

Background Information

Export Arrangement Between USDA and the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries

On March 27, 2002, the Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that the Japanese Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (MAFF) had determined that USDA's national organic standards for the production, handling and processing of plant-based organic agricultural products meet the requirements of the Japanese Agricultural Standards.

This official recognition means that plant-based agricultural products from United States operations certified as meeting U.S. organic standards may be labeled or represented in Japan as organic. The recognition arrangement does stipulate, however, that alkali-extracted humic acid, lignin sulfonate and potassium bicarbonate may not be used in raw or processed organic food exported to Japan. These substances are allowed under the U.S. organic standards.

USDA considers the prohibition of these three substances by MAFF to be based on the uses as specified by the National List; e.g., lignin sulfonate as a dust suppressant, flotation agent, or chelating agent. After April 29, 2002, accredited certifying agents must verify that no lignin sulfonate, alkali extracted humic acid, or potassium bicarbonate were applied after that date to crops or land. USDA envisions verification of the non-use of these substances by an accredited certifying agent (ACA) to be based on a paper review (audit) and visual examination (on-site) process. The verification of non-use does not require analytical testing. Unless the information is readily available on the product label, the determination whether or not the humic acid was alkali extracted will involve a joint dialogue between the producer, the ACA and the product's manufacturer to identify the extraction process.

The export arrangement with MAFF requires the ACA to issue an export certificate on behalf of the National Organic Program (NOP). In order to facilitate acceptance of the product, a compliance statement declaring the applicable prohibitions must be entered into the remarks section of the export certificate. The compliance statement for Japan is, *"Products covered under this export certificate are not known to be produced with alkali-extracted humic acid, lignin sulfonate and potassium bicarbonate."* The export certificate, procedures and other program support information for an ACA to issue export certificates on behalf of the NOP can be found on the NOP web site.

This export arrangement replaces and expands upon a temporary arrangement that allowed U.S. plantbased organic food ingredients to be exported to Japan and sold as organic. The temporary arrangement expired March 31, 2002.

USDA and MAFF envision robust, cooperative communications on issues related to the implementation and operation of the export arrangement. USDA encourages authorized ACAs to notify NOP of any operational problems or areas in need of clarification.