

STATE OF FLORIDA

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR EXECUTIVE ORDER NUMBER 08-132

WHEREAS, during the 1999 Session, the Florida Legislature passed, and the Governor signed into law, legislation supporting economic development in the rural areas of the State; and

WHEREAS, although economic progress has been made in many rural areas, the growth and prosperity enjoyed by many communities in the State during the past 45 years has not extended into Florida's rural areas; and

WHEREAS, these communities are stewards of the vast majority of Florida's land and natural resources, upon which the State's continued growth and prosperity depend; and

WHEREAS, successful rural communities are essential to the overall success of the State's economy and quality of life; and

WHEREAS, certain rural communities are struggling to maintain, support or enhance job creating activity or to generate revenues for education and other critical government services such as infrastructure, transportation and safety; and

WHEREAS, the challenges faced by these rural communities threaten their well-being and viability; and

WHEREAS, section 288.0656 (7), Florida Statutes, authorizes the Rural Economic Development Initiative to recommend to the Governor up to three areas for designation as rural areas of critical economic concern; and

WHEREAS, a rural area of critical economic concern is composed of rural communities adversely affected by an extraordinary economic event, or that is experiencing chronic or severe economic distress, or a natural disaster, or that presents a unique economic development opportunity of regional importance; and

WHEREAS, the Counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union were designated on April 23, 2003 as a rural area of critical economic concern for a term of five years, and the Rural Economic Development Initiative was directed to review the designation annually and recommend whether the designation should be terminated or continued; and

WHEREAS, the designation expired on April 23, 2008; and

WHEREAS, representatives of the thirty-seven state and regional agencies and organizations comprising the Rural Economic Development Initiative met on April 18, 2008, and agreed to recommend to the Governor to continue the designation of the Counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam, Suwannee, Taylor, and Union as a rural area of critical economic concern.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, CHARLIE CRIST, as Governor of Florida, by virtue of the authority vested in me by article IV, section 1(a), Florida Constitution, and section 288.0656 (7), Florida Statutes, do hereby promulgate the following Executive Order, effective immediately:

Section 1. The area within the boundaries of the Counties of Baker, Bradford, Columbia, Dixie, Gilchrist, Hamilton, Jefferson, Lafayette, Levy, Madison, Putnam,

Suwannee, Taylor, and Union is designated as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern.

Section 2. This area shall be a priority assignment for the Rural Economic Development Initiative.

Section 3. On a case-by-case basis, the criteria, requirements or provisions of economic development incentives may be waived. Such incentives include, but shall not be limited to, the Qualified Target Industry Tax Refund Program under section 288.106, Florida Statutes, the Quick Response Training Program under section 288.047, Florida Statutes, the Quick Response Training Program for participants in the welfare transition program under section 288.047(8), Florida Statutes, transportation projects under section 288.063, Florida Statutes, the brownfield redevelopment bonus refund under section 288.107, Florida Statutes, and the rural job tax credit program under sections 212.098 and 220.1895, Florida Statutes.

Section 4. Access to the assistance available under this Designation as a Rural Area of Critical Economic Concern shall be contingent upon the execution of memoranda of agreement between the Office of Tourism, Trade, and Economic Development, the governing bodies of the Counties, and the governing bodies of the Municipalities included within the area. Such memoranda of agreement shall specify the terms and conditions of the designation, including, but not limited to, the duties and responsibilities of the Counties and Municipalities to take actions designed to facilitate the retention and expansion of existing businesses in the area, as well as the recruitment of new businesses to the area.

Section 5. This designation shall be in effect for five years and will expire on June 11, 2013, but shall be reviewed by the Rural Economic Development Initiative annually. The Rural Economic Development Initiative may recommend the designation be terminated or continued based on economic development progress from current base lines or upon performance under the memoranda of agreement.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of Florida to be affixed at Tallahassee, the Capitol, this 11th day of June, 2008.

GOVERNOR

ATTEST:

SECRETARY OF STATE