural Russia, how families were structured, and—crucially—who was actually available to work the land during a period of crisis.

For genealogists, this census provides the most comprehensive census available to researchers after the [1835 Revision List](#).

The census is available as a [pdf document](#) and also as an [Excel file](#).

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