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<< **GAS (Continued):** It's rather difficult to verify whether some anonymous person in Georgia truly encountered a malfunctioning gas pump (and whether his report of same was accurate), but the Georgia Department of Agriculture stated that the pumps at the station referenced in the e-mail had been checked by that agency's Fuel and Measures Section in November 2007 and were re-checked (in response to various e-mails) in May 2008 and in both cases were found to be operating according to standards:

Our Fuel and Measures Section has looked into these claims against the station in Cartersville. The station in question was inspected on November 29, 2007 and all the pumps were found to be accurate. The station was inspected again on May 5, 2008 and again all pumps were found to be accurate.

Since this message conflates two distinctly different issues (whether gas pumps accurately report the amount of gasoline dispensed vs. whether gas pumps accurately register the proper charge for the amount of gasoline dispensed), we'll address them by discussing some general factors involved in the dispensing of gasoline.

Vendors of gasoline are subject to a variety of state and federal laws requiring them to maintain adequately calibrated dispensing equipment and calling for periodic inspections by government regulatory agencies to ensure that they are in compliance with said laws. However, this does not guarantee that every gas pump you might encounter will necessarily be accurate, for a variety of reasons: Some agencies may not have the funds to regularly carry out required inspections at every location, regulators' equipment might itself be inaccurate, understaffed agencies may not be able to adequately enforce compliance with regulations, etc.

Furthermore, instances of malfunctioning or improperly calibrated pumps are not necessarily indicators that a particular gasoline vendor is "cheating." More likely such irregularities are due to worn-out equipment that may be difficult to spot (and are about as likely to cheat the vendor as they are the customer), such as the common occurrence of worn check valves:

Some alert consumers have noticed it over the years: A pump that seems to hesitate a second when the lever is squeezed. Anywhere from 2 to 6 cents tick off before the rush of gasoline starts. That's what happens with a common, hard to diagnose and mostly ignored problem with the "check valve," which is supposed to make sure gas flows at the same time the price meter starts. SEE GAS #