

# [***Polish Farmers' Battle with Ukraine Escalates***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BDS-VWF1-JBR6-90HW-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** David Brennan

**Highlight:** A spat over agricultural imports is driving a wedge between the two neighbors, despite close security cooperation.

**Body**

Large protests by Polish farmers against Ukrainian agricultural imports escalated this weekend, as unidentified actors on the Polish side of the shared border destroyed nearly 200 tons of imported grain.

The incident occurred on Saturday night, when a goods train stopped at a station in the village of Kotomierz—close to the northern Polish city of Bydgoszcz—was targeted. Eight wagons were opened, with some 175 tons of Ukrainian corn spilled.

"The details and circumstances are being investigated," Lidia Kowalska, a police spokesperson from Bydgoszcz, said. "At 0930 we received a report about grain that had spilled out, it turned out that it was from eight wagons."

Ukraine's Ministry for Communities, Territories and Infrastructure Development of Ukraine described the act as "vandalism" in a comment to *Ukrainska Pravda*. "The cargo was in transit to the port of Gdansk, from which it was shipped to other countries around the world," the ministry said.

Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov on Monday urged Warsaw to take action. "Those who have damaged Ukrainian grain must be found, neutralized, and punished," he wrote on X, formerly known as [*Twitter*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/twitter?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

"Two friendly civilized European states are interested in this. Such planned demonstration videos and comments have similarities with the Russian hybrid war."

*Newsweek* has contacted the Polish Foreign Ministry by email to request comment.

Polish farmers have for several months been protesting the entry of Ukrainian grain into Poland, blocking major motorways, train lines, and multiple border crossing points in recent weeks.

The tensions stem from a [*European Union*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/european-union?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) decision to allow Ukraine tariff-free access to its markets, part of the bloc's response to Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion. Kyiv has applied to join the [*EU*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/eu?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) as a full member and is currently awaiting the start of membership talks. Ukraine has also been seeking new export routes as Russia chokes Black Sea trade and bombards the country's maritime infrastructure.

Polish grain dealers took advantage of the new arrangement, with a spike in imports leading to record grain stockpiles in 2023. Re-exports have been slowed by a lack of port infrastructure in Poland, meaning prices have remained low.

Polish agricultural protesters are now demanding a ban on Ukrainian agriculture products. They also want an end to restrictions on fertilizer and pesticide use introduced as part of the EU Green Deal.

Farmer grievances loomed large in last year's [*Polish general election*](https://www.newsweek.com/polish-election-offers-hope-ukraine-pis-ko-tusk-eu-nato-russia-1834999?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), when a liberal coalition led by now-Prime Minister Donald Tusk ousted the populist right-wing Law and Justice party. Tusk's new administration has expressed sympathy with the farmers, seeking to address their concerns while maintaining support for Ukraine.

Oleksandr Merezhko, a member of the Ukrainian parliament and the chair of the body's foreign affairs committee, told *Newsweek* that Ukrainian grain "has become a hostage to the internal ***politics*** in Poland."

"Soon in Poland will be local elections, and it might be the reason why new government is reluctant to solve the issue, because it is afraid to cause dissatisfaction of the farmers who are voters."

"We hoped that the new government in Poland would solve the issue but see seems like they don't want to do so. The political reason for that might be that their coalition is rather diverse and shaky."

The European Commission already took action last May, when it introduced an import ban on Ukrainian grain to five neighboring nations. The ban did not apply to grain intended for transit, as the damaged weekend shipment reportedly was.

When that multination ban expired in September, Warsaw introduced its own block on four types of grain, flour, and animal feed coming from Ukraine.

Tusk has sought fresh compromise through the EU to address the escalating tensions. In January, the EU committed to a new "safeguard mechanism" through which it could reimpose emergency tariffs on Ukrainian imports of poultry, eggs and sugar if they risked destabilizing markets. Cereal producers in Poland and elsewhere in Europe want the measures extended.

"To me, the issue should be depoliticized and solved as a purely economic issue on the basis of compromise between economic interests of Ukraine and Poland," Merezhko said. "If it does not work then the parties can turn to the legal dimension with participation of the EU or even the WTO."

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2353595/polish-farmers-protest-ukrainian-agricultural-imports-2024.jpg)

**Graphic**

Polish farmers protest Ukrainian agricultural imports 2024

JOHN MACDOUGALL/AFP via Getty Images

A tractor with a sign reading "Ukraine has drowned us in grain" blocks a highway between Slubice in Poland and Frankfurt an der Oder in eastern Germany, on February 26, 2024. Polish farmers say new agricultural imports from Ukraine are threatening their profitability.

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