

## **FAS and U.S. Industry Representatives Tackle Regulations on Wood Product/Housing**

On February 23, 2000, the Foreign Agricultural Service and U.S. wood industry representatives held technical discussions with Ministry of Construction (MOC) and Ministry of Agriculture (MAFF) officials. As a result the Government of Japan is considering U.S. requests to ease restrictions on the certification of wood products (Registered Certifying Organizations), the revised *Building Standards Law* (BSL) and the *Housing Quality Assurance Law* (HQAL). The following day, during the 6<sup>th</sup> Housing Experts Group meeting, U.S. Trade Representative, FAS/Japan, and Department of Commerce officials pressed MOC officials on broader housing sector regulations in government to government discussions.

The timing for these talks coincides with the Government of Japan's *Public Comment Period* on these new building code regulations. During February 10-March 9, 2000, MOC is accepting comments on the HQAL, and the comment period on the revised, "performance-based" BSL is February 15-March 15, 2000. FAS/Japan and the U.S. wood industry have arranged English translations of key sections of the BSL for use by the U.S.-side, and the U.S. Embassy's Agricultural Affairs office is coordinating the submission of the U.S. industry comments. On June 1, 2000, MOC implements the revised BSL, so the "window" to influence policy changes is only open briefly.

The changes in Japan's regulatory environment make it imperative that U.S. companies understand the process and the impact on exported wood products. Questions on the public comment process, the BSL, the HQAL, and wood product certification should be directed to FAS/Japan at [agtokyo@fas.usda.gov](mailto:agtokyo@fas.usda.gov) or to the American Forest and Paper Association Tokyo office at [boardy@aol.com](mailto:boardy@aol.com).

The Japanese Government recognizes the key role that housing plays in kick-starting Japan's huge economy. Broader policy measures taken in recent years to stimulate housing investment by consumers include changes to mortgage loan policies. During 1999 a reversal in the decline in housing construction resulted, but the United States must keep pushing Japan to further ease restrictive wood structure and fire codes in line with North American standards. Thus, the wood product/housing regulatory picture is an important thrust of FAS/Japan's efforts to increase the volume and types of U.S. wood products used in Japanese homes, apartments buildings, and municipal structures.

FAS/Japan, 2/29/00