Certification | Producing Farm | Distributor

October 28, 2026

Japan’s First: Zao Farm and Maruyama Announce International Animal Welfare Certification “Certified Humane®” for “JAPAN Zao Kogen Farm Cage-Free Egg®”

Establishing Japan’s first supply of internationally certified cage-free eggs and bringing sustainable food choices to the Japanese market

Agricultural Cooperative Corporation Zao Farm (headquarters: Zao Town, Katta District, Miyagi Prefecture; Director and Founder: Yoshinobu Sato) and Maruyama Corporation (headquarters: Zao Town, Katta District, Miyagi Prefecture; Representative Director: Eiichi Sato) are pleased to announce that their poultry business, “JAPAN Zao Kogen Farm Cage-Free Egg®,” has become the first in Japan to obtain Certified Humane®, the international animal welfare certification administered by Certified Humane Asia, an affiliate of the U.S. nonprofit organization Humane Farm Animal Care (HFAC).

This world-class certification is awarded only to farms that meet requirements for environments that allow farm animals to express their natural behaviors, as well as strict hygiene and feed management standards. “JAPAN Zao Kogen Farm Cage-Free Egg®” earned certification following a rigorous on-site audit by an independent third party. All hens are raised in a comfortable cage-free environment using a single-tier barn system and are provided with safe, in-house-formulated feed that does not rely on antibiotics.

■ Background to the Certification

Based in Zao Town, Miyagi Prefecture, amid the rich natural surroundings and hot springs of the sacred Zao mountain range, Agricultural Cooperative Corporation Zao Farm and Maruyama Corporation produce JAPAN X® pork, pursuing the distinctive taste of the JAPAN brand. Since June 2026, they have also produced “JAPAN Zao Kogen Farm Cage-Free Egg®,” bringing together their longstanding dedication to livestock farming and all the expertise they have developed.

Since its founding in 1958, the business has grown into one of the Tohoku region’s leading authorized feed distributors. Seeking to shape “the future of pig farming,” founder Yoshinobu Sato traveled to the Netherlands, Germany, France and Spain.

Drawing on the husbandry techniques and hygiene and health management practices he learned there, he introduced Japan's first windowless livestock housing and specific-pathogen-free (SPF) pig production technology. The business has since produced JAPAN X® pork in Miyagi, Iwate and Yamagata prefectures.

The business has also pursued the integrated development of agriculture and livestock farming, connecting the processing of meat, ham and beef tongue with domestic and overseas sales and distribution, and serving dishes at its directly operated hotels and tourism facilities. As producers, we have pursued great taste all the way to the dining table.

Our egg production began with a desire to make delicious tonkatsu using JAPAN X pork at our directly operated hotel. We wanted eggs for the breading that met the same high standards of taste. "JAPAN Zao Kogen Farm Cage-Free Egg®" was born from this ambition, drawing on all our expertise in health management and other practices developed over many years of raising JAPAN X® pigs.

At a secluded site 580 meters above sea level within Zao Kogen Prefectural Natural Park, we sought to understand the local climate, nature and culture, and to cherish an environment found nowhere else.

Forest conservation was incorporated into the design from the land-development stage. The poultry houses are raised approximately 1.5 meters above the ground, allowing ammonia and carbon dioxide generated inside to escape naturally and creating a dry, hen-friendly environment. Zeolite and sawdust are used as litter to support disinfection and sanitation, while also providing areas for dust bathing to relieve stress.

Windowless poultry houses are essential to creating this comfortable environment. Advanced computer-controlled systems bring in fresh air and maintain stable temperature and humidity, enabling active health management and helping healthy hens lay delicious eggs.

Each house is 8 meters wide and 70 meters long, with 490 meters of perches. This cage-free barn system places animal welfare at its heart. Hens can move freely and rest on perches in an environment designed to offer greater comfort than they would find in the wild. They receive clear underground water from Zao and generous amounts of naturally sourced green and yellow forage, including alfalfa and mugwort procured by the company. This supports healthy lives and delicious eggs.

The ultimate goal is to produce delicious eggs.

Years of experience have taught me that animals' freedoms are paramount: freedom from hunger, discomfort, pain and fear, and the freedom to express normal behavior. This is why we needed a highland environment at 580 meters, with clean forest air where animals can thrive.

Throughout my years in livestock farming, I have believed that delicious eggs come from this environment, together with feed, water and the care and affection of our farm staff.

To test the philosophy of producing delicious livestock products that I have developed over many years of raising JAPAN X® pigs, I decided to apply for internationally recognized Certified Humane® certification in the laying-hen sector as well.

Becoming the first Certified Humane® certified operation in Japan has strengthened my confidence in this philosophy. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to everyone involved in the assessment,

to the members of the U.S. nonprofit organization Humane Farm Animal Care (HFAC) who granted the certification, and to everyone who has supported our efforts.

As global interest in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and sustainable procurement policies has grown in recent years, an increasing number of companies, particularly restaurant operators, hotels and food manufacturers, have publicly committed to sourcing cage-free eggs. In Japan, awareness of ethical consumption is also growing. Until now, however, there had been no domestic producer certified for cage-free eggs under international standards, leaving companies without a certified domestic sourcing option.

By obtaining Japan's first Certified Humane® certification, we are establishing a supply framework that offers Japanese consumers and business partners an animal-welfare-conscious choice backed by reliable transparency.

■ Key Husbandry Standards and the Efforts of "JAPAN Zao Kogen Farm Cage-Free Egg®"

HFAC's science-based Animal Care Standards prioritize animal comfort and welfare and require compliance to be verified through independent on-site audits. The farm producing "JAPAN Zao Kogen Farm Cage-Free Egg®" rigorously implements the following standards.

1. **Ample space and a cage-free environment for natural behavior**
   Rather than being confined to cages, hens have sufficient floor space to spread their wings, turn around and rest naturally, along with clean resting areas.

2. **Dust-bathing areas, perches and nest boxes**
   Areas for instinctive dust bathing, perches for resting above ground and nest boxes for secure egg laying provide hens with a stress-free environment.

3. **Safe, nutritionally balanced feed management**
   Hens are consistently supplied with nutritious feed and clean drinking water, with their health as the priority. No antibiotics or growth promoters are used.

■ Comments

Yoshinobu Sato
Director and Founder, Agricultural Cooperative Corporation Zao Farm
Chairman and Representative Director, Maruyama Corporation:

"The ultimate goal is to produce delicious eggs.

Years of experience have taught me that animals' freedoms are paramount: freedom from hunger, discomfort, pain and fear, and the freedom to express normal behavior. This is why we needed a highland environment at 580 meters, with clean forest air where animals can thrive.

Throughout my years in livestock farming, I have believed that delicious eggs come from this environment, together with feed, water and the care and affection of our farm staff.

To test the philosophy of producing delicious livestock products that I have developed over many years of raising JAPAN X pigs, I decided to apply for internationally recognized Certified Humane® certification in the laying-hen sector as well.

Becoming the first Certified Humane® certified operation in Japan has reaffirmed my philosophy of livestock farming.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude once again to everyone involved in the assessment, to the members of the U.S. nonprofit organization Humane Farm Animal Care (HFAC) who granted the certification, and to everyone who has supported our efforts."

Luiz Mazzon, Managing Director of Certified Humane Asia:

"We warmly welcome the first Certified Humane® certification in Japan. Maruyama Corporation's JAPAN Z initiative is a pioneering model for sustainable poultry farming and high-welfare husbandry in Japan. This certification marks an important milestone in offering Japanese consumers and sourcing companies a choice backed by robust animal welfare standards."

■ Future Outlook and the Efforts of Zao Farm and Maruyama

With the establishment of Japan's first Certified Humane® certified farm, Agricultural Cooperative Corporation Zao Farm and Maruyama Corporation will use this certification as a new impetus to further strengthen the supply of "JAPAN Zao Kogen Farm Cage-Free Egg®" to consumers and companies seeking sustainable sourcing.

We will continue to advance animal welfare to international standards and help establish an ethical egg market in Japan by supplying fresh, delicious eggs directly from the farm to consumers and companies committed to responsible sourcing.

About Certified Humane® (HFAC)

Certified Humane® certified products are currently available in more than 80,000 stores around the world, including the United States, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, India, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines.

Humane Farm Animal Care (HFAC) is an international nonprofit certification organization dedicated to improving the lives and living conditions of farm animals raised for food. Since its launch in 2003, its program has reached more than 500 companies and 8,000 farms worldwide,

covering a cumulative total of more than 3 billion farm animals. Supported by more than 70 animal protection organizations, veterinary associations and other groups, HFAC verifies through independent audits that strict welfare standards are followed from birth to market.

- Official websites: https://certifiedhumane.org/ / https://certifiedhumaneasia.org/

About JAPAN Z Cage-Free Egg Zao Kogen Farm

Farm name: JAPAN Z Cage-Free Egg Zao Kogen Farm

Egg brand: JAPAN Zao Kogen Farm Cage-Free Egg®

Legal entity: Agricultural Cooperative Corporation Zao Farm

Representative: Tomoyuki Sato, Representative Director

Location: Zao Kogen Prefectural Natural Park, Miyagi Prefecture

Site area: 206,393 m²

Facilities: 10 poultry houses and 1 egg grading and packing (GP) center

Number of hens: 30,000

- Official website: https://japanz.co.jp/

Media and Business Inquiries

Company: Maruyama Corporation

Representative: Eiichi Sato, President and Representative Director

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