

# Belarus Strongman Says Pupils Should Harvest Potatoes

By [AFP](#)

October 04, 2022



Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko harvests potatoes. [president.gov.by](#)

Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko, who once touted vodka and saunas to ward off Covid-19, said on Monday that schoolchildren in the ex-Soviet state should harvest potatoes to be healthy.

Lukashenko has ruled Belarus with an iron fist since 1994 and is known for his folksy eccentricities and radical suggestions.

He fumed that Belarus, arguably the most Soviet country that emerged from the 1991 break-up of the U.S.S.R., did not allow the "mobilization of students to harvest potatoes."

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Students were routinely roped in for harvesting in the Soviet Union.

"With what examples are we bringing up our schoolchildren?" he told a government meeting.

"They say it's exploitation. But how is it exploitation if a person works for five or six hours? It's a pleasure for the parents and good physical training for children."

Lukashenko, a former manager at a collective farm, remains very attached to agriculture.

In 2020, he advocated saunas, a glass of vodka daily and working in farms on tractors to ward off the coronavirus.

Belarus, which borders Ukraine, is a staunch ally of Russia and allowed its territory to be used by Moscow's troops to launch a military operation against Kyiv in February.

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