



Office of the Auditor
465 S. King Street
Rm. 500
Honolulu, HI 96813
Ph. (808) 587-0800

Jan K. Yamane
Acting State Auditor
State of Hawai'i

“If we hire the inspectors now, they will be sitting around with nothing to do. There will be nobody to train them.”

Acting administrator's explanation for why a program manager needs to be hired before inspectors.

Management Audit of the Department of Agriculture's Measurement Standards Branch

Report No. 13-01, March 2013

Hiring delays and lack of planning impede Measurement Standards Branch

Vacant positions, reduced staff limits branch's function

The Measurement Standards Branch is tasked with enforcing the U.S. standards for weights and measures. Because of budget shortfalls since FY2010, the branch experienced a significant decline in the number of inspector positions. Currently, six of the branch's 11 positions remain vacant, and we found that the branch's two remaining inspectors can only perform eight of the branch's 15 key regulatory functions. In addition, inspections of measuring devices have fallen significantly. From FY2007 to FY2009, the branch inspected an average of 21 percent of small scales, 10 percent of medium scales, and 31 percent of gas pumps registered in the state. However, from FY2010 to FY2012, the branch inspected an average of only 2.6 percent of the small scales, less than 1 percent of medium scales, and 6.7 percent of the gas pumps registered in the state. Moreover, enforcement functions on the neighbor islands and packaging and labeling inspections throughout the state have ceased as of 2009.

Recognizing these deficiencies, the 2012 Legislature appropriated \$420,000 to restore a program manager and three new inspector positions. However, since the beginning of FY2013, the branch has been unable to fill these positions because the acting administrator has not addressed questions raised by the department's personnel office regarding the program manager position. According to the acting administrator, the inspector positions cannot be filled until a program manager is hired to develop a training program. As a result, the branch is unable to resume its inspection duties or fulfill its statutory responsibilities.

Better planning is needed

When the branch is able to hire new inspectors and fully resume enforcement activities, it will need the assistance of private service agencies to carry out its inspection duties. Consequently, the branch will need to monitor these service agencies and their activities. However, we found that the branch has no plans, policies, or procedures for such oversight. In addition, the branch lacks direction in the form of a written strategic plan for its measurement standards program. Without such a plan, management does not have a well-supported basis to determine priorities, guide decisions, or demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of its program. These planning deficiencies are exacerbated by the acting administrator's lack of time to devote to necessary administrative duties.

Agency response

The chairperson of the Board of Agriculture has addressed several of our report's recommendations. For instance, he has appointed a permanent Quality Assurance Division administrator, who is in the process of hiring a program manager and two inspectors. The chairperson also acknowledged that he is ultimately responsible for ensuring that the branch meets its regulatory responsibilities and therefore plans to work with the administrator to develop a strategic plan consistent with our recommendations.