

Voluntary Report – Voluntary - Public Distribution

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Report Name: Japan Proposes to Streamline GI Application Process

Country: Japan

Post: Tokyo

Report Category: Agricultural Situation

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Report Highlights:

Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries proposed to revise the Geographical Indication (GI) Act to boost exports of GI-protected processed foods. Comment period ends on September 1, 2022.

General Information

THIS REPORT CONTAINS ASSESSMENTS OF COMMODITY AND TRADE ISSUES MADE BY USDA STAFF
AND NOT NECESSARILY STATEMENTS OF OFFICIAL U.S. GOVERNMENT POLICY

On August 3, 2022, Japan's Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (MAFF) proposed to revise the Act for Protection of Designated Agricultural, Forestry and Fishery Products and Foodstuffs (hereafter, the Geographical Indication (GI) Act). The proposed changes are available only in [Japanese](#) and focus on two aspects.

First, to facilitate new GI submissions, the revision reduces administrative requirements for new GI applications. The current process requires extensive detailed information in a GI proposal by producer organizations and a thorough verification of the information by MAFF. Under the new proposal, MAFF intends to reduce the application and verification burdens. MAFF anticipates that these changes will encourage more GI submissions and speed up the review process.

Secondly, to increase GI registration of value-added products, MAFF will no longer require GI applications to specify natural idiosyncrasies of the product. The current version of the GI Act emphasizes that the distinctiveness of GI products derives in large part from the geographical idiosyncrasy of the source location. This requirement is more difficult to fulfill for processed products than for unprocessed foods, such as fruits, vegetables and meats. Under the proposed revision, the GI Act would remove references to the unique natural characteristics of the geographic location, where the GI product is produced. Instead, the GI Act would emphasize the cultural and societal uniqueness of GI products.

MAFF will accept public comments on the proposed revisions to the GI Act by September 1, 2022 (Japan Standard time). Comments should be submitted in Japanese via [eGov website](#) or mail (Intellectual Property Division, Export and International Bureau, MAFF, 1-2-1 Kasumigaseki, Chiyoda-ku, Tokyo, Japan, 100-8950).

Background

Japan aims to grow the value of its agricultural exports to approximately \$15 billion¹ (two trillion Japanese yen) by 2025 and to approximately \$38 billion (five trillion yen) by 2030 ([JA 2021-0103](#)). MAFF views its GI protection efforts, overseen by its Intellectual Property Division (IPD), as a pillar of its export expansion strategy. In July 2021, IPD was integrated within MAFF's newly established Export and International Affairs Bureau.

In May 2022, the National Diet approved the revised Export Facilitation Act ([JA2022-0030](#)), and MAFF is developing a new Export Expansion Action Strategy for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Products and Food. One of the aims of the strategy is to protect Japan's GI products exported to foreign markets from imitation. The strategy will encourage MAFF to extend GI protection to foreign GI products imported to Japan in exchange for GI protections for Japanese GI products in those countries². Consequently, Japan would be able to rely on its trading partners to enforce GI protections for Japanese products. For example, MAFF has been coordinating with Vietnam and Thailand on mutual protection of GI products ([JA9073](#)).

To date, the majority of Japan's GI agricultural products have been whole (unprocessed) foods (Table 1). As of August 2022, less than 14 percent of GI-designated products³ have been processed agricultural products, and of these nearly a third are dried persimmon. On the other hand, the GI-protected food products from the European

¹ The following exchange rate is used in the report: \$1=133 yen

² Outside of trade agreements, producer organizations have to independently register GI products in foreign countries.

³ Japan's GI-protected processed foods include 5 types of dried persimmon, 2 vinegars, 2 miso (soybean paste), 2 pickles, *somen* noodle, tea ([JA2020-0046](#)), dried radish, freeze-dried tofu, and processed [Kochia](#) seeds.

Union are predominantly value-added products, such as cheese, other dairy products, processed meats, confectionary, and oil products. MAFF anticipates that the proposed revision of the GI Act will encourage Japanese producers of well-known value-added food products to apply for GI protection and will enhance the recognition of Japan’s GI system in overseas markets.

Table 1. Japanese domestic products registered by MAFF for GI protection as of August 2022

Agricultural Products					Processed Food	Fisheries Products	Others (charcoal, silk, tatami mat, etc.)	Total
Unprocessed								
Fruit	Vegetable	Grain/Beans	Meat	Others				
21	39	5	14	2	16	14	5	116
81								

* The table does not include the three foreign GI products registered in Japan.

** The National Tax Agency oversees GIs for alcoholic beverages, which are not included in this table.

Attachments:

No Attachments.