

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Highlights:

Government of Japan published the official English translation of the revised Act on Japanese Agricultural Standards (JAS), amended on June 16, 2017. Historically, the JAS system focused on overall product quality. However, with the amended system, Japan aims to establish new specialized certification systems to target emerging niche consumer preferences. Compliance with JAS requirements is mandatory for imported construction materials, such as U.S. softwood. The revised JAS Act may also be of interest to U.S. suppliers of Japan's food manufacturing facilities, which typically are JAS-certified.

Background

Following FAS/Tokyo's request, Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) completed and published the official translation of the [Act on Japanese Agricultural Standards](#) (JAS), amended on June 16, 2017.

JAS 2017 Amendment to Boost Japanese Exports

The original JAS system was established by the Law Concerning Standardization, etc. of Agricultural and Forestry Products ([Law No.175, 1950](#)) to standardize quality expectations for food and forest products in Japan. Accredited Registered Certifying Bodies (RCBs)¹ inspect products to ensure conformity with JAS. Standard JAS label is displayed on JAS-certified products to inform consumers that products meet established JAS quality requirements. Although JAS certification is voluntary, separate regulations and codes at times predicate the use of JAS-certified materials. For example, under Japanese building codes, only JAS-certified dimension lumber and engineered wood products can be used in construction. Also, strict ingredient specifications of Japanese food manufacturers are typically rooted in JAS requirements for the final product.

To support Japan's agricultural exports and differentiate Japanese products worldwide, in November 2016, Japan's Cabinet approved the [Agriculture Competitiveness Enforcement Program](#) and the [Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery Products Exports Infrastructure Improvement Program](#). Through these programs, Japan promotes international recognition of the JAS system, geographical indications (see the 2018 GAIN report on "Japan Revising Elements of National GI Law" and the 2015 GAIN report on "Japan to Implement GI system on June 1_2015"), and protection of specific domestic plant varieties. According to MAFF, the JAS system offers confidence to consumers regarding safety, quality and authenticity of products in the market.

On June 16, 2017, MAFF amended the original JAS law and simplified the name to the "Act of JAS," which entered into force on April 1, 2018. The amended JAS system facilitates the creation of new JAS certifications beyond the traditional focus on product quality. The amendment expands JAS certification systems for production, distribution, handling, management, and testing methods. Accredited RCBs continue to serve as JAS certifiers for the new programs. The JAS logo for value-added products exemplifies the trend toward multiple JAS certification systems (see the 2018 GAIN report on "Japan Introduces a New JAS Logo for Differentiated Products").

Under the amended JAS Act, industry can propose new JAS certifications. MAFF offered several hypothetical JAS certifications that would be allowed under the new JAS system: gluten-free, traditional matcha (finely ground powder of green tea leaves), sustainable management, etc. MAFF also indicated that a JAS testing standard could be developed to measure the knowledge level regarding on Japanese food or traditional tea ceremony.

As of November 2019, [MAFF](#) approved 46 food product standards, 2 non-food agricultural product standards, 11 forest product standards², 3 handling method standards and 4 testing method standards. The official translation of the amended JAS Act should facilitate compliance with required JAS regulations for U.S. exporters to Japan.

Attachments:

No Attachments.

¹ Foreign RCBs are called Registered Overseas Certifying Bodies (ROCBs).

² Further information on recent JAS revisions concerning forest products is available in the 2017 GAIN report "Japan Modifies Forest Products Standards" and in the 2018 GAIN report "Japan Invites Public Comments on Lumber Standards."