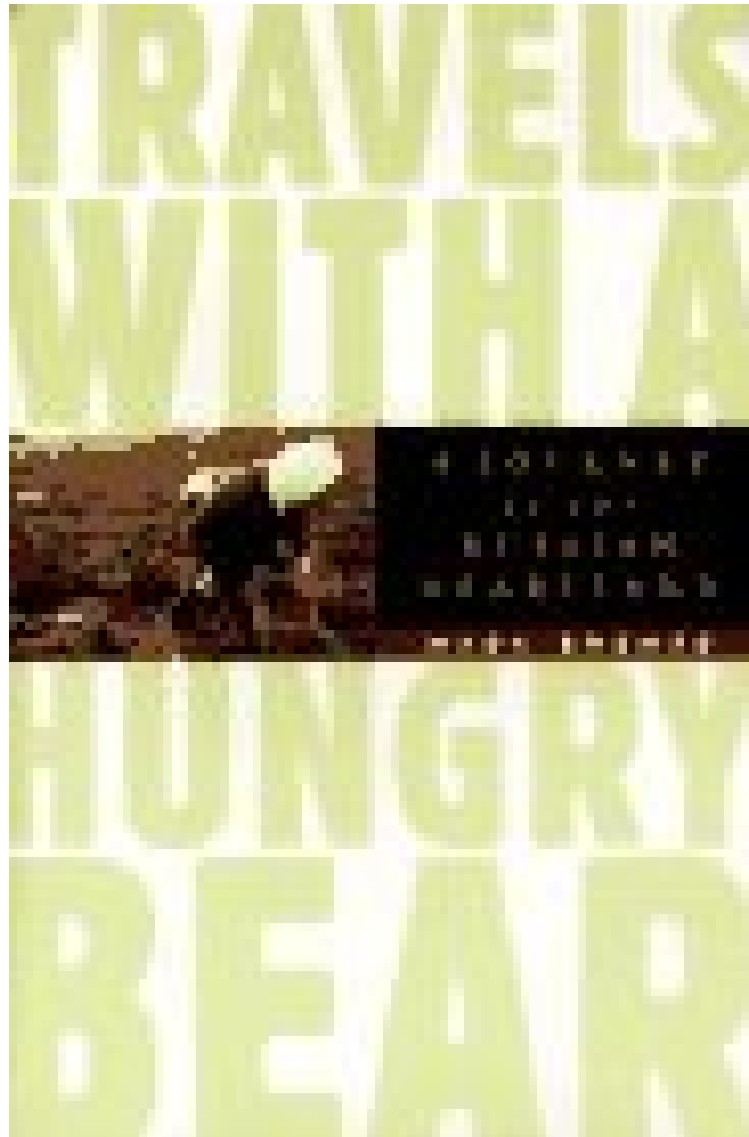


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Travels With a Hungry Bear: A Journey to the Russian Heartland

Mark Kramer

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Mark Kramer : Travels With a Hungry Bear: A Journey to the Russian Heartland before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Travels With a Hungry Bear: A Journey to the Russian Heartland:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Not recommended.By JayfredThis book about his travels bored me.2 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Mega Bureaucracy: What really killed the USSRBy bjcefolajI enjoyed this book.In America we take food for granted, it is always around. Whether in a book store or a baseball game, at the

Grand Canyon or in a church we assume the availability of food: the ubiquitous coffee shop, restaurant, or snack bar. We may not have money, we may worry about the calories, but never do we fear the possibility that food simply may not exist at a given place and time. It is inconceivable that we could actually be somewhere, hungry, and no matter our wealth or stature not be in a position to have food. Such a circumstance was common in the USSR, it is the meaning of 'shortages'. This book explores some of the dirty details behind soviet farming and its constant shortfalls. How quotas encouraged destructive practices, and how corporate structure is unfit to manage the routine uncertainties inherent in a farm. This isn't the whole story of course, experiencing the USSR in 1989 is like watching only the last "Matrix" movie. You'd know why the series died, but wouldn't understand why it ever lived. Was the USSR always so backwards? If so, how could so much have been sacrificed on its behalf?

An absorbing chronicle of travels, from 1987 to 1993, around the new Russia offers a street-level account of the difficult changes happening there, following the slow breakup of the old system and the efforts to rebuild a nation.

In *Travels with a Hungry Bear*, Mark Kramer, a professor in Boston University's journalism and American studies departments who has written extensively on farming, ventures to the heart of Russia to examine the country's agriculture system and how it impacts the economy. Among his findings is that the vestiges of the Soviet system continue to slow the business of agriculture. Yet the book is not just a collection of hard economic facts; Kramer writes passionately about the land and the people whose livelihood depends on it. From *Publishers Weekly* Kramer (Three Farms), a professor of journalism and American studies at Boston University, takes the unusual approach of probing the character of the Russians by studying their agricultural practices. Sent to the U.S.S.R. in 1987 by the *New York Times* to investigate "why a nation whose farms stretched from Norway to Korea across eleven time zones suffered nearly empty food shops," he returned again every year through 1993, visiting collective farms and interviewing bureaucrats, as well as common laborers. His incisive commentary helps to explain the failure of the command economy to provide for even the most basic needs. With biting humor in one instance, two self-congratulatory party hacks are likened to tubas tuning up; he points out the absurdities of the five-year plans dictated from Moscow and concludes that, despite many willing reformers in the country, "keeping down the Ivanovs was to the Soviet regime what keeping up with the Joneses was in America." Although general readers may find more information here than they need, those interested in how Russia got into its present mess will be greatly rewarded by this impressive reportage. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc. From *Library Journal* Kramer (journalism and American studies, Boston Univ.) offers a fascinating exploration of agriculture, or, more accurately, the failure of agriculture, in the former Soviet Union in the fading days of communism. Kramer journeyed to the Soviet Union from 1987 to 1993 as Gorbachev was introducing perestroika to the dying collective-farm system. The author delves into the Russian character and exposes the country's great inefficiencies due to bureaucratic and socialistic mindsets. Kramer has worked on farms in the United States and makes numerous comparisons of the two countries' agricultural systems, clearly illustrating vast differences that resulted in the USSR's failure to feed its people despite its huge expanse of fertile farmland. Kramer's research is thorough and his writing excellent, though in the end the work will be too detailed for some readers. Melinda Stivers Leach, Precision Editorial Svcs., Wondervu, Colo. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.