

~~(7) SEAFOOD AND AQUACULTURAL PRODUCTS.~~

~~(C) "AGRICULTURAL AREA" MEANS ANY AREA IN THE STATE WHERE AGRICULTURE OCCURS.~~

~~(D) "RURAL AREA" MEANS ALLEGANY, CALVERT, CAROLINE, CARROLL, CECIL, CHARLES, DORCHESTER, FREDERICK, GARRETT, HARFORD, KENT, QUEEN ANNE'S, ST. MARYS, SOMERSET, TALBOT, WASHINGTON, WICOMICO, AND WORCESTER COUNTIES.~~

~~(E) (1) "RURAL COMMUNITY" MEANS AN INCORPORATED OR UNINCORPORATED AREA OF A COUNTY OR GROUP OF COUNTIES IN A RURAL AREA.~~

~~(2) "RURAL COMMUNITY" INCLUDES A COUNTY OR MUNICIPAL CORPORATION IN A RURAL AREA.~~

~~(F) "PROGRAM" MEANS THE RURAL MARYLAND PROSPERITY INVESTMENT PROGRAM UNDER THIS SUBTITLE.~~

13-502.

~~THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY FINDS THAT:~~

~~(1) MANY RURAL COMMUNITIES IN THE STATE ARE FACING A HOST OF DIFFICULT CHALLENGES RELATING TO PERSISTENT UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY, CHANGING TECHNOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, AN AGING POPULATION AND AN OUT MIGRATION OF YOUTH, INADEQUATE ACCESS TO QUALITY HOUSING, HEALTH CARE AND OTHER SERVICES, AND DETERIORATING OR INADEQUATE TRANSPORTATION, COMMUNICATIONS, SANITATION, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT INFRASTRUCTURE;~~

~~(2) THE STATE'S AGRICULTURAL AND RESOURCE BASED INDUSTRIES CONTINUE TO UNDERPIN THE LOCAL ECONOMIES OF RURAL COMMUNITIES, BUT ARE INCREASINGLY UNDER THREAT FROM NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MARKET COMPETITION, URBAN ENCROACHMENT AND LAND DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE, ENVIRONMENTAL AND REGULATORY INFLUENCES, AND LACK OF ACCESS TO CREDIT AND CAPITAL FOR NEW ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT;~~

~~(3) LOCAL GOVERNMENTS, REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS, AND PRIVATE SECTOR SERVICE PROVIDERS HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO MEET ALL THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT, AND HUMAN SERVICES NEEDS OF MARYLAND CITIZENS RESIDING IN THE RURAL COUNTIES AND MUNICIPAL CORPORATIONS BECAUSE OF A LACK OF ADEQUATE AVAILABLE CAPACITY AND RESOURCES;~~

~~(4) (1) THE OBJECTIVE OF THE RURAL MARYLAND PROSPERITY INVESTMENT PROGRAM IS TO RAISE THE OVERALL STANDARD OF LIVING IN RURAL AREAS BY THE YEAR 2020 TO A LEVEL THAT MEETS OR EXCEEDS STATEWIDE BENCHMARK AVERAGES, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME PRESERVING THE BEST ASPECTS OF A PASTORAL HERITAGE AND RURAL WAY OF LIFE;~~