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Irrigation water floods a plowed field in Tipton, California. Photograph by Justin Sullivan/Getty Images

# Ireland Tops U.S. as the Country Best Able to Feed Its People

By Alan Bjerga, Cindy Hoffman and Cedric Sam

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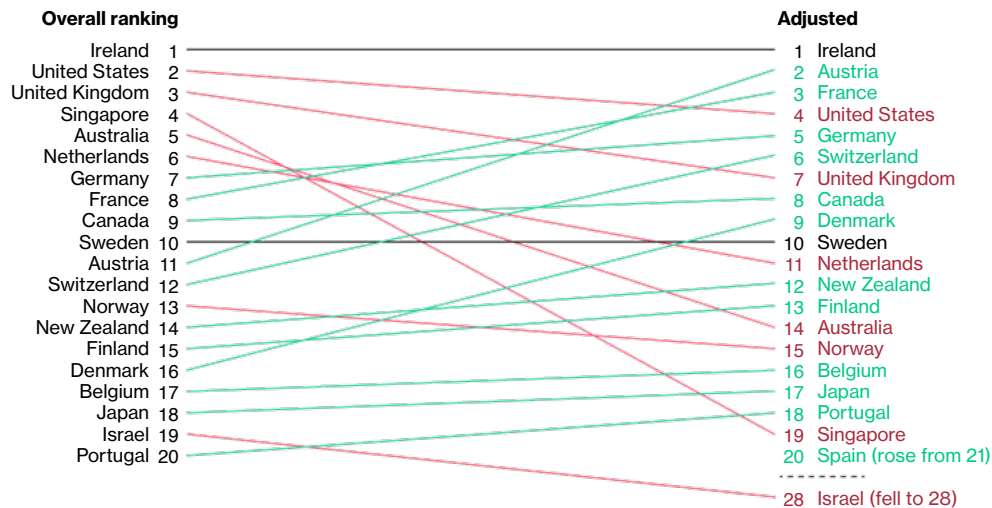
The U.S. for the first time dropped from the top spot in a global ranking of how well countries can feed their own people, as concerns about agricultural research spending and government policy trends may make the world's top food exporter a less-certain place to get a meal.

Ireland is the world's most "food-secure" nation, improving its food affordability, availability, quality and safety while the U.S. has stagnated, according to a copy of the sixth annual Global Food Security Index compiled by the Economist Intelligence Unit scheduled for release Tuesday.

Worldwide, food security fell for the first time in five years, largely because of increases in the number of refugees, weather disasters and a decline in global political stability. The examination, commissioned by Dupont Co., this year added metrics based on climate and natural-resource risks. Adjusting for those factors, the U.S. fell to fourth place, with Austria and France moving ahead.

## Top 20 Countries Before and After New Metrics

U.S., already down a notch, falls to fourth when climate's factored in



“Food security is in reverse,” said Robert Powell, a senior consultant with the Economist Intelligence Unit in New York. “If we’re aiming for zero hunger, we’re going in the wrong direction.”

The number of people suffering from hunger rose by about 38 million to 815 million in 2016, the United Nations said last month. Climate change is seen as a driver of increasing weather volatility which is contributing to famines in developing nations. This year, adverse weather combined with conflict was tied to famine and severe food shortages in South Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen.

Richer nations have fewer problems providing inexpensive, plentiful and safe food to their citizens. Still, risks remain, and some are increasing, according to the study.

#### Four Categories Make Up the Score

Natural resources and resilience were added this year

##### Affordability

Food consumption as share of household expenditure  
Proportion of population under global poverty line  
Gross domestic product per capita  
Agricultural import tariffs  
Presence of food safety net programs  
Access to financing for farmers

##### Availability

Sufficiency of supply  
Public expenditure on agricultural R&D  
Agricultural infrastructure  
Volatility of agricultural production  
Political stability risk  
Corruption  
Urban absorption capacity  
Food loss

##### Quality And Safety

Diet diversification  
Nutritional standards  
Micronutrient availability  
Protein quality  
Food safety

##### Added in 2017: Natural Resources And Resilience

Exposure  
Water  
Land  
Oceans  
Sensitivity  
Adaptive capacity  
Demographic stresses

Wealthier countries including the U.S. and Canada have highly productive food systems, but use more water than they need to, leaving them more vulnerable to increasingly severe droughts expected because of climate change. European nations, meanwhile, may see strains caused by an aging population that pays less in taxes and demands more social services.

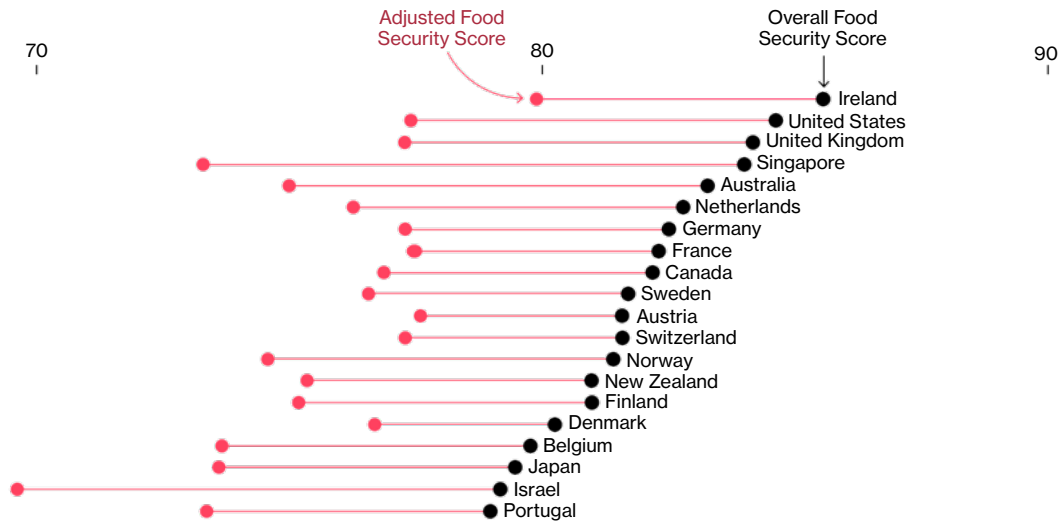
Countries in sub-Saharan Africa clustered near the bottom of the rankings yet have opportunities to develop more sustainable food systems as late adapters to technology, the

report said.

Meanwhile, some developed nations rose or fell dramatically in the rankings because of local circumstances. Austria has a relatively stable climate and very low soil erosion, aiding food production, sending its rating upward. Singapore, meanwhile, fell more than any other nation, given the threat it faces from rising sea levels, exposure to extreme weather and reliance on food imports.

### Climate and Resources: Nobody's Perfect

Singapore threat severe while every country faces challenges



The study places a high value on government support for agricultural research, which is important to keeping nutrition inexpensive and available as food needs increase, Powell said. This is where Ireland, a country where an 1840s famine led a half-million residents to migrate to America, has excelled while the U.S. has faltered, according to the report.

Ireland has outspent the U.S. in relative terms on public research and development on agriculture over the past five years, increasing farming's share of gross domestic product even as its economy has grown, according to data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development.

### Climate and Resources Greatly Affect Stability

Low **resources and resilience scores** lowered every nation's **overall rating**, adjusting scores downward

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U.S. funding as a share of GDP has declined over that same period. That, combined with concerns about U.S. governance—“the United States’ hostile policy towards immigration and trade has dampened the foreign policy outlook” the report said—allowed Ireland to take the top spot.

“Ireland has roared back marvelously from the banking crisis, and their agriculture research and development has increased,” Powell said. In the U.S., “we haven’t seen that level of public-sector investment.”

The study, first published in 2012, is used to guide corporate decisions on allocating resources, said Krysta Harden, a former U.S. Agriculture Department deputy secretary who’s now the chief sustainability officer and vice president for public policy for the agriculture division of DowDuPont Inc.

Its publication is meant to aid governments, nongovernmental organizations and businesses in understanding where food struggles are greatest and where more work needs to be done even in relatively more secure nations, she said.

“Hopefully it’s a wake-up call,” she said. “Agriculture is an ongoing investment that cannot end and cannot be diminished.”

### The Global Index

Sort by Overall Score, Resources and Resilience, and Adjusted Score

Country	Overall Food Security Score	Natural Resources and Resilience	Adjusted Overall Food Security	Adjustment
Ireland	85 . 6	73 . 4	<b>79 . 9</b>	<b>-5 . 7</b>
Austria	81 . 6	80 . 3	<b>77 . 6</b>	<b>-4 . 0</b>
France	82 . 3	76 . 5	<b>77 . 5</b>	<b>-4 . 8</b>
United States	84 . 6	65 . 8	<b>77 . 4</b>	<b>-7 . 2</b>
Germany	82 . 5	74 . 9	<b>77 . 3</b>	<b>-5 . 2</b>
Switzerland	81 . 6	79 . 0	<b>77 . 3</b>	<b>-4 . 3</b>
United Kingdom	84 . 2	67 . 0	<b>77 . 3</b>	<b>-6 . 9</b>
Canada	82 . 2	74 . 0	<b>76 . 9</b>	<b>-5 . 3</b>
Denmark	80 . 3	82 . 1	<b>76 . 7</b>	<b>-3 . 6</b>
Sweden	81 . 7	74 . 8	<b>76 . 6</b>	<b>-5 . 1</b>
Netherlands	82 . 8	68 . 6	<b>76 . 3</b>	<b>-6 . 5</b>
New Zealand	81 . 0	72 . 3	<b>75 . 4</b>	<b>-5 . 6</b>
Finland	81 . 0	71 . 5	<b>75 . 2</b>	<b>-5 . 8</b>
Australia	83 . 3	60 . 1	<b>75 . 0</b>	<b>-8 . 3</b>
Norway	81 . 4	66 . 6	<b>74 . 6</b>	<b>-6 . 8</b>
Belgium	79 . 8	69 . 5	<b>73 . 7</b>	<b>-6 . 1</b>
Japan	79 . 5	70 . 4	<b>73 . 6</b>	<b>-5 . 9</b>
Portugal	79 . 0	71 . 6	<b>73 . 4</b>	<b>-5 . 6</b>

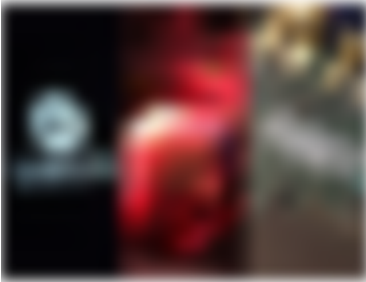
Singapore	84.0	49.2	73.3	-10.7
Spain	78.1	72.5	72.7	-5.4
Czech Republic	75.8	80.3	72.1	-3.7
Italy	75.9	72.9	70.8	-5.1
Poland	74.1	78.8	70.2	-3.9
Israel	79.2	51.3	69.6	-9.6
Hungary	72.2	79.0	68.4	-3.8
Chile	74.7	62.6	67.7	-7.0
Greece	71.9	74.4	67.3	-4.6
Slovakia	70.0	81.1	66.7	-3.3
South Korea	74.7	53.9	66.1	-8.6
Kuwait	74.6	51.1	65.5	-9.1
Uruguay	69.7	75.9	65.5	-4.2
Oman	73.9	49.2	64.5	-9.4
Qatar	73.3	49.9	64.1	-9.2
Romania	67.7	75.2	63.5	-4.2
Costa Rica	69.3	58.5	62.1	-7.2
Saudi Arabia	71.0	46.3	61.5	-9.5
Russia	66.2	71.0	61.4	-4.8
Argentina	67.3	64.2	61.3	-6.0
Brazil	67.7	60.6	61.0	-6.7
Bahrain	68.6	53.0	60.5	-8.1
United Arab Emirates	70.9	40.0	60.3	-10.6
Bulgaria	62.9	75.1	59.0	-3.9
Malaysia	66.2	52.1	58.3	-7.9
Mexico	65.8	54.4	58.3	-7.5
China	63.7	60.1	57.3	-6.4
South Africa	64.0	57.7	57.2	-6.8
Belarus	63.0	62.6	57.1	-5.9
Turkey	61.1	67.0	56.1	-5.0
Serbia	60.6	69.0	55.9	-4.7
Panama	62.5	54.1	55.3	-7.2
Botswana	59.4	62.6	53.8	-5.6
Colombia	60.1	53.8	53.2	-6.9
Thailand	58.3	64.3	53.1	-5.2
Jordan	58.3	62.8	52.9	-5.4
Tunisia	58.8	56.6	52.4	-6.4

Azerbaijan	57.8	59.8	52.0	-5.8
Paraguay	56.5	66.7	51.8	-4.7
Kazakhstan	56.0	67.7	51.5	-4.5
Peru	59.2	45.4	51.1	-8.1
Egypt	56.6	57.0	50.5	-6.1
Ecuador	55.2	52.4	48.6	-6.6
Dominican Republic	54.8	53.6	48.4	-6.4
Ukraine	54.1	58.2	48.4	-5.7
Vietnam	54.0	58.1	48.3	-5.7
El Salvador	53.1	58.4	47.6	-5.5
Sri Lanka	53.0	58.4	47.5	-5.5
Morocco	52.8	55.1	46.9	-5.9
Bolivia	51.3	62.1	46.4	-4.9
Algeria	51.5	53.5	45.5	-6.0
Venezuela	50.2	60.6	45.3	-4.9
Nicaragua	50.0	61.8	45.2	-4.8
Guatemala	49.6	61.8	44.9	-4.7
Indonesia	51.3	46.5	44.4	-6.9
Honduras	48.6	62.7	44.1	-4.5
Pakistan	47.8	62.5	43.3	-4.5
India	48.9	53.7	43.2	-5.7
Ghana	47.9	57.4	42.8	-5.1
Uzbekistan	47.5	54.7	42.1	-5.4
Philippines	47.3	52.0	41.6	-5.7
Myanmar	44.8	69.5	41.4	-3.4
Uganda	43.3	71.3	40.2	-3.1
Senegal	44.2	61.8	40.0	-4.2
Nepal	44.5	58.5	39.9	-4.6
Cambodia	43.3	63.1	39.3	-4.0
Cote d'Ivoire	42.5	69.9	39.3	-3.2
Kenya	42.2	63.7	38.4	-3.8
Cameroon	41.6	57.3	37.2	-4.4
Rwanda	39.8	68.4	36.7	-3.1
Mali	39.4	63.8	35.8	-3.6
Bangladesh	39.7	56.2	35.4	-4.3
Benin	39.6	56.5	35.3	-4.3
Nigeria	38.4	60.7	34.6	-3.8

Togo	37.2	60.5	<b>33.5</b>	-3.7
Tanzania	35.4	67.5	<b>32.5</b>	-2.9
Tajikistan	35.9	53.7	<b>31.7</b>	-4.2
Sudan	34.8	57.0	<b>31.1</b>	-3.7
Burkina Faso	33.1	69.5	<b>30.6</b>	-2.5
Laos	33.1	68.7	<b>30.5</b>	-2.6
Guinea	34.0	56.0	<b>30.3</b>	-3.7
Ethiopia	33.3	61.1	<b>30.1</b>	-3.2
Mozambique	33.7	54.3	<b>29.8</b>	-3.9
Zambia	32.4	67.3	<b>29.8</b>	-2.6
Angola	33.2	56.8	<b>29.6</b>	-3.6
Syria	33.3	50.7	<b>29.2</b>	-4.1
Malawi	31.3	70.1	<b>29.0</b>	-2.3
Niger	29.5	67.0	<b>27.1</b>	-2.4
Haiti	29.1	60.4	<b>26.2</b>	-2.9
Sierra Leone	28.7	57.5	<b>25.7</b>	-3.0
Chad	28.3	59.0	<b>25.4</b>	-2.9
Yemen	28.8	47.5	<b>25.0</b>	-3.8
Madagascar	27.2	66.2	<b>24.9</b>	-2.3
Burundi	25.1	68.8	<b>23.1</b>	-2.0
Congo (Dem. Rep.)	25.5	46.3	<b>22.1</b>	-3.4

Source: The Economist Intelligence Unit  
 Photos: Getty Images

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