

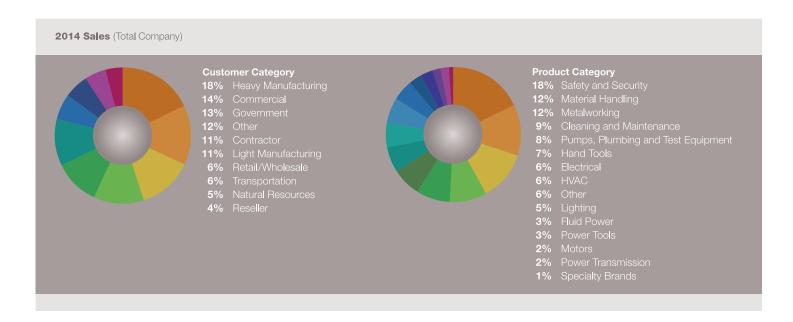


**2014 ANNUAL REPORT** 



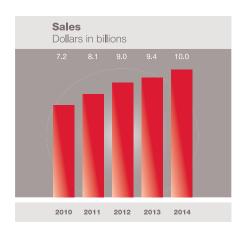
# **COMPANY INFORMATION**

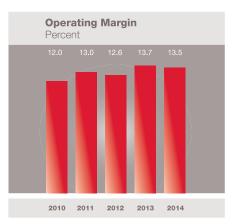
W.W. Grainger, Inc., with 2014 sales of \$10 billion, is North America's leading broad line supplier of maintenance, repair and operating products, with operations also in Asia, Europe and Latin America. For more information about the company, visit www.grainger.com/investor.



# Financial Highlights

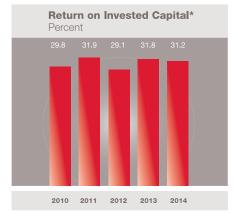
(In thousands of dollars, except per share amounts)	2014	2013	% Change
Income Statement			
Net sales	\$9,964,953	\$9,437,758	5.6 %
Gross profit	4,314,242	4,136,483	4.3 %
As a percent of net sales	43.3%	43.8%	
Operating earnings	1,347,117	1,296,854	3.9 %
As a percent of net sales	13.5%	13.7%	
Earnings before income taxes.	1,334,386	1,287,599	3.6 %
As a percent of net sales	13.4%	13.6%	
Net earnings attributable to W.W. Grainger, Inc.	\$801,729	\$797,036	0.6 %
As a percent of net sales.	8.1%	8.4%	
Per Share			
Earnings – basic	\$11.59	\$11.31	2.5 %
Earnings – diluted	\$11.45	\$11.13	2.9 %
Cash dividends paid	\$4.17	\$3.59	16.2 %
Average number of shares outstanding – diluted	69,205,744	70,576,432	(1.9)%
Balance Sheet and Cash Flow			
Working capital	\$1,697,487	\$1,621,103	4.7 %
Cash flow from operations	959,814	986,498	(2.7)%
Additions to property, buildings and equipment – net	360,635	245,444	46.9 %
Financial Ratios and Other Data			
Return on average shareholders' equity	24.3%	24.7%	
Return on average total capitalization	20.9%	21.4%	
Return on invested capital (ROIC)*	31.2%	31.8%	
Number of branches	681	709	(3.9)%
Number of employees	23,622	23,741	(0.5)%

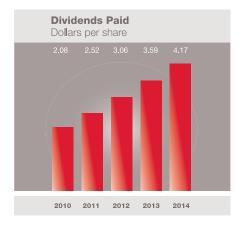




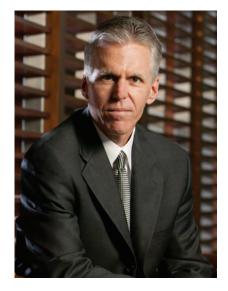








# To Our Shareholders



James T. Ryan Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer

By many measures, 2014 was a year of both tough challenges and strong progress for Grainger. We continued to invest in growth and infrastructure, and our business in the United States performed well as it increased share with large businesses and institutions. We also enjoyed strong growth with our single channel online model businesses in Japan, the United States and Europe. At the same time, we addressed several of our underperforming international businesses.

While the overall results we delivered last year did not meet our short-term objectives, the actions we took strengthened our position to lead this industry for the long term, and we remain energized by the opportunity ahead.

# 2014 financial highlights

- Sales for the year were \$10 billion, an increase of 6 percent versus 2013. Reported earnings per share were \$11.45, up 3 percent, including \$0.81 per share in charges related to our international businesses. On an adjusted basis, earnings per share were \$12.26, up 6 percent.
- In 2014, cash flow from operations was \$960 million, enabling us to fund capital expenditures of \$387 million. We also returned \$816 million in cash to shareholders, consisting of \$525 million in share repurchases and \$291 million in dividends. The dividend payout approved by our Board of Directors in April 2014 reflects a 16 percent increase in the quarterly dividend.

Our formula for creating shareholder value has been, and will remain, a function of growing faster than the market, while maintaining or expanding operating margins. Historically, strong gross margins have helped us deliver on this formula. Given the low inflationary environment, we need to achieve this in a different way, so we are aggressively going after productivity improvement to fund growth and infrastructure projects.

This past year, we focused even more on where we can compete and win. We continued to invest in markets with high GDP per capita and intensive maintenance, repair and operating (MRO) needs where our value proposition is most successful. We also learned that the road to attaining scale and profitability in some markets outside of North America is long and complex:

 This proved true in Brazil. We did not see enough in the early phases of our ownership of that business to give us confidence we would be successful in the near term. We made the decision to shut down our operations there.

- Our business in China has not met our expectations, however
  this market has the potential to evolve and be important in
  the future. We've refocused our efforts on inside sales and
  eCommerce to grow with small customers and are encouraged
  by what we now see.
- Europe also continues to present an attractive opportunity for the long term despite a difficult economy. We've taken costs out of our Fabory business through shop closures and internal restructuring, and we are further focusing this business on delivering its core offering of fasteners through a more effective sales force and eCommerce capabilities.

# Prioritizing where we win and how

#### North America

We are driven to make our products and services accessible in ways that are the most convenient and cost-effective for the professional customer. Nowhere do we do this better than in North America. With more than 200 years of combined experience in the United States, Canada and Mexico, we understand better than anyone else how customers want to purchase MRO supplies. We've seen their purchasing behaviors change dramatically over the years, and our foresight, relationships and infrastructure have enabled us to respond and capture market share when this happens.

The multichannel model we run in North America sets the standard for serving the needs of larger, more complex businesses. These organizations are looking for a supplier that can bring more products, services and solutions to their places of business. And, as they push more work upstream to their suppliers, delivering a suite of inventory solutions, technical support and integrated eCommerce capabilities has become a base expectation. Our continued investment in these offerings helps customers and drives growth for Grainger.





# The single channel online model

Customers with less complex operations, much simpler needs and a preference to shop online are driving our aggressive investment in our single channel online businesses. This model enables us to serve customers through a website that quickly navigates them to needed products. MonotaRO in Japan and Zoro in the United States are extremely flexible businesses and combined are growing at approximately 40 percent and should grow to almost \$1 billion in sales by 2016. Encouraged by strong customer satisfaction and attractive returns, we've launched the same model in Europe and are excited by the early results.

# Solid foundation

Success in this industry takes a progressive mindset and requires a solid infrastructure. Our supply chain and systems are designed to ensure we can continue to meet customer needs and future demand. These infrastructure investments create substantial benefit for our customers and drive scale for Grainger.

- In the United States, we began work on a new distribution center in New Jersey that not only will increase our storage capacity but also will have the highest throughput of any building in our network.
- In Canada, we completed our new distribution center outside of Toronto, which will more than double our storage and throughput capacity in Ontario.
- We also continued work extending our United States SAP system to Canada and Mexico. We are scheduled to go live with both businesses in 2015.
- We strengthened our offer to manufacturing customers through the acquisition of WFS Enterprises, Inc. in Ontario, Canada, and through an even stronger focus on safety and metalworking.

# A long-term view

Looking forward, our success will require us to operate in an uncertain economic environment. Early in 2015, we are seeing continued low inflation and unfavorable exchange rates in Canada and Japan. We expect to face these headwinds for the foreseeable future and will manage through them accordingly. Grainger's opportunity is to gain share even faster through our differentiated service. We will continue to lead this industry by staying focused on our priorities, making tough decisions and remaining agile and responsive to the environment where we operate.

Our priorities for 2015 are:

- Growth: In North America, accelerate investments in eCommerce, inventory management, safety services and metalworking to gain more share. Foster new growth through our single channel online businesses in Japan, the United States and Europe.
- **Productivity:** Fund growth by creating more efficiencies, reducing costs and delivering better service.
- Foundation: Invest in supply chain and technology systems to add capacity and increase service and scale. Continue to focus on creating a work environment that makes Grainger a destination employer.
- Shareholder returns: Continue to generate strong returns and cash flow while returning two-thirds of cash generated back to shareholders.

We believe the advantage in this industry will go to those who know how to operate both the multichannel branch, seller and services based business model, as well as the single channel Internet based model. We have deep expertise in both, especially in North America, where we can serve both with the same infrastructure.



At Grainger, there is nothing more important than helping our customers be successful. We operate in a unique industry, and the work our customers do is located all around us. We are driven to help the men and women responsible for keeping facilities running and people safe. We have and will continue to anticipate their needs, manage this business for the long term and have the best team in the industry to serve them. People have been the heart of this business for nearly 90 years, and we will continue to foster a great place to work for team members today and in the future.

To help guide and provide oversight, I'm pleased to welcome Rodney C. Adkins to our Board of Directors. Rodney was appointed in 2014 and brings deep experience from his 30-year career at IBM.

I want to thank our team members, customers, supplier partners and our shareholders for your trust in Grainger and your shared commitment to helping this company succeed. I'm confident that together we can continue to grow this business for years to come.



James T. Ryan Chairman of the Board, President and Chief Executive Officer

February 27, 2015

# Corporate Governance at a Glance

Board Accountability	Shareholder Rights
Board is elected by majority vote Yes	Company does not have a shareholder rights plan Yes
Majority of Directors independent Yes	Shareholders have cumulative voting rights Yes
Separate Chairman and CEO No	Shareholders may call special meetings Yes
Independent Lead Director Yes	Employees may vote their shares in company-sponsored plans Yes
Independent Board Affairs and Nominating Committee Yes	All stock-based incentive plans have been approved by shareholders Yes
Number of Board meetings held or scheduled	An independent tabulator tabulates shareholder votes Yes
All Directors elected annually Yes	Company posts its articles of incorporation and bylaws on website Yes
Corporate governance guidelines (Operating Principles) approved by the Board	Executive Compensation
Board plays active role in risk oversight Yes	Independent Compensation Committee Yes
Independent Directors hold meetings without management present Yes	Board Compensation Committee has independent compensation consultant
Board-approved succession plan in place Yes	Compensation risk assessment conducted Yes
The performance of the Board is reviewed regularly Yes	The Company does not have employment agreements. Yes
The performance of each Committee is reviewed regularly Yes	
Board members conduct periodic individual self-evaluations Yes	Executive compensation is tied to performance; numeric criteria are disclosed
Board orientation/education programYes	The Company has the ability to claw back incentive compensation Yes
Directors must tender resignation upon a substantive change in career (Criteria for Membership)	CEO salary is no more than 2½ times salary of next highest paid named executive officer
All Directors are expected to attend annual shareholders meeting Yes	Tidi fied executive officer
All Directors attended at least 75 percent of Board	Corporate Behavior
and Committee meetings Yes	A Company employee is tasked with environmental responsibilities Yes
Financial Disclosure and Internal Controls	Company has environmental, health and safety guidelines Yes
Charters for Audit, Compensation and Board Affairs and	Environmental and workplace safety policy is disclosed Yes
Nominating Committees	Environmental performance is audited by an independent outside firm No
Disclosure Committee function for financial reporting Yes	Company employs Notice and Access for proxy communication Yes
Independent Audit Committee Yes	Company publishes core vision and values statement Yes
Audit Committee has a financial expert	Company compares its governance policies to an external code of best practices
Auditors ratified at most recent annual meeting Yes	Company has program in place to monitor its policies on corruption and bribery
	Company has a code of ethics (Business Conduct Guidelines) Yes

# **Corporate Social Responsibility**

For more information on Corporate Governance, visit www.grainger.com.



**OPERATING** 



VALUING



SERVING OUR



Company has an ethics officer..... Yes Training on ethical behavior is required for all employees . . . . . Yes

SUSTAINING OUR

Grainger's Corporate Social Responsibility platform includes the company's commitments to operating responsibly, valuing people, serving communities and sustaining the environment. These commitments shape the company's focus on corporate citizenship and fuel its determination to make a positive difference. Key areas of progress in 2014 include setting a goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions intensity, continuing to roll out the company's Supplier Code of Ethics and achieving high standards in operational safety performance. In 2014, Grainger also donated \$28 million to charitable organizations in cash, products and employee matching gifts. To learn more about Grainger's Corporate Social Responsibility initiatives, visit www.graingercsr.com.

# Historical Financial Summary

		2014	2013	2012
Financial	Net sales	\$9,964,953	\$9,437,758	\$8,950,045
<b>Summary</b> (\$000)	Earnings before income taxes	1,334,386	1,287,599	1,117,789
,	Income taxes	522,090	479,850	418,940
	Net earnings attributable to W.W. Grainger, Inc.	801,729	797,036	689,881
	Working capital	1,697,487	1,621,103	1,603,748
	Additions to property, buildings and equipment and			
	capitalized software	387,390	272,145	249,860
	Depreciation and amortization	190,171	164,902	145,612
	Current assets	2,967,549	3,044,285	2,900,640
	Total assets	5,284,252	5,266,328	5,014,598
	Shareholders' equity	3,284,101	3,326,836	3,117,366
	Cash dividends paid	291,395	255,466	220,077
	Long-term debt (less current maturities)	404,536	445,513	467,048
Per Share (\$)	Earnings – basic	11.59	11.31	9.71
	Earnings – diluted	11.45	11.13	9.52
	Cash dividends paid	4.17	3.59	3.06
	Book value	48.70	48.32	44.87
	Year-end stock price	254.89	255.42	202.37
Ratios	Percent of return on average shareholders' equity	24.3	24.7	23.6
	Percent of return on average total capitalization	20.9	21.4	20.5
	Earnings before income taxes as a percent of net sales	13.4	13.6	12.5
	Earnings as a percent of net sales	8.1	8.4	7.7
	Cash dividends paid as a percent of net earnings	36.3	32.1	31.9
	Total debt as a percent of total capitalization	12.9	14.0	15.3
	Current assets as a percent of total assets	56.2	57.8	57.8
	Current assets to current liabilities	2.4	2.5	2.7
	Average inventory turnover – FIFO	3.1	3.0	2.8
	Average inventory turnover – LIFO	4.2	4.1	3.9
Other Data	Average number of shares outstanding – basic	68,334,322	69,455,507	69,811,881
	Average number of shares outstanding - diluted	69,205,744	70,576,432	71,181,733
	Number of employees	23,622	23,741	22,413
	Number of outside sales representatives	4,907	4,479	4,157
	Number of branches	681	709	715
	Number of products in the Grainger® catalog issued February 1	590,000	570,000	410,000

Note: See the company's current and prior years' Form 10-K for changes in accounting and other adjustments.

2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
\$5,049,785	\$5,526,636	\$5,883,654	\$6,418,014	\$6,850,032	\$6,221,991	\$7,182,158	\$8,078,185
445,139	532,674	603,023	681,861	773,218	707,337	853,778	1,051,527
158,216	186,350	219,624	261,741	297,863	276,565	340,196	385,115
286,923	346,324	383,399	420,120	475,355	430,466	510,865	658,423
1,108,384	1,290,188	852,472	1,021,663	1,064,094	1,026,690	1,162,318	1,438,375
160,758	157,247	136,764	197,423	194,975	142,414	127,124	196,942
96,305	105,671	114,884	127,882	135,137	140,974	137,793	137,211
1,744,416	1,985,539	1,862,086	1,800,817	2,144,109	2,131,515	2,238,071	2,694,900
2,809,573	3,107,921	3,046,088	3,094,028	3,515,417	3,726,332	3,904,377	4,716,062
2,067,970	2,288,976	2,177,615	2,098,108	2,033,805	2,227,199	2,287,670	2,724,279
71,243	82,663	97,896	113,093	121,504	134,684	152,338	180,527
_	4,895	4,895	4,895	488,228	437,500	420,446	175,055
3.18	3.87	4.36	5.01	6.07	5.70	7.05	9.26
3.13	3.78	4.24	4.91	5.97	5.62	6.93	9.07
0.79	0.92	1.11	1.34	1.55	1.78	2.08	2.52
22.83	25.51	25.90	26.40	27.20	30.81	32.97	38.94
66.62	71.10	69.94	87.52	78.84	96.83	138.11	187.19
14.7	15.9	17.2	19.7	23.0	20.2	22.6	26.3
14.2	15.9	17.2	19.2	20.3	16.4	18.7	22.2
8.8	9.6	10.2	10.6	11.3	11.4	11.9	13.0
5.7	6.3	6.5	6.6	6.9	6.9	7.1	8.1
24.8	23.9	25.5	26.9	25.6	31.3	29.8	27.4
0.5	0.4	0.4	5.0	20.7	19.1	17.8	15.9
62.1	63.9	61.1	58.2	61.0	57.2	57.3	57.1
2.7	2.9	2.6	2.2	2.8	2.7	2.6	1.9
3.3	3.2	3.1	3.1	2.9	2.7	3.1	3.0
4.6	4.5	4.4	4.3	4.1	3.8	4.4	4.0
90,206,773	89,568,746	87,838,723	82,403,958	76,579,856	73,786,346	70,836,945	69,690,854
91,673,375	91,588,295	90,523,774	84,173,381	77,887,620	74,891,852	72,138,858	71,176,158
15,523	16,732	17,074	18,036	18,334	18,006	18,596	21,446
2,154	2,507	1,805	2,386	2,433	2,845	3,079	4,029
582	589	593	610	617	612	607	711
82,300	82,400	115,000	139,000	183,000	233,000	307,000	354,000

# NOTE ON ROIC

Prior to January 2011, ROIC was calculated using annual operating earnings divided by a 13-point (monthly) average for net working assets. Since 2011, ROIC has been calculated using a 5-point (quarterly) average for net working assets to provide greater transparency. Net working assets are working assets minus working liabilities defined as follows: working assets equal total assets less cash equivalents (non-operating cash), deferred taxes and investments in unconsolidated entities, plus the LIFO reserve. Working liabilities are the sum of trade payables, accrued compensation and benefits, accrued contributions to employees' profit sharing plans and accrued expenses.

# **Board of Directors**

## Rodney C. Adkins

Former Senior Vice President of International Business Machines Corporation, President of 3RAM Group LLC, Miami Beach, Fla. (2, 3)

### Brian P. Anderson

Former Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer, OfficeMax Incorporated, Itasca, III. (1, 2)

# V. Ann Hailey

President, Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer, Famous Yard Sale, Inc., New Albany, Ohio (1, 2)

### William K. Hall

Founding Partner, Procyon Advisors LLP, Skokie, III. (1, 2)

Stuart L. Levenick

Former Group President, Caterpillar Inc., Peoria, III. (2, 3, 1)

### Neil S. Novich

(1, 2)

Former Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer, Ryerson Inc., Chicago, III.

# Michael J. Roberts

Former Global President and COO of McDonalds Corporation, Founder of LYFE Kitchen, Chicago, III. (2, 3)

# Gary L. Rogers

Former Vice Chairman, General Electric Company, Fairfield, Conn. (2, 3)

## James T. Ryan

Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer, W.W. Grainger, Inc.

### E. Scott Santi

President and Chief Executive Officer, Illinois Tool Works Inc., Glenview, III. (1, 2)

# James D. Slavik

Chairman, Mark IV Capital, Inc., Newport Beach, Calif.

(2, 3)

- (1) Member of Audit Committee
- (2) Member of Board Affairs and Nominating Committee
- (3) Member of Compensation Committee
- + Lead Director

# Management

# **Executive Management**

# Michael S. Ali

Senior Vice President and Chief Information Officer

# Laura D. Brown

Senior Vice President, Communications and Investor Relations

# Court D. Carruthers

Senior Vice President and Group President, Americas

# Joseph C. High

Senior Vice President and Chief People Officer

# John L. Howard

Senior Vice President and General Counsel

### Ronald L. Jadin

Senior Vice President and Chief Financial Officer

# **DG Macpherson**

Senior Vice President and Group President, Global Supply Chain and International

# James T. Ryan

Chairman, President and Chief Executive Officer

# **Operating Management**

# Paul C. Miller

Vice President, Global eCommerce, Customer Information and Innovation

#### Debra S. Oler

Vice President and General Manager, Grainger Industrial Supply

# Paige Robbins

Vice President, Global Supply Chain

# Kinya Seto

Senior Vice President, Online Business

# **Shareholder and Media Information**

## **Company Headquarters**

W.W. Grainger, Inc. 100 Grainger Parkway Lake Forest, Illinois 60045-5201 847.535.1000 Phone 847.535.0878 Fax

#### **Annual Meeting**

The 2015 Annual Meeting of Shareholders will be held at the company's headquarters in Lake Forest, Illinois, at 10:00 a.m. CDT on Wednesday, April 29, 2015.

#### **Auditors**

Ernst & Young LLP 155 North Wacker Drive Chicago, Illinois 60606-1787

### **Common Stock Listing**

The company's common stock is listed on the New York Stock Exchange under the trading symbol GWW.

# Transfer Agent, Registrar and Dividend Disbursing Agent

Instructions and inquiries regarding transfers, certificates, changes of title or address, lost or missing dividend checks, consolidation of accounts and elimination of multiple mailings should be directed to:

Computershare Trust Company, N.A. P.O. Box 43078 Providence, RI 02940-3078 800.446.2617

# **Dividend Direct Deposit**

Shareholders of record have the opportunity to have their quarterly dividends electronically deposited directly into their checking, money market or savings accounts at financial institutions that participate in the automated clearinghouse system.

Shareholders who are interested in taking advantage of this service or would like more information on the program should contact Computershare.

#### **Investor Relations Contacts**

Laura D. Brown Senior Vice President, Communications and Investor Relations 847.535.0409

William D. Chapman Senior Director, Investor Relations 847.535.0881

D. Casey Darby Senior Manager, Investor Relations 847,535,0099

Upon written request to Investor Relations, we will provide, free of charge, a copy of our Form 10-K for the fiscal year ended December 31, 2014.

Grainger's Annual Report, Form 10-K, Form 10-Q, proxy statement and other filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission, as well as the Fact Book and news releases including quarterly earnings and monthly sales, can be accessed free of charge at the Investor Relations section of the company's website at www.grainger.com/investor. For more information, contact Investor Relations at 847,535,1000.

Requests for other company-related information should be made to David Rawlinson, Vice President, Deputy General Counsel and Corporate Secretary, at the company's headquarters.

# Media Relations Contact

Joseph Micucci Director, Media Relations 847.535.0879

#### **Trademarks**

ACKLANDS-GRAINGER, AIR HANDLER, CONDOR, FOR THE ONES WHO GET IT DONE, GRAINGER, GRAINGER and Design, GRAINGER FOR THE ONES WHO GET IT DONE and Design, GRAINGER LIGHTING SERVICES, GRAINGER Shipping Box Design, GRAINGER.COM, GRAINGER.COM.MX, KEEPSTOCK, LUMAPRO, TOUGH GUY and WESTWARD are the trademarks or service marks of W.W. Grainger, Inc., which may be registered in the United States and/or other countries.

DAYTON and SPEEDAIRE are the trademarks of Dayton Electric Manufacturing Co., which may be registered in the United States and/or other countries.

FABORY is the trademark of Fabory Nederland B.V., which may be registered in the United States and/or other countries.

MONOTARO is the trademark of MonotaRO Co., Ltd., which may be registered in the United States and/or other countries.

WFS INDUSTRY'S SUPPLY PARTNER and Design is the trademark of WFS Enterprises, Inc., which may be registered in the United States and/or other countries.

ZORO is the trademark of Zoro Tools, Inc., which may be registered in the United States and/or other countries.

All other trademarks and service marks are the property of their respective owners.

#### **Forward-Looking Statements**

This Annual Report and Form 10-K contains statements that are not historical in nature but concern future results and business plans, strategies and objectives and other matters that may be deemed to be "forward-looking statements" under the federal securities laws. Such forward-looking statements are identified by words such as "anticipate, estimate, expect, forecast, intend, plan, predict, project" and "should" or similar expressions and include Grainger's expected earnings per share, sales growth and capital expenditures.

Grainger cannot guarantee that any forward-looking statement will be realized, although Grainger does believe that its assumptions underlying its forward-looking statements are reasonable. Achievement of future results is subject to risks and uncertainties that could cause Grainger's results to differ materially from those which are presented.

Factors that could cause actual results to differ materially from those presented or implied in a forward-looking statement include, without limitation: higher product costs or other expenses; a major loss of customers; loss or disruption of source of supply; increased competitive pricing pressures; failure to develop or implement new technologies or business strategies; the outcome of pending and future litigation or governmental or regulatory proceedings; investigations, inquiries, audits and changes in laws and regulations; disruption of information technology or data security systems; general industry or market conditions; general global economic conditions; currency exchange rate fluctuations; market volatility; commodity price volatility; labor shortages; litigation involving appropriate payment for wages; facilities disruptions or shutdowns; higher fuel costs or disruptions in transportation services; natural and other catastrophes; unanticipated weather conditions and the factors identified in Item 1A: Risk Factors.

Caution should be taken not to place undue reliance on Grainger's forward-looking statements and Grainger undertakes no obligation to publicly update the forward-looking statements, whether as a result of new information, future events or otherwise.





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