



Workers exploited at farms supplying UK supermarkets

Poor pay and punitive working conditions are common on farms and plantations that supply fresh fruit or tea to major UK supermarkets including Lidl, Aldi, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Morrisons, according to new research published by a leading international charity.

5 The report from Oxfam claims that the supermarkets' persistent will to maximise profits is increasing poverty and gender discrimination in their retail supply chains. Its research is based on interviews with workers in India and Brazil and a separate survey in five other countries.

10 Interviews with workers on 50 tea plantations in Assam allege that cholera and typhoid are common because of poor access to toilets and safe drinking water. Half of those questioned receive government ration cards because they earn so little while female workers regularly clocked up 13 hours of hard labour a day.

Aldi, Morrisons, Tesco and Sainsbury's confirmed they source their own-brand tea from companies whose suppliers include the estates visited and Lidl was amongst other global supermarkets which source their own brand tea from the Assam region.

15 On fruit farms in north-east Brazil, women with children said they were forced to rely on relatives or government support to feed their families outside the harvest season. Workers reported allergies and serious skin diseases as a result of using chemicals without adequate protection on grape, melon and mango farms that supply supermarkets including Lidl, Sainsbury's, Tesco and Morrisons.

20 Oxfam also found that supermarkets are taking the lion's share of the price paid by shoppers. Of the 79p paid by shoppers for a pack of 100g black Assam tea in the UK, supermarkets and tea brands receive 49p while workers receive just 3p. The research was produced as part of Oxfam's global Behind the Barcodes campaign, which aims to improve the lives of the millions of people around the world producing food for supermarkets but trapped in
25 poverty.

On behalf of UK supermarkets, Peter Andrews, the head of sustainability at the British Retail Consortium, said: "Supermarkets in the UK are leading actions aimed at improving the lives of the millions of people across the globe who contribute to the retail supply chain."

By Rebecca Smithers, adapted from *The Guardian*, October 10th, 2019

(353 words)