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USDA recognise MAFF Japan and other news

The National Organic Standards Board (NOSB) met in Baltimore on 20–22 May. In her report to the Board, Agricultural Marketing Service Deputy Director Barbara Robinson announced that USDA has granted recognition to Japan, which allows Japan to accredit certifiers to certify to USDA-NOP standards, and declared that the US Government is treating the US/Canadian Equivalency discussions with great care. She also announced that the long awaited rule on access to pasture was in the final stages of clearance, and that the origin of livestock issue would be treated as a Proposed Rule, bypassing an Advanced Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on the issue.

In addition to decisions on materials being considered for inclusion on the National List, several contentious issues were on the agenda for the meeting, including recommendations on fish feed for organic aquaculture, aquatic plants, and commercial availability guidance on sourcing of organic seed. Discussion documents concerning net pens for organic aquaculture, hydroponics, the definition of a ‘non-agricultural’ substance and the latest guidance for certification of multi-site operations (or group certification) also generated substantial public comment.

All decisions on published recommendations were deferred for additional information, except that the aquatic plants recommendation was approved after being amended to pro-

hibit use of manure as a fertility input in open water (i.e. ocean) aquatic plant cultivation.

One presentation was made by representatives of a Materials Working Group, which has been meeting regularly since the November NOSB meeting to develop recommendations to help sort out the difficult definition of materials questions. Some progress was made in posing a series of options that could be considered, including changing the definition of ‘non-agricultural substances’ included in the NOP. One problem with the current situation is that yeast, which is now available as a certified organic product, is designated as ‘non-agricultural’, and is, therefore, not required to be sourced as organic when commercially available.

Progress could also be observed in the discussion of multi-site (group) certification, which was the subject of ongoing discussion by a Task Force convened by the Organic Trade Association (OTA). Recommendations from the OTA Task Force as well as from IFOAM were highly influential in crafting the NOSB Certification, Accreditation and Compliance Committee (CACC) discussion document. The major issue concerns the inclusion of sectors other than farmer-grower groups under the heading of ‘multi-site’ certification. While there is nearly unanimous agreement that group certification for smallholders in developing countries must be strengthened and protected, much