

The JAS Mark Food Labeling System

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Introduction

The Japanese government has various food labeling systems. One of the most popular is the JAS Mark system. This system was launched in 1950 when the Act on Standardization and Proper Quality Labeling of Agricultural and Forestry Products, commonly known as the JAS Act, was established¹. The basic premise of the JAS Mark system is to assist consumers' decision-making by ensuring that the quality of commodities that carry the JAS Mark logo is guaranteed by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF). This paper presents an outline of the system.

The JAS surveillance committee

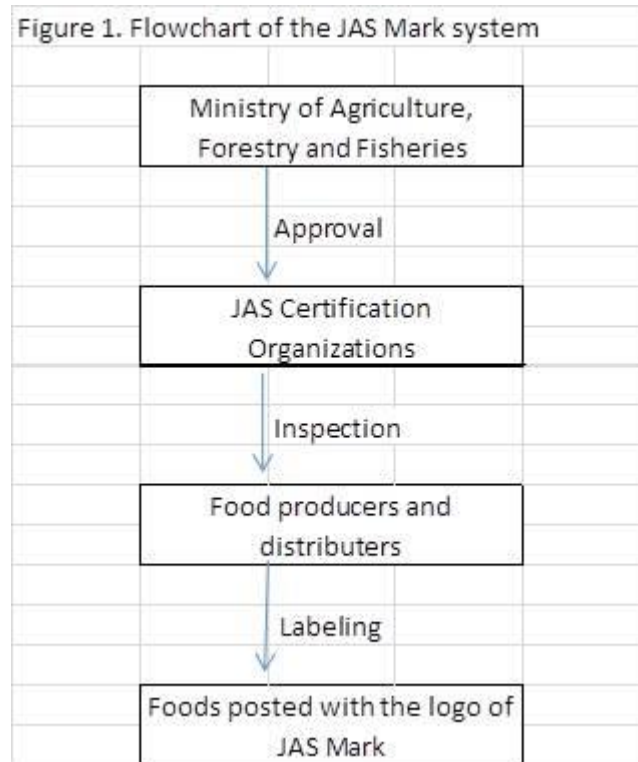
One of the most challenging goals of the JAS Mark system is establishing the JAS Mark quality standards. The JAS Surveillance Committee, one of the MAFF's advisory boards, leads this effort. Consumers' concerns with food quality and food producers' processing technology evolves over time; therefore, the JAS Surveillance Committee must occasionally review standards for the JAS Mark system².

Members of the JAS Surveillance Committee are appointed by the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. The JAS Act stipulates that there should be a maximum of 20 JAS Surveillance Committee members. The members are selected from academicians and representatives of consumer and food producer groups.

Currently, there are 201 standards for 64 commodity types (multiple standards are possible for one type of commodity). As discussed below, the JAS Mark system includes foods and certain inedible commodities such as wood and silk. The following sections in this paper, however, discuss food products unless otherwise stated because the majority of listed commodities under the JAS Mark system are food products.

Obtaining permission to use the JAS mark logo

Fig. 1 shows the two-step procedure for food producers and distributors who want to display the logo of JAS Mark on their commodities. The first step is to establish contact with the requisite JAS Certification Organizations, which supervise inspections concerning the JAS Mark system standards. Each JAS Certification Organization must specify the standard for which it will provide inspection, and the organization must be approved by MAFF to conduct such an inspection. For the second step, JAS Certification Organizations must inspect the food producers and distributors who want to display the JAS Mark on their commodities. The name of the JAS Certification Organization must be displayed on the JAS Mark logo.



Three types of JAS Mark standards

The 201 standards for the JAS Mark system are classified into three groups: (A) ingredients and the commodity benefits, (B) production methods, and (C) distribution methods.

A. Standards for ingredients and commodity benefits

There are 186 standards for 50 commodity types. Table 1 shows that this group is categorized into three subgroups according to the commodity type.

| Table 1 Standards for ingredients and benefits for the JAS Mark system | | | | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| A-1 Foods, drinks, edible oils, and fats | | | | | | | | | |
| instant noodles, dried noodles, macaroni, vegetable protein, soy sauce, Worcester sauce, flavored seasoning, dressing, brewed vinegar, processed tomato, carrot juice and mixed carrot juice, dried soup, margarine, shortening, purified lard, edible refined and processed oils, edible vegetable oils, glucose, isomerized glucose syrup, jam, fruit drink, carbonated drink, soy milk, canned and bottled agricultural products, canned and bottled livestock products, canned and bottled aquatic products, prepared frozen foods, pickled vegetables, ham, pressed ham, sausage, mixed sausage, bacon, hamburger patty, chilled hamburger steak, chilled meatballs, flakes of dried bonito, dried sardines, not-from-concentrate apple juice, bread crumbs. | | | | | | | | | |
| A-2 Wood building materials | | | | | | | | | |
| woods, sawn woods, glued laminated woods, sawn woods for wooden wall frame construction, parallel strand lumber for wooden wall frame construction, laminated veneer lumber, structural panels, plywood, wood flooring. | | | | | | | | | |
| A-3 Others | | | | | | | | | |
| raw silk, outer layer of tatami mat. | | | | | | | | | |

(A-1) Foods, drinks, edible oils, and fats

Table 2 shows the example of tomato juice, which is included in “processed tomato” in Table 1. Detailed requirements are stipulated for each type of standard and commodity type.

| Table 2 | | Defenition and standards for tomato juice in the JAS Mark system |
|------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Definition | | Obtained from either the following Type (1) or Type (2). Type (1): Squeezed or pureed crushed tomato (i.e., fruit of <i>Lycopersicum esculentum P.Mill</i> that is fully ripened or ripened enough to be tinged with red) with the skin and seeds removed (salt is allowed to be added). Type (2): Concentrate the juice that is obtained above and dilute it to the original condition. |
| Standards | Properties and condition | 1. Good color and flavor. 2. Smooth grain. Homogeneous thickness. Appropriate viscosity. 3. Almost no impurities. |
| | Unsalted soluble solid contents | More than 5 percent. |
| | Ingredients | Nothing other than the following three: 1. Tomato. 2. Condensed tomato. 3. Salt. |
| | Extraneous material | Should not be included. |
| | Volume | Should be compatible with the labeled volume. |

(A-2) Wood building materials

The JAS Mark system encompasses forestry products as well as food. Forestry products, such as wood, must meet strength, color, water resistance, and surface appearance JAS Mark requirements. Reflecting increasing consumer concern for the sick house syndrome, MAFF pays special attention to the evaporation of formaldehyde. In 2005, MAFF insisted that the measuring and posting of formaldehyde evaporation levels be compulsory for all wood building materials carrying the JAS Mark.

(A-3) Others

This group consists of raw silk and the outer layer of tatami mat.

B. Standards for methods of food production

There are 14 standards for 13 commodity types in this group. Table 3 shows that this group is further classified into three subgroups.

| Table 3 Standards for production methods for the JAS Mark system | | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| B-1 JAS Mark for organic farming | | | | | | |
| organic crops, organic livestock products, organic processed foods, organic feeds | | | | | | |
| B-2 JAS Mark for transparency of food production processes | | | | | | |
| beef, pork, crops, farm-raised fish | | | | | | |
| B-3 Others | | | | | | |
| ripened ham, ripened sausage, ripened bacon, locally produced poultry, hand-stretched dried noodles | | | | | | |

(B-1) JAS Mark for organic farming

The majority of Japanese consumers have a favorable opinion of organic farming. The exact meaning of organic farming, however, is difficult to define. In 1992, MAFF presented guidelines for the use of the term “organic” on food labeling. However, this guideline was not legally enforced. In the revised JAS Act of 1999, the new MAFF guidelines included standards for organic farming in the JAS Mark system. Commodities that meet these standards are called JAS organic commodities. MAFF stipulated that any food products other than JAS organic commodities are prohibited from using the term “organic” on labels³.

There are four types of organic commodities.

Organic crops: Crops are grown on farmland where soil preparation uses manure and fertilizers and pesticides made by chemical synthesis have not been used for at least two years prior to planting.

Organic livestock products: Products from domestic animals that are raised in a stress-free environment, fed on organic feeds, and to which no antibiotic is administered.

Organic processed foods: Foods processed mainly from organic crops, organic livestock products, and organic processed foods without additives made by chemical synthesis.

Organic feeds: Feeds processed mainly from organic crops, organic dairy products, and organic processed foods without additives made by chemical synthesis.

(B-2) JAS Mark for transparency in food production processes

MAFF introduced this category in 2003 in response to the increasing consumer anxiety concerning food production processes. A food producer who satisfies the conditions for this category may display the JAS Mark logo with an identification number on each food product item. The identification number allows a consumer to trace the food production process. For example, in the case of beef, a consumer can obtain detailed information such as the name of the farmer, the name of the slaughter house, the birth and feeding records of the beef cattle, and the location and conditions of the beef cattle shed.

(B-3) Others

The third subgroup consists of ripened ham, ripened sausage, ripened bacon, locally produced

poultry, and hand-stretched dried noodles. Detailed requirements are stipulated for the use of terms such as “ripened,” “locally produced,” and “hand-stretched.”

C. Standards for food distribution methods

This category was established in the revision of the JAS Act in 2005. In 2009, processed food distributed at a constant temperature was recognized by the JAS Mark system and marked the first case in this category.

Notes:

¹ The JAS Act incorporates two systems for food labeling. The first is the JAS Mark system, which food producers and distributors comply with at will. The second is the mandatory food labeling system whereby each food product includes a label displaying essential information reflecting quality standards. The mandatory food labeling system started in 1970 and will be replaced by a new system under the Food Labeling Act, which will be enacted on April 1, 2015. Details of the current mandatory food labeling system under the JAS Act are found at http://ap.fftc.agnet.org/ap_db.php?id=384.

² The JAS Severance Committee is responsible for maintaining consistency with international standards for food quality, such as Codex, and reviewing the JAS Mark system standards.

³ MAFF approves the labeling systems for organic commodities from 32 foreign countries (namely, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, Switzerland, the US, and 27 member countries of the EU) that meet the requirements of Japan’s system for JAS organic commodities. Imported commodities that are approved by JAS as organic commodities in the 32 countries are also allowed to be distributed as organic commodities in Japan.

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