



INTERNATIONAL  
**TRADE**  
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# U.S. Trading Companies, 2012

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# ***U.S. Trading Companies: 2012 Highlights***

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## **U.S. Exporters and Exports Increased in 2012, Especially Among SMEs**

- A record of nearly 305,000 U.S. companies exported goods in 2012, of which the majority (297,995) were small or medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with fewer than 500 employees.
- SMEs were responsible for nearly 33 percent of known goods exports in 2012.
- Among all U.S. manufacturers that exported goods in 2012, nearly 97 percent were SMEs, with exports from these companies representing nearly one fifth (18 percent) of the value of exports from manufacturers that year.
- In 2012, wholesalers and other non-manufacturing firms (including unclassified firms) made up 76 percent of all SME exporters, generating 66 percent of total known goods exports from SMEs.

## **Many U.S. Companies Both Export and Import**

- Nearly 407,000 U.S. companies engaged in goods trade in 2012.
- Of the companies known to have engaged in goods trade in 2012, more than 83,000 both exported and imported goods that year. Of these, more than 79,000 were SMEs.
- Despite accounting for less than a third (31 percent) of these companies, manufacturing firms accounted for 67 percent of the known export value and 50 percent of the known import value among firms that both imported and exported goods in 2012.

## **Small Businesses Could Benefit from Entering New Markets**

- In 2012, 58 percent of SMEs posted sales to only one foreign market.
- Ninety-two percent of all SME exporters do business from a single U.S. location, with only 16 percent of SME exports going through affiliates (related parties) abroad.
- Canada is by far the most popular export destination for SMEs. In 2012, more than 91,000 SME exporting companies registered sales to Canada.

## **SMEs Stand to Benefit from Trade Agreements**

- In 2012, more than 20,000 SMEs exported goods to South Korea and nearly 15,000 SMEs exported goods to Colombia, both markets where a trade agreement went into effect that year.
- The number of SME exporters sending goods to Colombia grew by nearly 4 percent in 2012 compared to the previous year, and the number of exporters selling goods to Korea increased by 1.2 percent, outpacing the overall 0.4 percent increase in SME exporters.
- In 2012, almost 93,000 SMEs exported goods to the European Union.

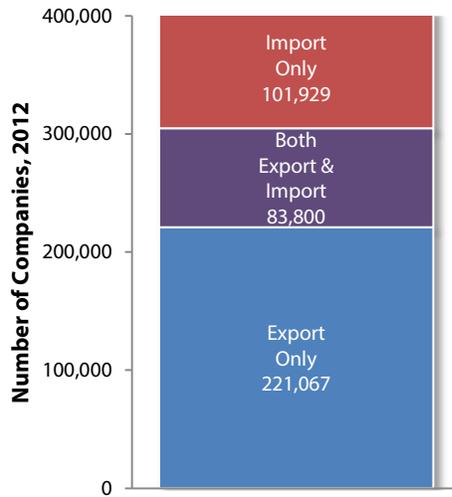
## **Exports Have a Local Impact**

- California had both the most exporters (75,012) and the most SME exporters (71,921) overall in 2012.
- The number of SME exporters in Florida grew by nearly 1,500 between 2012 and 2011, the largest increase among the 50 states.
- Nationwide, SMEs account for nearly a third of the known value of goods exports. However, in five states exports from SMEs accounted for more than half of total known state exports: Montana, Florida, Rhode Island, Wyoming, and New York.
- In 2012, the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA metropolitan area was home to the largest number of goods exporters. This metropolitan area also had the largest number of SME exporters among U.S. metropolitan areas.
- Of the nearly 35,000 exporters located in the Los Angeles metropolitan area, more than 20,000 shipped goods to members of the proposed Trans-Pacific Partnership and nearly 10,000 sold goods to the European Union in 2012.

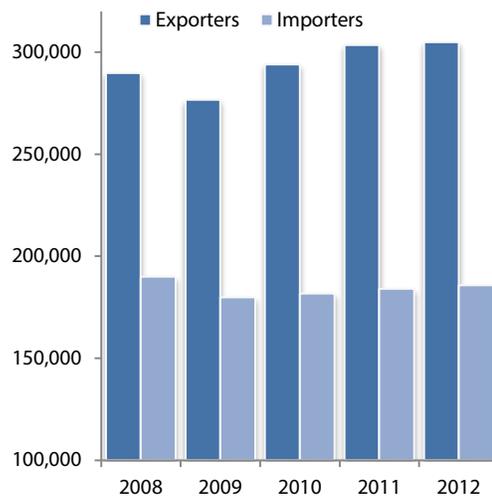
# U.S. Trading Companies Grew in 2012

In 2012, nearly 407,000 U.S. companies engaged in goods trade, of which 83,800 both exported and imported goods that year. On the export side, the number of U.S. goods exporters grew to reach a record-high of 304,867 companies, an increase of nearly 1,400 companies from the previous year and up more than 10 percent from 2009. Meanwhile, the number of U.S. importers grew to reach 185,729 companies, up by nearly 1,800 companies from 2011. While this is an increase of 3.3 percent from 2009, the number of U.S. importers still remains below the 2008 peak of nearly 190,000 companies.

**U.S. Trading Companies, 2012**



**Change in the Number of U.S. Trading Companies, 2008-12**



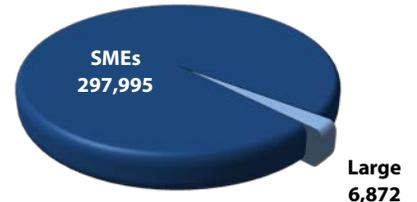
Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with fewer than 500 employees accounted for 98 percent of U.S. exporters in 2012, with nearly 300,000 SME exporters shipping goods overseas that year. These companies also accounted for a third of the known goods export value in 2012, totaling \$449.4 billion. On the import side, SMEs accounted for more than 97 percent of importers in 2012 and nearly 31 percent of the total known goods import value.

Small and medium-sized enterprises in general are among the major beneficiaries of U.S. initiatives to reduce foreign barriers to U.S. exports

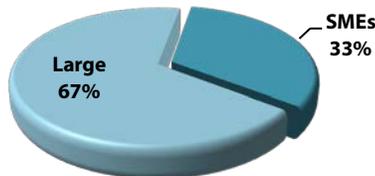
**Number of U.S. Exporters, 2012**



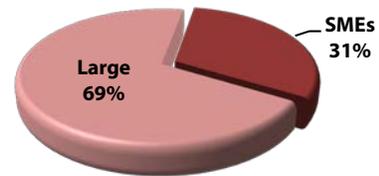
**Number of U.S. Importers, 2012**



**Share of Known Export Value, 2012**

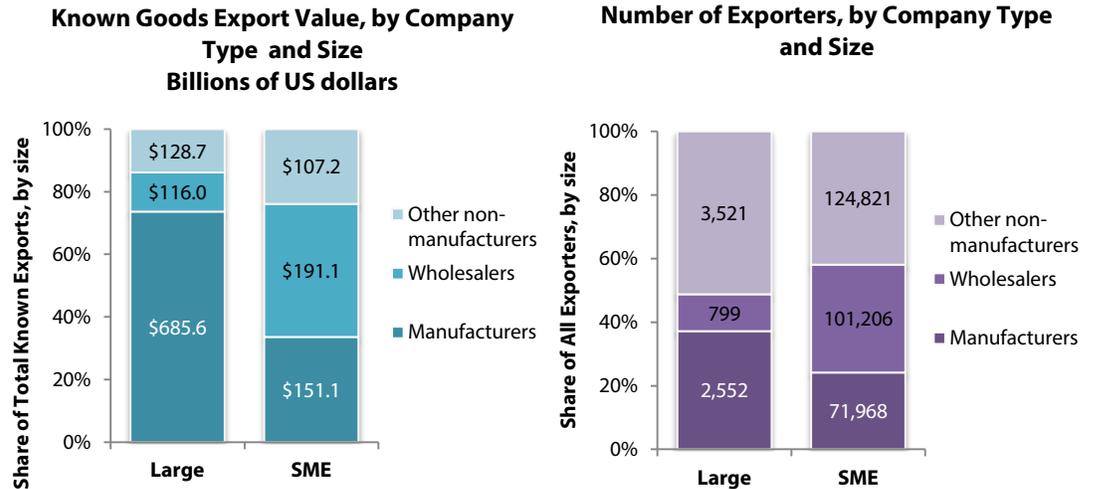


**Share of Known Import Value, 2012**

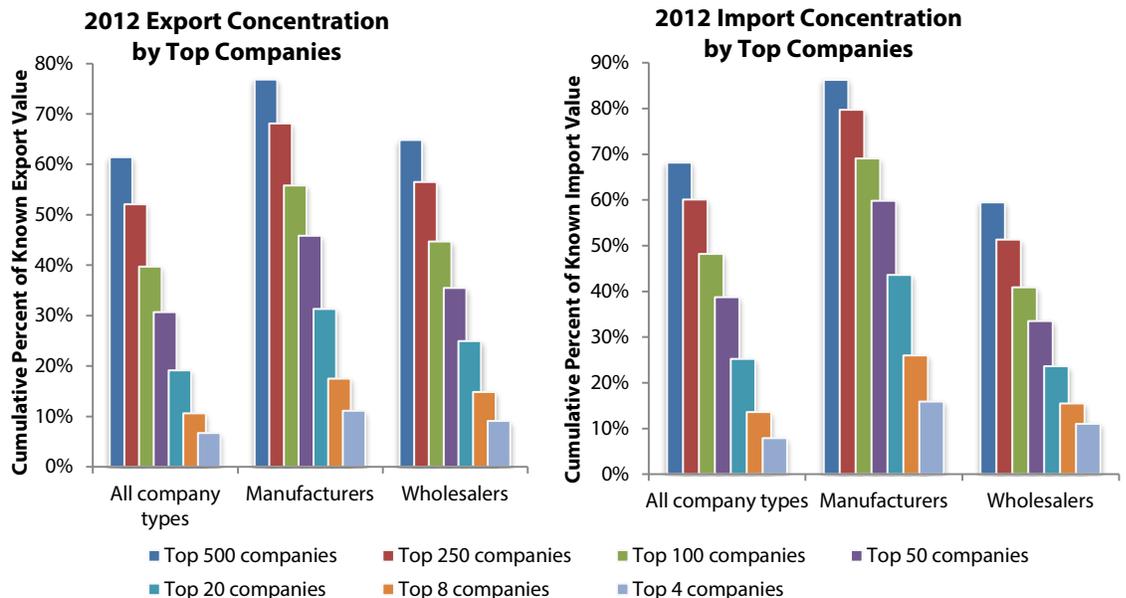


# Wholesalers Dominate the Export Scene

Overall, non-manufacturing companies account for the largest number of U.S. trading companies, particularly among SMEs. In 2012, wholesale trade companies and other non-manufacturing firms (including unclassified firms) accounted for nearly 76 percent of SME exporters, generating two-thirds of known exports from SMEs. While these companies also account for a large number of large companies, manufacturing firms accounted for 74 percent of the known export value from large firms in 2012.



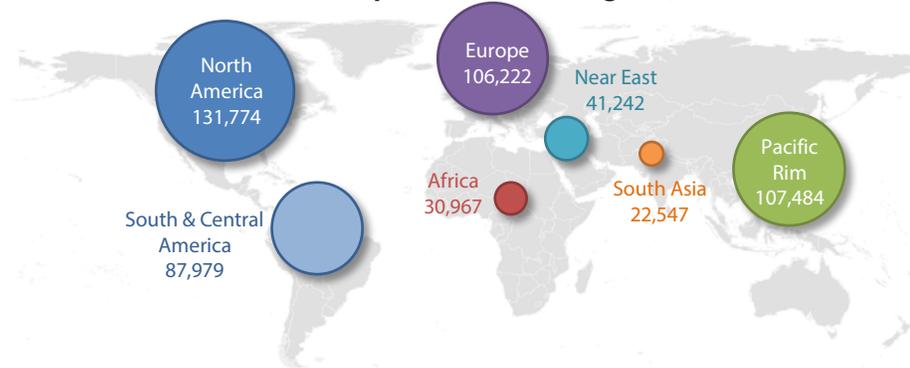
This trend toward larger companies is also apparent when looking at the concentration of trade activity towards top firms. Among manufacturing exporters, the top 250 firms accounted for 68 percent of known manufactured goods exports and 80 percent of known manufactured goods imports. For wholesale trading companies, the top 250 firms only account for 57 percent of the total known export value and 51 percent of the known import value, suggesting that firms in this industry are somewhat less concentrated towards the top few. Overall, manufacturers average higher exports than non-manufacturers by value, with a median export value of \$113.8 billion compared to \$44.4 billion for non-manufacturing firms.



# New Markets Benefit U.S. Exporters

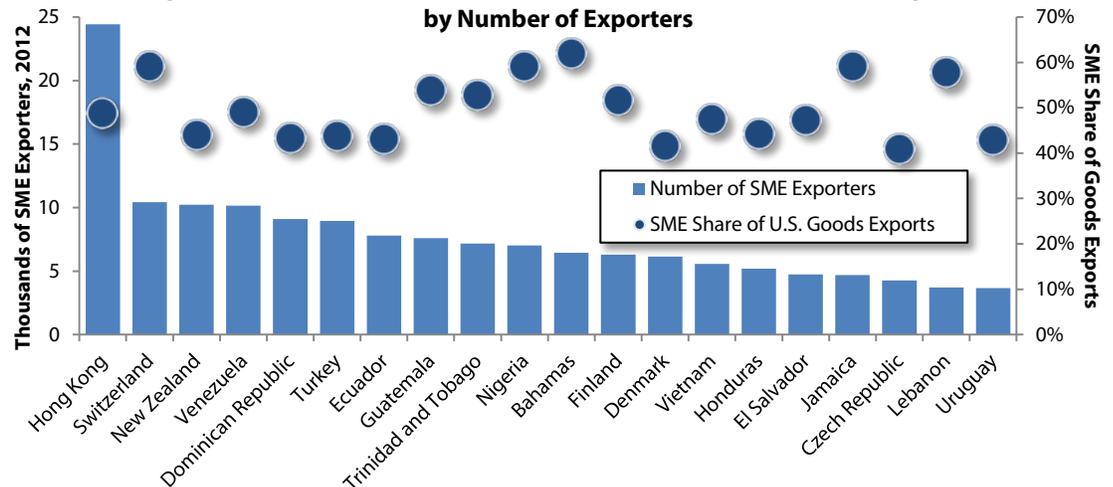
U.S. exporters largely ship goods to markets in North America (namely, NAFTA partners Canada and Mexico), with 43 percent of exporters shipping merchandise to this region in 2012, of which more than 126,000 were SMEs. The Pacific Rim and Europe were also popular regions for U.S. exporters in 2012.

**Number of U.S. Exporters to World Regions, 2012**

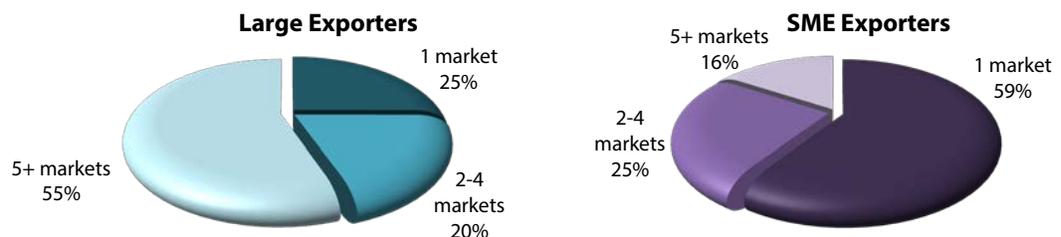


While Mexico is the largest export market for SME exports, accounting for 14 percent of known goods exports from SMEs in 2012, smaller markets remain important export partners for SMEs. Despite only accounting for about a third of known U.S. goods exports worldwide, SMEs accounted for more than half of the U.S. goods export value to 110 markets in 2012 and more than 40 percent of the goods export value to an additional 30 countries.

**Top 20 Markets Where SMEs Account for More Than 40 Percent of Exports, by Number of Exporters**



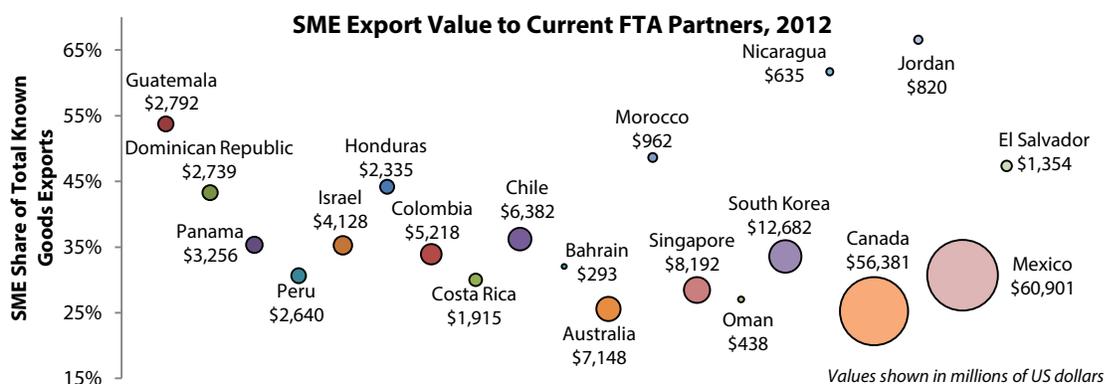
Evidence shows that many SMEs could sharply boost exports by entering new markets. In 2012, nearly 60 percent of all SME goods exporters posted sales to only one foreign market. On the other hand, more than half of large firms that exported goods that year recorded sales to five or more foreign markets.



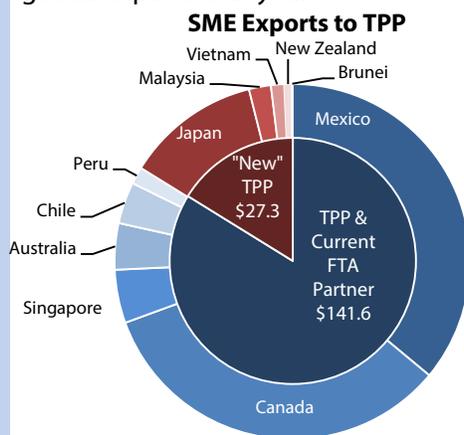
# SMEs Can Benefit from FTAs

Compared with large firms, SMEs are especially dependent on U.S. Government initiatives to open foreign markets. Unlike larger companies, most SMEs do not possess offshore business affiliates that can be used to overcome trade barriers and gain market access. In 2012, 90 percent of all SME exporters sold overseas from a single U.S. location, while only 11 percent of large firms that export are single-location companies.

While NAFTA partners remain the largest markets for U.S. exports, other free trade partners are also important markets for SMEs. In 2012, U.S. SMEs exported \$181.2 billion of goods to FTA partners, led by exports to Mexico, Canada, South Korea, Singapore, Australia, and Chile. Among these markets, SMEs accounted for more than half of the total goods export value to Jordan, Nicaragua, and Guatemala, and more than 40 percent of the goods export share to Morocco, El Salvador, Honduras, and the Dominican Republic.



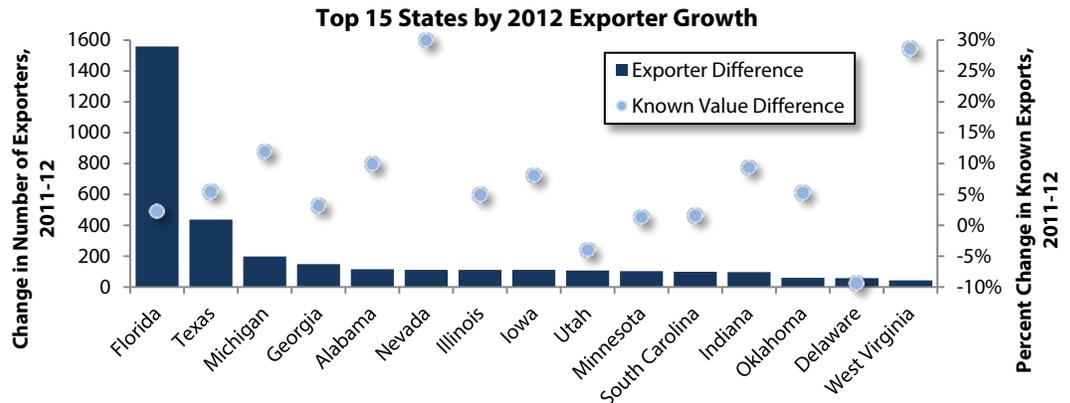
In addition to the fourteen FTAs currently in force with 20 countries, the United States is also negotiating two additional regional agreements: the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). In 2012, nearly 177,000 U.S. companies exported goods to countries in the proposed TPP agreement, of which more than 171,000 were SMEs. While TPP covers some markets where the U.S. already has a trade agreement, this group also includes Japan, the 4<sup>th</sup> largest market for SME exports in 2012. In addition, exports from U.S. SMEs account for more than 40 percent of total known U.S. goods exports to both Vietnam and New Zealand. TTIP would potentially reduce trade barriers between the U.S. and the 28 European Union markets, including several major markets for U.S. exporters. In 2012, nearly 97,000 companies exported goods to the EU<sup>1</sup>, of which nearly 93,000 were SMEs. The European Union also accounted for \$71.3 billion in SME goods exports that year.



<sup>1</sup> These figures do not include Croatia, which joined the European Union in 2013.

# Trade Impacts Local Businesses

In 2012, California had the most identified exporters, at more than 75,000 exporters. Other states that reported high numbers of exporters included Florida, New York, Texas, and Illinois. Together, these five states accounted for 43 percent of known U.S. goods exports in 2012. That same year, Florida reported the largest increase in the number of exporters, adding 1,559 exporters compared to the previous year. In addition to Florida, large increases in the number of exporting companies occurred in Texas, Michigan, Georgia, and Alabama in 2012.



While exporters are generally concentrated in the major exporting states, SMEs represent a large share of the value of U.S. exports originating from both small and large states. Exports from SMEs accounted for more than half of the total known export value of goods exports originating from Montana, Florida, Rhode Island, Wyoming, and New York.



*\*SMEs accounted for 32.6% of known exports nationwide in 2012*

On a metropolitan level, the Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA area reported the highest number of goods exporters in 2012, totaling nearly 35,000 companies. Of these, more than 33,000 were SMEs, most of which sold manufactured products abroad, such as computer and electronic products, machinery, miscellaneous manufactures, and transportation equipment. Many Los Angeles exporters shipped goods to markets in the general Asia-Pacific region, including members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

In addition to Los Angeles, other metro areas with high numbers of exporters in 2012 included New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA; Miami-Fort Lauderdale-West Palm Beach, FL; Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI; and Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX. These metropolitan areas also had a large number of SME exporters that year.

## ***Reference Information***

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Released November 2014

All statistics in this report are from the Commerce Department's Exporter Database (EDB) and Importer Database, which provide an annual statistical profile of U.S. exporting and importing companies, including their number, size, industry composition, and geographic distribution. U.S. importer information was made available beginning with the 2009 release (including 2008 data).

The EDB and IDB are joint projects of the Census Bureau and the International Trade Administration.

The full dataset, along with technical notes and other supplemental information, can be viewed online at <http://tse.export.gov/edb>.

### **Comments and questions should be directed to:**

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