

■ Rural Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities

USDA Rural Development is involved in an ambitious new effort to help revive the rural economies of some of the Nation's most economically depressed rural areas. USDA Rural Development is now working closely with three Rural Empowerment Zones (EZ) and 30 Rural Enterprise Communities (EC) which are benefiting from special economic stimulus programs to help overcome persistently high poverty rates. These EZ/EC designations are helping to revitalize local communities by putting Americans to work.

The EZ/EC designations are 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.

Authority for a second round of EZ/EC designations will be sought in 1997.

The Rural Empowerment Zones 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 Enterprise Communities 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.

Employers in the EZ 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. In addition, each EZ and EC receives priority for certain programs available through Rural Development agencies.