

2. ACS DATA PRODUCTS FOR BUSINESS USES

Census Business Builder

In September 2015, the U.S. Census Bureau launched a new data product for the business community: Census Business Builder.¹⁴ As its name implies, Census

Business Builder is designed for users needing data to help start or grow a business or to better understand an area's business landscape. The data can be used in determining potential locations for new businesses or in creating a business plan for investors.

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, Census Business Builder (CBB), <www.census.gov/data/data-tools/cbb.html>.

Why this tool may be right for you	Why you may want to consider another tool
You want to open a new business or expand an existing business.	The data are limited to states, counties, places, ZIP codes, and census tracts.
The tool combines American Community Survey (ACS) data with economic data to guide your research.	Results include only a subset of all ACS topics.
Interactive maps allow you to select areas and compare results to those of neighboring areas.	
Reports are downloadable and printable.	

There are two editions of Census Business Builder: the Small Business Edition and the Regional Analyst Edition.¹⁵

The Small Business Edition was developed primarily for small business owners who need data for their business plans or to better understand their potential market, but large businesses can also find data for their industries by using the Search tool. The tool includes the following data:

- Social, economic, housing, and demographic data from the ACS.
- Business data from the County Business Patterns, Nonemployer Statistics, the Economic Census, and the Survey of Business Owners.
- Labor force data from the Quarterly Workforce Indicators program.
- Imports and Exports data from the International Trade program.
- Consumer spending data from Esri (a company that provides GIS mapping software).
- Farms data from the Census of Agriculture, USDA.

In July 2017, a new feature was added that allows users to upload and map their own data. More information about uploading data and instructions are available on the Census Business Builder Web page.¹⁶

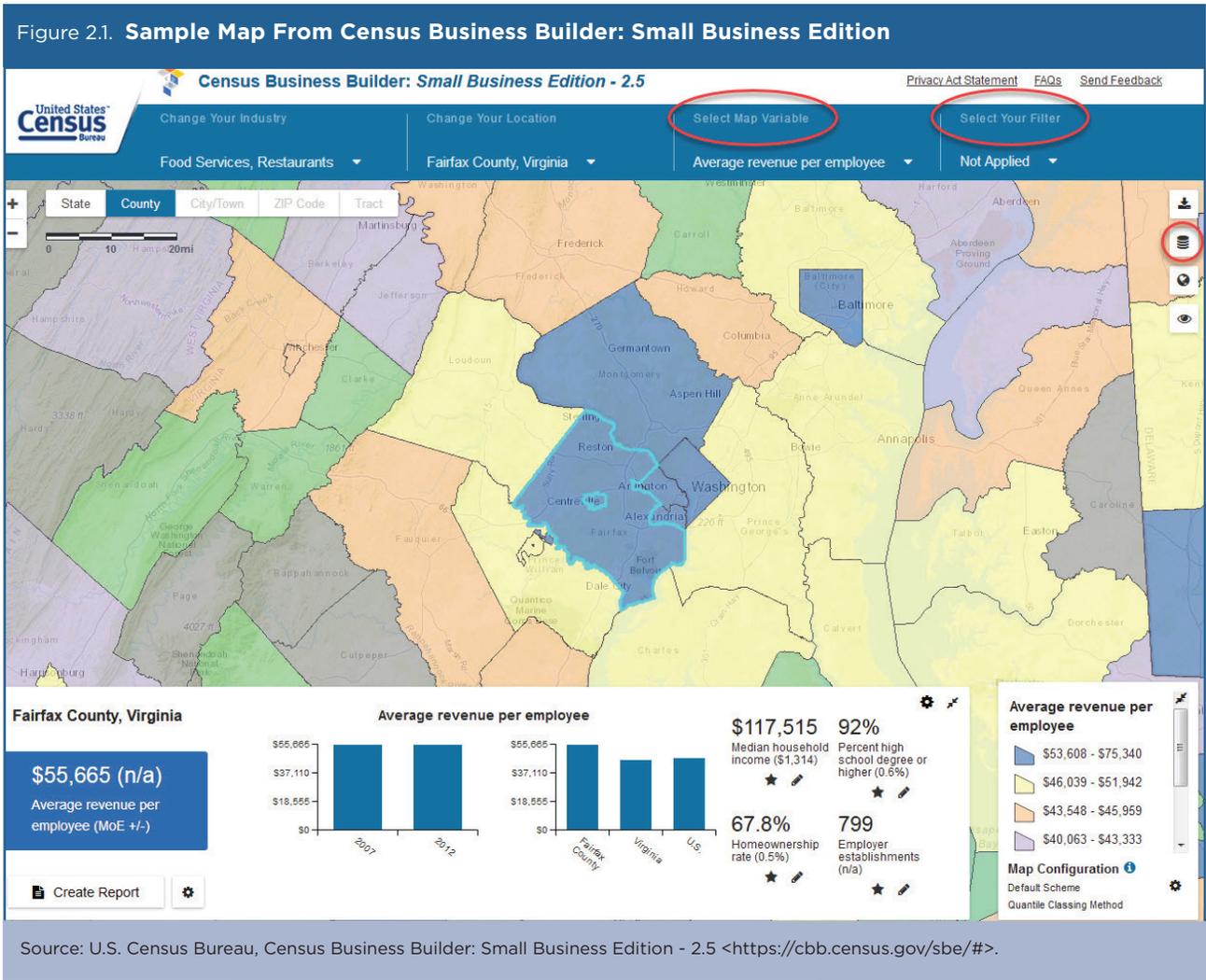
The Small Business Edition provides easy access to information about potential customers and similar businesses. For example, the map and data dashboard displayed in Figure 2.1 present information about average business revenue per employee for restaurants by county in the Washington, DC Metro Area, combined with social, economic, and housing data from the ACS. The variable displayed on the map can be changed using the Map Variables menu on the top toolbar, and the Filter menu allows the user to identify specific areas that meet their own criteria. Data in the map can be downloaded as an Excel or .csv file using the download button located in the upper right-hand corner of the map.

The interactive and customizable dashboard includes charts that show historical data for many of the mapped data variables as well as a comparison of the selected area to the state and nation (see Figure 2.2). Users can change map variables in the dashboard by clicking the edit icons (pencils) located below each statistic on the right-hand side of the dashboard.

¹⁵ U.S. Census Bureau, Census Business Builder: Small Business Edition - 2.5, <<https://cbb.census.gov/sbe/#>>; and Regional Analyst Edition - 2.5, <<https://cbb.census.gov/rae/#>>.

¹⁶ U.S. Census Bureau, Census Business Builder (CBB), <www.census.gov/data/data-tools/cbb.How_Tos.html>.

Figure 2.1. Sample Map From Census Business Builder: Small Business Edition

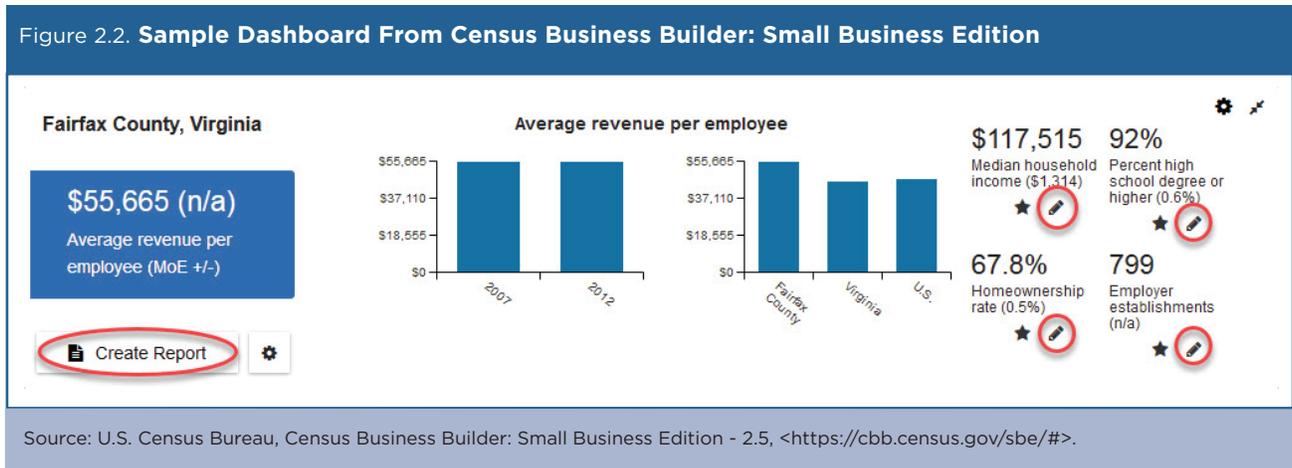


After exploring the data on the map, users can also create Local Business Profile reports (by clicking the Create Report link) that include all the map variables (and their associated MOEs) as well as links to

American FactFinder (AFF) for even more detailed data (see Figure 2.3).¹⁷

¹⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder, <<https://factfinder.census.gov/>>.

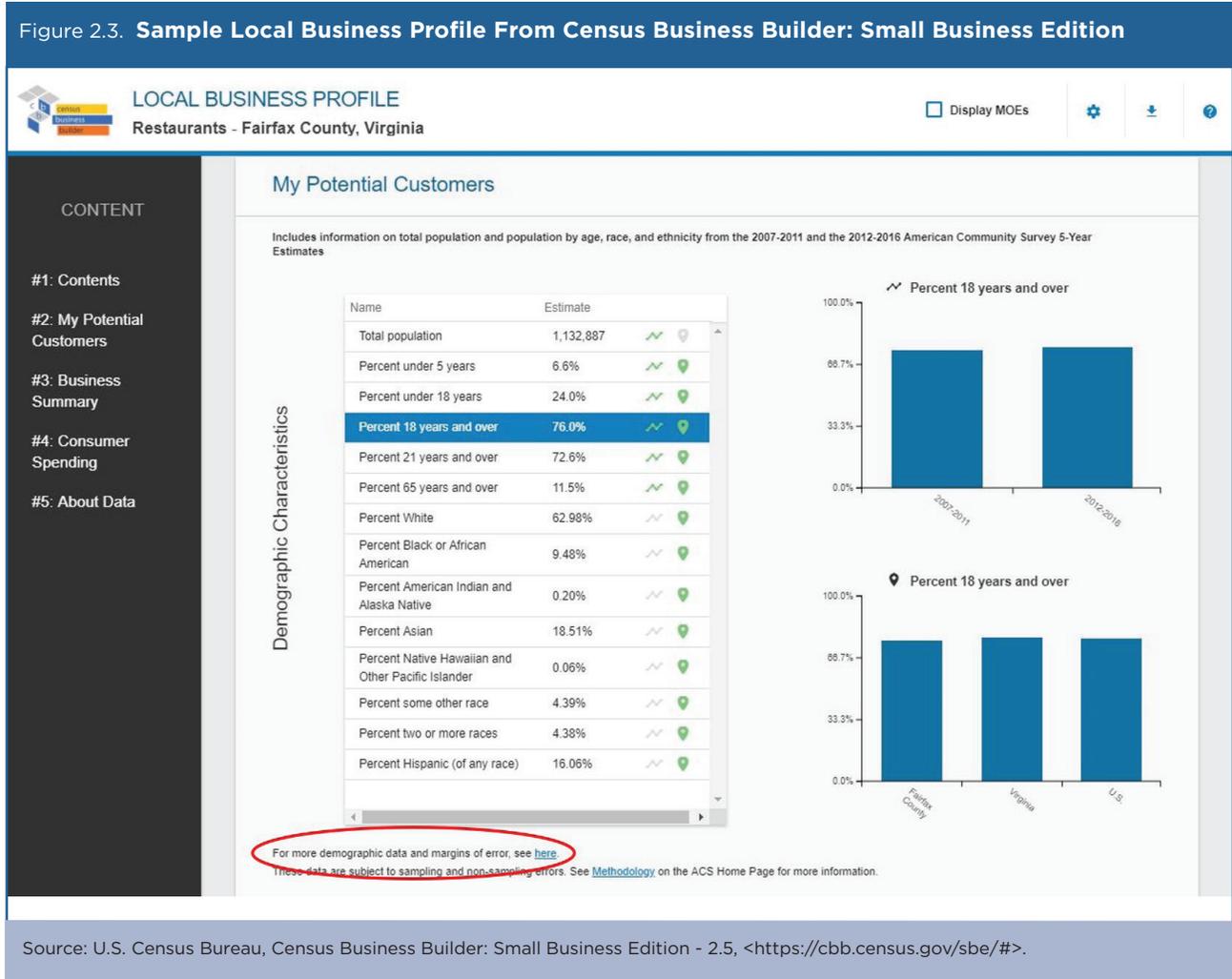
Figure 2.2. Sample Dashboard From Census Business Builder: Small Business Edition



The demographic and consumer spending data are available at the state, county, city/town, ZIP code, and census tract levels; economic data are available at the state, county, and city/town levels; and agriculture and trade data are available at the state level only.

The “ZIP code” data in Census Business Builder combine ZIP code Tabulation Area (ZCTA) data from the ACS with ZIP code data from other sources. ZCTAs are aggregations of census blocks that form “generalized areal representations of United States Postal Service

Figure 2.3. Sample Local Business Profile From Census Business Builder: Small Business Edition



(USPS) ZIP code service areas.”¹⁸ Many businesses use data for ZIP codes to design marketing campaigns based on the characteristics of people living in different mail delivery areas.

USPS ZIP codes represent a collection of mail delivery routes rather than geographic areas with clear boundaries. While ZIP codes for sets of mailing addresses may be changed every year by USPS, the Census Bureau only updates ZCTA definitions periodically. For example, the most recent ZCTA definitions are from 2010. In contrast, many private data suppliers update their ZIP code definitions/areas at least once a year.

The Regional Analyst Edition of Census Business Builder was developed primarily for chambers of commerce, regional planners, and others who need a broader portrait of the people and businesses in their service area. It presents data for all sectors of the

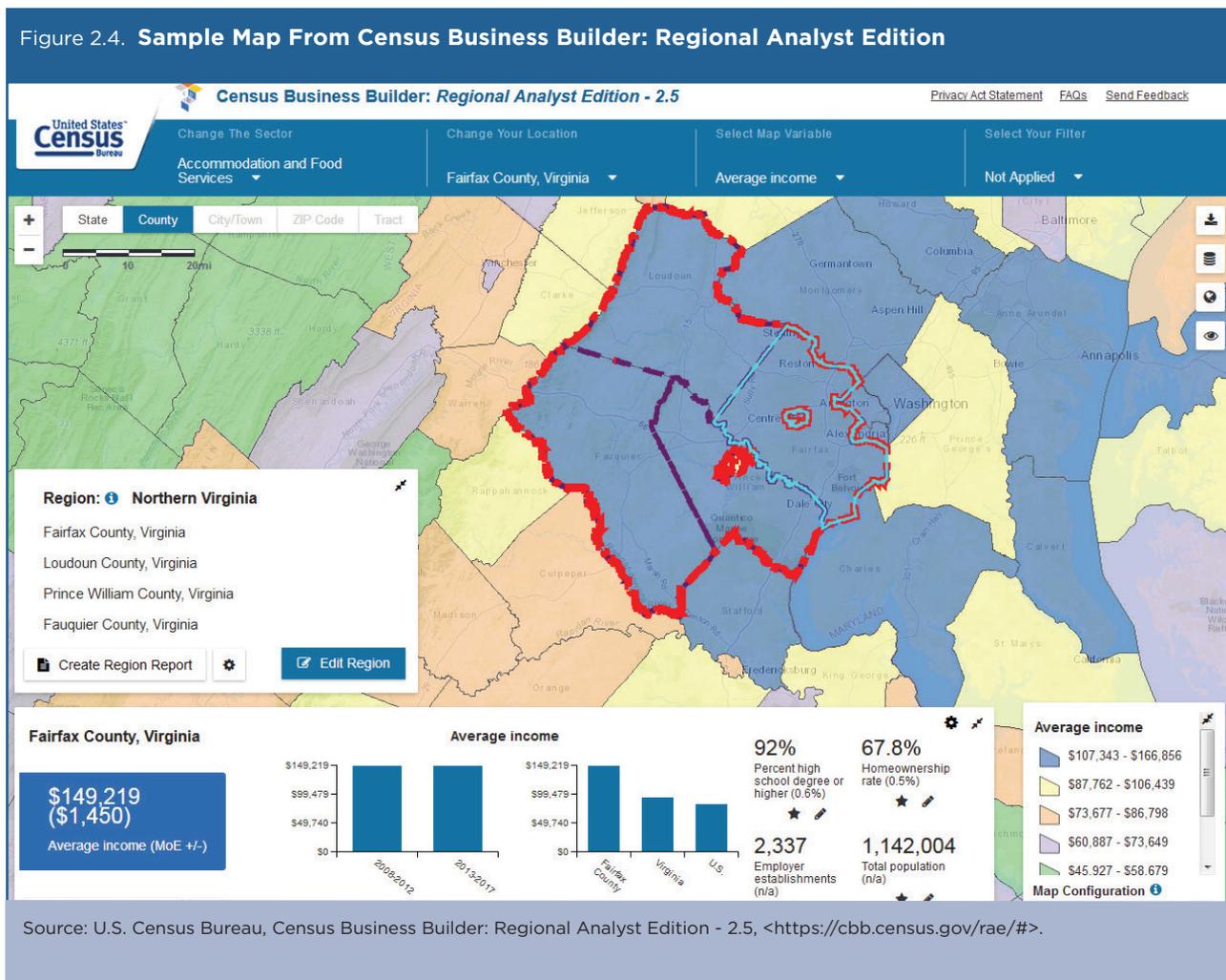
economy and for user-defined regions based on combinations of states, counties, cities/towns, ZIP codes, and tracts. You can also build regions by combining different types of geographic areas.

A sample map showing average household income for a region of Northern Virginia Counties that was created with the Regional Analyst Edition is shown in Figure 2.4.

The Regional Analyst Edition includes the same interactive and customizable data dashboard, download options, and map features as the Small Business Edition.

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, ZIP code Tabulation Areas (ZCTAs), <www.census.gov/geo/reference/zctas.html>.

Figure 2.4. Sample Map From Census Business Builder: Regional Analyst Edition



American FactFinder and Other Data Sources

Businesses with occasional or limited data needs will be well served by the prepackaged ACS data products available through American FactFinder (AFF)—the Census Bureau’s primary tool for accessing data from the ACS, the Puerto Rico Community Survey, the decennial census, and many other Census Bureau data sets.¹⁹ AFF provides comprehensive access to pretabulated ACS data for a wide range of geographic areas, including states, cities, counties, census tracts, and block groups.

Many ACS products available through AFF function best as a lookup tool. If data users have a few areas in mind and want specific data and maps for those areas, they can access the relevant ACS product. For example, a small Des Moines-based retailer could go to AFF and obtain selected Detailed Tables, Data Profiles, and Subject Tables for the Sioux City, Omaha, and Lincoln metropolitan areas to determine which area is the best candidate for an initial expansion.

¹⁹ U.S. Census Bureau, American FactFinder, <<https://factfinder.census.gov/>>.

Other business users may need to access ACS estimates for many geographic areas across the country. For example, a real estate firm could download ACS data every year to help monitor the demographics in a large number of sites defined as aggregations of block groups. A financial services provider with data on the age and mortgage status of its customers might use ACS Public Use Microdata Sample data to build a model estimating the likelihood that its customers have children approaching college age. Or a business might use ACS data on housing costs as a percentage of income to identify neighborhoods where homeowners face difficulty in making house payments.

These more advanced users also have several options to access more detailed ACS data through downloadable Summary Files, the Public Use Microdata Sample Files, or the Census Bureau’s Application Programming Interface (API).²⁰

²⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), Summary File Data, <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/summary-file.html>; American Community Survey (ACS), PUMS Data, <www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/data/pums.html>; Developers, <www.census.gov/developers/>.