



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Institute of Standards and Technology
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20899-

February 19, 2015

Katy Coba, Director
Oregon Department of Agriculture
Director's Office
635 Capitol Street N.E.
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Director Coba,

I am writing to emphasize to you the importance of the national infrastructure of weights and measures and its importance to Oregon and the economy as a whole. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), a non-regulatory agency of the United States Department of Commerce, has statutory responsibility to secure uniformity in weights and measures laws and methods of inspection in the United States. To this end NIST provides the standards for the accuracy, use, and evaluation of nearly all commercial measuring equipment used in the United States. It publishes model laws and regulations covering product packaging and labeling, methods of sale, motor fuel and motor oil quality standards, etc. and it provides technical expertise and training to state and local weights and measures officials, enabling them to be more effective in their respective roles in an ever-changing marketplace.

"Weights and measures" refers to the technical and regulatory infrastructure that supports the commercial measurement system which supports the trade of goods and services on the basis of weight, measure, or count within the United States and in the international market. Its importance is shown by a NIST Office of Weights and Measures survey using economic data from the Bureau of the Census as well as data obtained from trade and industry associations. These data indicate that approximately 50 percent of the nation's Gross Domestic Product is derived from products sold by weight, measure, or count. Consumers and businesses in Oregon buy and sell products daily. Packaged goods are sold at the supermarket; motor fuels are sold through dispensers; price scanners are used at retail checkout stands to efficiently look up product prices; farmers sell grain, produce, and livestock using scales; and landfills charge fees based upon the weight of the trash delivered, often without much thought given to the measuring equipment integral to the transaction.

In this economy, where so much trust is placed on the accuracy of a scale, on the accuracy of a fuel dispenser, and on the integrity of a product label it is important to maintain an adequate level of oversight to help maintain a commercial measuring system worthy of that trust so that we can continue to benefit from the economic efficiencies that accompany it. This oversight responsibility is shared between federal, state, and local governments with the majority of the weights and measures enforcement authority residing at the state and local level.

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Because the weights and measures infrastructure in the United States is largely stable and highly functional, it is tempting for us to take it for granted when making funding decisions. The impact of this infrastructure is, however, far more complex than what is immediately visible to the consumer. One can relate gradual reductions to state and local weights and measures regulatory programs to deferring maintenance on roads and bridges. There is a short term cost benefit, however long term consequences will ultimately be revealed. Without adequate funding to staff and equip a weights and measures program, it becomes increasingly difficult to conduct meaningful oversight activities. Poorly maintained, inaccurate, substandard, or fraudulent measuring equipment will be unchecked in the market, as has been recently demonstrated in several communities in western Alaska where access is difficult; the effects of product mislabeling will permeate the market as such as in the late 80s where significant gasoline octane labeling issues were found in states lacking a sufficient oversight program. Consumers will often be left without the basic tools needed to protect themselves.

NIST is proud of its partnership with state and local jurisdictions in the maintenance of this complex infrastructure. As Oregon strives to create jobs and promote economic growth, the role of adequate oversight of the weights and measures infrastructure has never been more critical.

Sincerely,



Carol T. Hockert

Chief, Office of Weights and Measures