

## ■ Rural Empowerment Zones and Communities

USDA is involved in an ambitious new effort to help revive the rural economies of some of the Nation's most economically depressed rural areas. This effort resulted in the selection of three Rural Empowerment Zones (EZs) and 30 Rural Enterprise Communities (ECs) in 1994 which will be eligible for special economic stimulus programs to help overcome persistently high poverty rates. These designations will help revitalize local communities by putting Americans to work.

The Rural EZs selected for the program are:

- Kentucky Highlands (Clinton, Jackson, and Wayne counties),
- Mid-Delta in Mississippi (Bolivar, Sunflower, Leflore, Washington, Humphries, and Holmes counties), and
- Rio Grande Valley in Texas (Starr, Cameron, Hidalgo, and Willacy counties).

The 30 ECs include counties and towns across the Nation. States with one or more ECs include: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia, Washington, and West Virginia.

EZ/EC designations were based on strategic plans developed by local leaders, organizations, State officials, and the private sector. Each EZ and EC designation means special consideration for various Federal programs and other assistance, including social service block grants, new tax-exempt facility bonds, tax incentives for employment, and other special consideration for existing Federal programs.

Employers in EZs will qualify for tax credits for each qualified worker who resides in the zone. Each EZ receives \$40 million and each EC receives \$2.95 million to implement the strategic plans.