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Busy days for certification bodies in Japan

The revision of JAS Law requires all certification bodies working under the JAS Law (organic and non organic) to apply to the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) for re-registration. Below is a report on the current situation.

The JAS Law was revised on 22 June, 2005. A consequence of the revision is that all Certification Bodies (CBs) have to re-register if they want to continue their JAS activities. The status of CBs – both Registered Certification Organisations (RCOs) and Registered Foreign Certification Organisations (RFCOs) – under the previous JAS Law will be maintained until 28 February 2006.

Big changes to registration of CBs outside Japan

The revisions have brought in some changes to the process of becoming registered as a Registered Foreign Certification Organisation. The following are the main points.

- 1) All CBs in any country can now apply to be a RFCO.
- 2) CBs are required to meet ISO/IEC guide 65.
- 3) More than 50% of a CB's directors or staff must not currently be, or have been in the last two years, operators, such as farmers, processors, re-packers, distributors.
- 4) A representative person shall not be a director or staff of operator (this also includes the past two years).

- 5) Applications, manuals, etc. must be prepared in Japanese.
- 6) Registration is effective for four years.

According to Yutaka Maruyama (a person with considerable experience in applying as a JAS CBs) the requirements mentioned in points 4 and 5 in the list above give rise for concern. JAS Law and its interpretation is complicated, even for the Japanese. Translations of even the most important sections, take time, or may not get translated properly at all. In fact, to follow the JAS Organic regulation, each CB will probably need to have a skilled Japanese member of staff. Even then there may be difficulties, for instance, one RFCO sent a Japanese member of staff to Japan to apply on 1 September 2005. Although the RFCO is accredited under the US NOP, the EU Reg. , and to IFOAM, Norms, she still had a hard time reviewing their previous manuals before applying.

Some requirements for CBs are unclear and others, such as the qualifications inspectors and decision makers are required to possess, have not yet been announced. MAFF was going to

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