

November 3, 2005

## French Farmers Cultivate Ally

### Small Landowners, Subsidy Foes Join to Unveil Big Aid Recipients

By **JULIANE VON REPERT-BISMARCK**  
 DOW JONES NEWSWIRES  
 November 3, 2005; Page A10

MIGNÉ-AUX-ANCES, France -- Jacques Pasquier has begun spying on his fellow French farmers.

"See that tractor over there," Mr. Pasquier says from his blue Fiat Punto, pointing at a bulky red machine negotiating a dusty turn. "It's far too big for that little field. It belongs to a big farmer. One of the ones we want to know about."



**Jacques Pasquier**

Jacques Pasquier

Europe's generous and closely guarded agriculture subsidies are facing unprecedented pressure, both within the European Union, where they are weighing down the bloc's budget, and from the EU's trading partners around the world trying to negotiate lower global trade barriers. Despite fierce French resistance, Mr. Pasquier and other small farmers here are convinced that cutbacks are coming eventually.

So they are forging an unlikely alliance with an opponent of farm subsidies -- a free-market think tank based in Paris, Groupe d'Économie Mondiale, or GEM -- seeking to publicly identify the biggest beneficiaries of agricultural aid to demonstrate the system's flaws. The small farmers are trying to make sure any changes focus on big players -- not family farms of less than 100 hectares (about 250 acres), like his.

Of course, there is a chance Mr. Pasquier and his cohorts are playing into the hands of free-market advocates who want comprehensive cuts in aid, which could affect their own bottom lines. That is a calculated risk they are willing to take.

"We are not in a position to choose," says Mr. Pasquier, walking beneath fruit-laden fig trees on the family farm that also grows walnuts, wheat and sunflowers. He says the farm brings him €24,000 (about \$29,000) in yearly profits -- less than the €30,000 he receives in aid. "If we don't face the problems of these subsidies, then the whole system will disappear. And we will disappear, too."

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The subsidy-identification effort in France -- the biggest recipient of Europe's direct aid to farmers, at more than € billion, or 21% of the 2004 total -- follows publication this year of subsidy recipients in England, the Netherlands and parts of Spain. Most countries have tightly guarded the information, but the pressure to release it is spreading.

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In September, information obtained by French farmers and computed by the Paris think tank showed the Netherlands farm minister was receiving more than €150,000 in subsidies for his farm in France's Dordogne region. Later that month, his department released Dutch figures showing the Netherlands's biggest recipients of direct aid and export subsidies from 1999 to 2003 were Mars BV, the Dutch arm of chocolate-bar empire Mars Inc.; Dutch brewer **Heineken** NV; and Philip Morris Holland, the Dutch operation of U.S. tobacco company **Altria Group** Inc.

United Kingdom figures this year showed that Queen Elizabeth II and such corporate titans as sugar company **Tate & Lyle** PLC are among the large beneficiaries there. Belgium last month joined the tide, publishing the biggest receivers of export subsidies: They included Tate & Lyle, German chemicals company **BASF** AG, Swiss food multinational conglomerate **Nestlé** SA and Campina, the European dairy cooperative.

The work in France toward such a list is slow. Strict privacy laws protect subsidy recipients, and politicians refuse to give information about these public funds. Still, the small farmers and the free-trade advocates who coordinate their efforts from Paris are undeterred.

In Mr. Pasquier's southwestern region of Poitou-Charente, a patchwork of small fields, stone villages and medieval castles near the Atlantic coast, the 45-year-old farmer is using his farm expertise for signs that big landowners are at work. In the evenings, he makes calls to his colleagues across the region, follows tip-offs about farm purchases on the Internet and communicates with GEM. This month, the think tank hopes to clear a raft of legal hurdles protecting farmers' identities and publish a partial who's who of big subsidy recipients.

### Fertilizing Farmers

Some of the largest recipients of EU agriculture subsidies disclosed so far:

**England (2004):**

- Tate & Lyle, Europe's main cane-sugar refiner: **£127 million**
- Nestlé UK, British unit of Nestlé, world's largest food company: **£11.3 million**
- Queen Elizabeth II, for two estates: **£545,897**

**The Netherlands (2003):**

- Philip Morris Holland, unit of U.S. tobacco company Altria Group: **€1.46 million**
- Royal Dutch Shell, oil-and-gas company: **€659,736**
- Van Drie, closely held agribusiness: **€745,795**

**Spain\* (2003):**

- Ebro Puleva, global agribusiness company: **€20.4 million**
- Hernandez Barrera family, largest shareholders of Ebro Puleva: **€2.46 million**

\*From data released in four geographic regions

Notes: €1= \$1.2071; £1= \$1.7766      Sources: European Commission; Evert Vermeer Foundation; Intermon Oxfam

"The current farm subsidies are a source of amazing inefficiencies and injustices," says Pierre Boulanger, who leads the GEM transparency project and contacted the staunchly protectionist farmers this summer to

dig for information. "They are under attack from the world, and if they aren't reformed, then it will be the small farmers who suffer in Europe."

Data from the European Commission in Brussels say only 30 farmers in France receive more than €300,000 a year -- a figure many believe greatly understates the number of big beneficiaries. But large farms are hard to spot in France. French laws try to inhibit farms' expanding too far beyond 100 hectares, but landowners get around that by registering property under the names of spouses or relatives, with fields scattered through different jurisdictions. Landholdings fragmented over the centuries have created today's traditional -- and sometimes deceptive -- quilt of small fields.

Already, partial figures obtained from the French Agriculture Ministry by French magazine Capital recently say Prince Albert II of Monaco cashes in €300,000 a year for his French farmland, while French Sen. Remy Pointereau receives €120,000. So far, the French government provides figures if asked for a specific farm's income, but refuses to hand over comprehensive information.

"It's an amusing project, but I'm not going to give that information," said French Agriculture Minister Dominique Bussereau in an interview. "It would hurt France's farmers."

France is under increasing pressure from such countries as the U.K. and the Netherlands to show what it does with its farm funds and to allow alterations to the so-called Common Agricultural Policy that doles them out. Global-trade talks have intensified this pressure, shining light on the way Europe protects its farmers.

Paris maintains it won't allow farm-subsidy changes before 2013, but government insiders say that may be hard to avoid.

The fear of cutbacks is tangible in Mr. Pasquier's Poitou-Charente region. At a town-hall debate on what is to be done about the summer drought, farmers divided by the size of their subsidies give one another the cold shoulder.

Conspicuously absent is Bruno Broquerault, who has built his father's 100-hectare farm into a 2,000-hectare mechanized business that he says collects €200,000 a year in subsidies and brings him and his wife €500,000 of annual profit. Sipping coffee in his 18th-century hilltop mansion, Mr. Broquerault says changes wouldn't hurt him, but rather the few farmhands he employs. "Yes, it's possible to live without subsidies," he says. "But it would mean I would have to buy more land and hire fewer workers."

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