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Royal farms get £1m in subsidies / David Hencke and Rob Evans

Rich landowners reap bulk of taxpayers' cash at expense of most needy farmers

Royal farms get £1m in subsidies

David Hencke and Rob Evans

The Queen and Prince Charles received a total of more than £1m in EU farm subsidies in the past two years, it was revealed last week.

The figure emerged as the government for the first time published the amount of subsidy each farmer in Britain receives, after a request from the Guardian under the Freedom of Information Act. It showed that major landowners receive the largest subsidies from the taxpayer. Seventeen farmers and agricultural enterprises received more than £1m each last year in help from the taxpayer.

The figures also reveal that hundreds of millions of pounds go to subsidise Britain's agricultural exports, while many developing countries are unable to compete, adding to the huge debt facing Africa.

The largest export subsidy goes to Tate and Lyle, which over two years received £233m from the taxpayer to sell sugar overseas.

A spokesman for Tate and Lyle said the company was put at a disadvantage by the EU's pricing structure on sugar. "[The company's] only option is therefore to export sugar it is unable to sell in the European Union and these payments compensate the company for lower prices it can achieve in the world market."

The scale of taxpayers' subsidies has reopened the arguments on why wealthy landowners and multinationals should receive such generous help.

Michael Wills, the former minister in charge of freedom of information, now running the Help Africa campaign, said: "The release of these figures only reveals what we long suspected -- that taxpayers' money is going to people who don't really need it. It is time this was changed."

Ministers brushed aside objections from landowners to publish the figures, which have for years been a closely guarded secret within Whitehall.

Phil Bloomer of Oxfam, said the figures showed that "east Anglian grain barons and the landed gentry enjoy a bumper cash harvest, while small British farmers struggle to get by". The Queen's main farm at Sandringham in Norfolk has been paid £769,000 in subsidies in the past two years. A spokesman for the Queen rejected any suggestion that she received too much money from the taxpayer. "The Queen is a landowner and a farmer. She receives subsidy, just as any other farmer would do."

A total of £168,000 was given to Prince Charles's organic farm at Highgrove in Gloucestershire during the past two years.

One of Britain's richest men, the Duke of Westminster, who is worth £5bn, received £799,000 in the same period.

The Co-op is one of the top companies receiving the subsidies, but has been pressing for reforms of the payments.

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