

# CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF RETAIL FOOD CHAINS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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*Summary: The corporate social responsibility concept represents voluntary integration of social and environmental aspects to strategic and everyday routine processes and operations of companies. The concept is based on wide participation of important interested parties and communication with these parties. Corporate social responsibility consists of three pillars – an economic pillar, a social pillar and an environmental pillar. This article is focused on information about corporate social responsibility that is commonly available on websites and also in relevant documents provided by the retail food chains in the Czech Republic. These pieces of information are compared by means of content analysis. The content of the released information is evaluated with respect to recommendations provided by the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) in the sphere of sustainability reporting.*

*Key words: corporate social responsibility, food supply chain, retail food chain, sustainability reporting, environmental and social aspects.*

## INTRODUCTION

Corporate social responsibility (“CSR”), also called responsible business, corporate conscience or corporate citizenship, is a form of corporate self-regulation integrated into a business model (1). The term CSR became popular in the 1960s and has remained to be a term used indiscriminately by many to cover legal and moral responsibility more narrowly construed (2). Business Dictionary (3) defines CSR as “*a company’s sense of responsibility towards the community and environment (both ecological and social) in which it operates. Companies express this citizenship through their waste and pollution reduction processes, by contributing to educational and social programs and by earning adequate returns on the employed resources.*” Pavlík et al. (4) states that the issue of CSR is very comprehensive and it comprises a lot of activities that it is possible to include into this area. The concept of CSR is based on these three pillars (4):

- an economic pillar,
- an environmental pillar,

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- a social pillar.

Zadražilová et al. (5) specifies the economic pillar as the responsibility of the company towards markets, customers, suppliers and other business partners. The environmental pillar represents responsibility of a company to the environment; the subject of interest here are environmental aspects and impacts of company's activities, products and services. The social pillar is defined as responsibility of a company towards its employees and towards the local community where the company runs its business.

Pavlík et al. (4) states that companies should emphasize some specific principles and activities. Companies, in the economic area, should focus on the quality and safety of their offered products and services, principles of suitable management, customer relationship management, transparency of their activities, an anticorruption attitude, innovation, sustainability of products, ethics in marketing communication etc. From the perspective of the environmental area, companies should stress in particular economical use of natural resources and their protection, investment into "clean" technology, production which is environmentally friendly, reduction of negative impacts on the environment etc. Finally, from the perspective of the social area, companies should focus primarily on occupational health and safety, equal opportunities, prohibition of child labour, education and retraining for employees, respect to human rights etc.

Each company specifies and sets up its own strategy, activities and methods for achieving its own goals in relation to CSR. Porter and Kramer (6) however emphasize that if CSR programs are to be successful then it is essential that the economic, the environmental and the social objectives are not in any mutual competition. Zadražilová et al. (5) emphasizes the importance of customers and suppliers in terms of their significance for a given company. Supplier-customer relationships are the crucial topic for CSR projects, because it is necessary to keep relations between customers and suppliers in such way that both parties mutually benefit while respecting ethical rules in their dealings.

CSR principles must be implemented also in the context of the food supply chain management. This paper deals with CSR application in selected retail food chains in the Czech Republic (CR). This paper concentrates primarily on those aspects of CSR that are used by the retail food chains in their programs. The food industry faces many significant risks of public criticism of CSR issues in the supply chain; it retains important public visibility since it not only supports a requirement of daily human life but also plays a large role in the national economy (7).

## **1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF THE OBSERVED ISSUE**

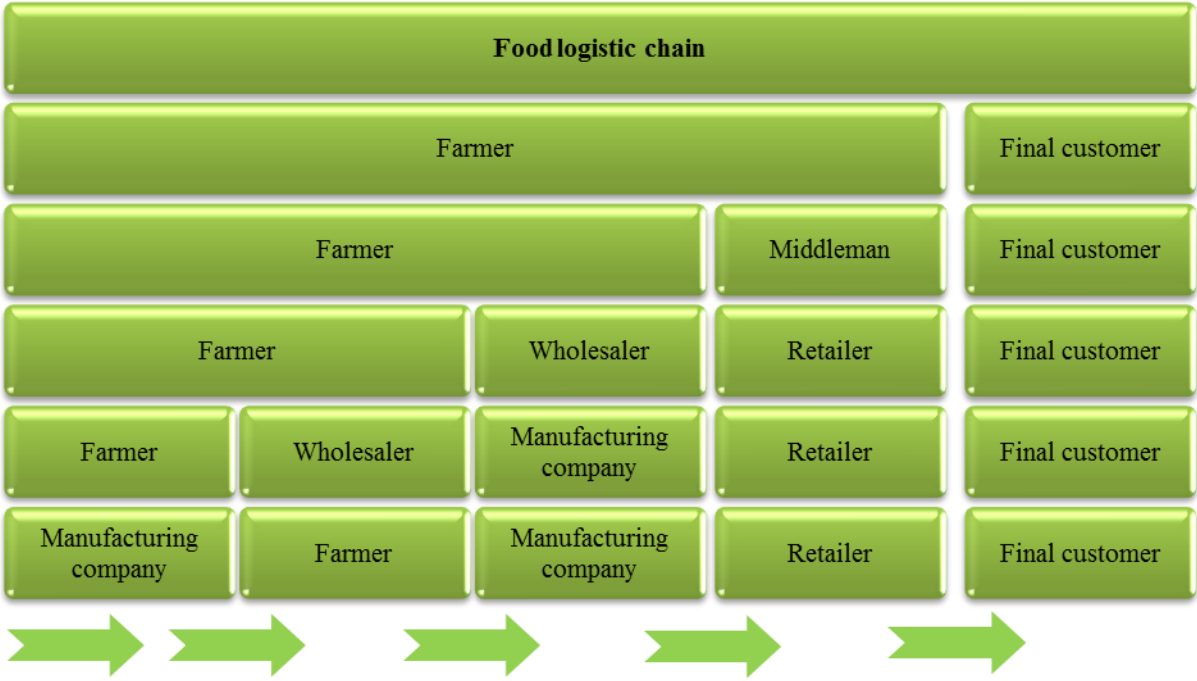
This chapter deals with specification of food supply chains and CSR dimensions in food supply chains.

### **1.1 Food Supply Chains**

Ganeshan et al. (8) defined a supply chain as a series of consecutive activities that comprise of planning, coordination and control of materials, semi-finished products and finished products from supplier to customer. According to the authors, there are two

crucial flows in the supply chain – a material flow and an information flow; and material flows have a direct link to cash flows.

Entrup, Wezel and Meulenberg and Viaene (9, 10, 11) described some different types of food logistic supply chains (Fig. 1). The simplest food supply chain, which is without any levels, is the chain from farmers to final customers. It is possible to add some levels such as a middleman, a wholesaler, a retailer or a manufacturing company. Meulenberg and Viaene (11) state that a direct logistic chain from farmers to final customers, or with a middleman, was used for several centuries, but today it is used only in developing countries. Donk (12) states that currently in the food industry there is most used a logistic chain with three levels, concretely a manufacturing company, a farmer, a manufacturing company, a retailer and a final customer. The fact that farmers buy from manufacturing companies some feed and seeds that they use for own production supports this idea.



Source: Authors, (9, 10, 11)

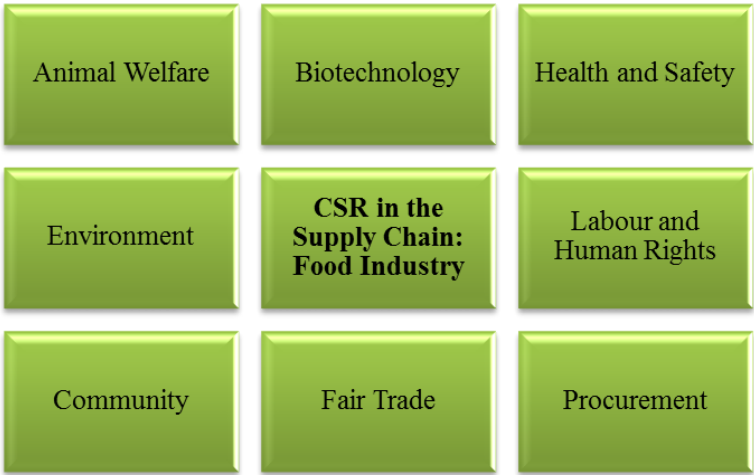
Fig. 1 – Visualization of possible food logistic chains

Supply chain must be managed; Vorst (13) defined the term supply chain management (“SCM”) as integrated planning, coordination and control of every material and information flows which browse the given chain. The main goal of SCM is to satisfy the consecutive customer with lowest cost and at the same time to fulfil requirements of all stakeholders. Trienekens and Omta (14) have emphasized that problems and opportunities of the whole logistic food supply chain must be resolved using effective decision-making apparatus, whereby a comprehensive and holistic view throughout the logistic chain is very important. Beek, Beulens and Meffert (15) looking at the logistic chains stress the perspective of 3P (Triple-P-view: Profit, Planet and People). There are: the economic view (Profit), the environmental view (Planet) and the social view (People). Beske and Seuring (16) stress that research and practical application of sustainability in the supplier chains area has had

recently an increasing trend, this issue must be researched into also in case of the food chain management.

**1.2 Dimensions of CSR in the Food Supply Chain**

CSR is based on the idea that corporations should behave in a social and ethical way responsibly; socially and ethically responsibly in relations with their stakeholders such as customers, employees, governments, communities, non-government organizations, investors, supply chain members, unions, regulators and media (7). The research into CSR has evolved over the last 50 years (17). CSR appears to be gaining importance in the food supply chain due to not only the nature of the product as animal/plant based consumables that are required for existence but also thanks to the complex, labour intensive nature of food supply chains (7). Maloni and Brown (7) developed a comprehensive framework of CSR applications in the food supply chain combining purchasing social responsibility, logistics social responsibility and current industry trends and they have created a complete CSR model for supply chain CSR for the food industry (Fig. 2).



Source: (7)

Fig. 2 – Dimensions of CSR in the Food Supply Chain

The following subchapters (1.2.1 – 1.2.8) represent each of the dimensions of CSR in the food supply chain according to Maloni and Brown.

**1.2.1 Animal Welfare**

The basic premise is that animals should not endure unnecessary suffering; animal welfare includes humane approaches to handling, housing, transport and slaughter. Food companies have pursued lower costs by implementing more intensified animal farming (commonly known as factory farming) (7). Zuzworsky (18) noted that such practices have helped the industry reduce costs, but this approach has led to several questionable animal welfare practices. There are discussed problems with animal living space, access to fresh air and sunlight, and interaction with other animals; attention is given also to the manner of slaughter of animals before the end of natural life (see for instance (19)). Schröder and McEachern (20) have discussed additional barriers including insufficient labelling, standard product availability and purchasing being out of consumer control due to eating out. They

have also suggested that consumers need better information about animal welfare practices of food products.

### **1.2.2 Biotechnology**

Biotechnology represents a rapidly emerging category of CSR food supply chains (7). It is defined as the “*use of biological processes to make useful products*” (21). Biotechnology includes, but is not necessarily limited to, recombinant DNA (combining DNA from different organisms), tissue culturing (growing tissue outside the body), cloning, growth stimulation, genetic testing (for breeding and selection purposes) and the use of antibiotics (21, 22).

Consumer attitudes about food biotechnology and the subsequent threat to protest or boycott industry practices have caused threat to food retailers; retailers are becoming more sensitive to consumer attitudes and are beginning to push for more comprehensive standards down the supply chain (7). Food companies in the European Union are adopting stricter requirements for labelling and traceability of genetically modified foods (23).

### **1.2.3 Community**

The community aspect of CSR represents a broad set of activities that provide support to the local community; such activities are: educational support, economic development, job training, employee volunteering, health care, literacy, arts and culture, childcare and housing (7).

### **1.2.4 Environment**

The food industry has many environmental aspects and impacts. Fox and Boehlje (19,24) have noted problems with manure disposal, soil and water damage, deforestation, global warming from methane, packaging, distances between farms and consumers (farm to consumer), waste disposal and use of fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides etc. Food industry retailers must not only be prepared to offer environmentally friendly products to consumers, but they must also demonstrate responsible environmental care practices in their supply chains (7).

### **1.2.5 Fair Trade**

Maloni and Brown (7) stress, in relation with CSR in food supply chain, the significance of the fair trade idea: “*the premise of fair trade is that food retailers should support prices to the suppliers that allow these suppliers to not only avoid poverty but also sustain business longevity*”. Efforts to identify and to remove barriers to this type of business relations are seen. This type of business relations is based on dialogue, transparency and mutual respect and its objective is higher fairness in international trade (see e.g. (25)).

### **1.2.6 Health and Safety**

The food industry has several health and safety challenges, these are: mad cow disease, foot and mouth disease, protection against biological, chemical and radiological attacks, programs for sharing information throughout the supply chain (Food and Agriculture

Information Sharing and Analysis Centre and the Food and Agriculture Sector Coordination Council), food traceability, healthy lifestyles, aversion to the fast food restaurants, product labelling and lack of food in some countries (7).

### ***1.2.7 Labour and Human Rights***

This issue was mentioned already twenty years ago in relation with foreign manufacturers that supplied to prominent retailers such as NIKE and Wal-Mart. The result of these cases and other cases was the introduction of international labour standards focused on the following issues: children and forced labour, health and safety, collective bargaining, grievances, discrimination, discipline and compensation (7, 26).

### ***1.2.8 Procurement***

Carter (27, 28) presented a review of many examples of ethical mistakes in the procurement process, these are: favouritism, preferential treatment, bribery, gifts, obscure contract terms and rebidding past deadlines.

## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This article deals with the application of CSR principles in retail food chains in the CR. The objective here is to bring attention to those aspects that are the subject of primary attention by the chains themselves. The research is based on the type of information that these companies provide about their approach to CSR.

Cimler (29) and Cimler and Zdražilová (30) define retail chains as places where the purchase and sale of products is done with the purpose to sell to the end customer. Cimler and Zdražilová (30) further categorize retail chains into specialized and non-specialized. Main characteristic of specialized retail shops is a quite narrow range of products, non-food products and trained service staff. The non-specialized retail shops have, on the contrary, a wide range of goods and they offer both food and non-food products. The most important non-specialized retail chains active in the Czech Republic have been included into the research. From the turnover point of view there are seven companies to be considered significant. These companies are: AHOLD Czech Republic, a.s., BILLA, spol. s r. o., Globus ČR, k.s., Tesco Stores ČR a.s., Penny Market s.r.o., Kaufland Česká republika v.o.s. and Lidl Česká republika v.o.s.

Our attention has been given in particular to information that the selected companies provided about the CSR activities on their web pages. Based on this information we have identified those CSR aspects that are considered important by the relevant companies.

The sorting of the CSR aspects is based on recommendations provided by the GRI on sustainability reporting (31). GRI has pioneered corporate sustainability reporting since 1997 (32). GRI is an international, independent organization that helps businesses; governments and other organizations understand and communicate the impact of business on critical sustainability issues such as climate change, human rights, corruption and many others. GRI produces the world's most trusted and widely used standards for sustainability reporting, which enable organizations to measure and understand their most

critical impacts on the environment and the society. For this reason we have selected, in the framework of our research, CSR aspects division according to GRI in spite of the fact that the authors are fully aware that there exist also other approaches to CSR aspects reporting that could be used. CSR aspects are divided into three areas, these are: the economic area, the environmental area and the social area (see Tab. 1).

Tab. 1 – CSR Aspects

<b>Economic area</b>	<b>Environmental area</b>	<b>Social area</b>
Economic performance	Materials	Employment
Market presence	Energy	Labour/management relations
Indirect economic impacts	Water	Occupational health and safety
Procurement practices	Biodiversity	Training and education
	Emissions	Diversity and equal opportunity
	Effluents and waste	Equal remuneration for women and men
	Products and services	Non-discrimination
	Compliance	Collective bargaining
	Transport	Human right
	Supplier environmental assessment	Local communities
	Environmental grievance mechanisms	Anti-corruption
		Public policy
		Anti-competitive behaviour
		Compliance
		Supplier assessment
		Grievance mechanisms
		Customer health and safety
		Product and service labelling
		Marketing communication

Source: (32)

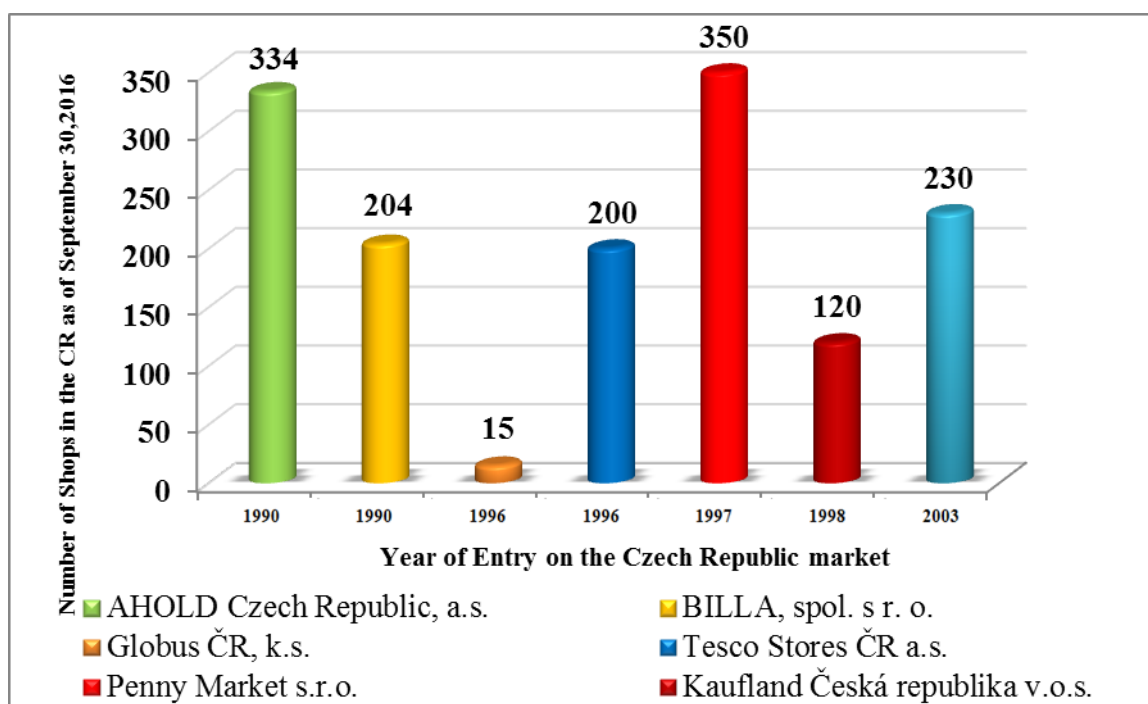
In order to meet the defined objective we have executed first the content analysis, then the comparative analysis (comparison of published information with the GRI recommendations) and then we have executed the synthesis of the acquired pieces of knowledge. In the framework of the analysis our attention has been given to individual CSR aspects with the provision that the presentation of information about the given aspect on the relevant company’s web pages has been observed. However it must be stressed that the level of detail and the level of complexity of the provided information have varied. In the framework of the analysis only the presence of the given aspect have been observed not the rate in which the given aspect has been fulfilled regarding the GRI requirements.

**3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

In the following text there are presented the findings from our research. Firstly attention is given to retail chains’ approach to CSR and then to aspects, that retail chains publish and present and give their priority attention to.

### 3.1 Retail Chains Characteristics and Retail Chains' Approaches to CSR

Basic information about retail chains is summarized in Fig. 3 and Tab. 2.



Source: (33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39)

Fig. 3 – Retail Chains Characteristics

Tab. 2 – Basic Information about Retail Chains

Food Chain	Turnover* (thousands CZK)	Number of Employees in the CR
Penny Market s.r.o.	30 737 173	More than 7 000
Lidl Česká republika v.o.s.	33 604 262	More than 5 000
Tesco Stores ČR a.s.	39 273 000	Nearly 14 000
Kaufland Česká republika v.o.s.	47 567 491	More than 17 200
AHOLD Czech Republic, a.s.	38 021 740	More than 17 500
Globus ČR, k.s.	21 897 917	More than 6 000
BILLA, spol. s r. o.	21 139 356	6 000

\* the latest data available

Source: (33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39)

Company AHOLD Czech Republic, a.s. has been present on the Czech Republic market since 1990. Under the company name Euronova a.s. it was the first foreign chain that entered the Czech market. In comparison with other retail chains the company belongs among the largest employers, currently the company employs more than 17 500 employees. An inseparable part of the company management strategy is social responsibility in the following areas: the social, the economic and the environmental. In the CSR framework company AHOLD Czech Republic, a.s. declares its will to meet its goals in accord with the GRI methodology.



In year 1990 also company BILLA, spol. s r. o. entered the Czech Republic market. This company currently employs 6 000 employees and operates 204 shops. The company puts emphasis on responsible approach to the environment and to assistance to local community in the places where the company operates.

Six years later, in year 1996, two more retail chains entered the Czech Republic market. They were companies Tesco Stores ČR a.s. and Globus ČR, k.s.

The objective of company Tesco Stores ČR a.s. is to act fairly and responsibly in any activities the company undertakes. Under responsible business operations the company focuses in particular on the company customers' interests, but at the same time also on its suppliers, employees and on all other communities impacted by the company's activities. The object of interest is also its activities and products and their environmental impacts. This company currently operates more than 200 shops and employs about 14 000 employees.

Company Globus ČR, k.s. operates fifteen shops with more than 6000 employees. Regarding CSR this company, contrary to other chains, communicates on the company web pages only about support and cooperation to charity projects.

In year 1997 company Penny Market s.r.o. entered the Czech Republic market. This company employs more than 7 000 employees. This company is a subsidiary company of an international trade chain REWE. The basic pillars of its organization culture are permanent values and related social responsibility. Company Penny Market s.r.o. focuses on the economic, the environmental and the social CSR aspects. Its central point of attention is care for its employees. The company puts emphasis on sale of products made by Czech producers and on Czech labels.

One year later, in year 1998, company Kaufland Česká republika v.o.s. entered the Czech Republic market. The company currently operates more than 120 shops and employs more than 17 200 employees. The company considers as important part of its policy the environmental responsibility and the social responsibility. It concentrates primarily on efficient use of available natural resources and on minimizing impacts of its business activities on the environment. The company actively supports projects helping children, handicapped people, and also animals.

The youngest company, which entered the Czech Republic market in 2003, is company Lidl Česká republika v.o.s. Since its entry on the Czech market this company has been selected already four times to be „The Best Trader of the Year“ by its customers. In Germany this company belongs among Top 10 retail food stores. Company Lidl Česká republika v.o.s. put emphasis on responsible usage of natural resources, but also on relations with its customers and its trading partners.

### **3.2 CSR – Significant Aspects**

Tab. 3 to 5 summarize the results of the comparative analysis. Information is divided into three areas according to the GRI recommendation – to the economic area, to the environmental area and to the social area. Under each of these areas partial aspects that the GRI recommends to report are included. In the tables aspects to which food supply chains give attention are highlighted (although the level of detail and the level of complexity of the provided information vary).

Tab. 3 – The Economic Area

Aspect	AHOLD	BILLA	Globus	Tesco	Penny	Kaufland	Lidl
Economic performance	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Market presence							
Indirect economic impacts							
Procurement practice	√	√		√	√	√	√

Source: Authors

Tab. 4 – The Environmental Area

Aspect	AHOLD	BILLA	Globus	Tesco	Penny	Kaufland	Lidl
Materials							
Energy	√	√		√	√	√	√
Water	√						
Biodiversity							
Emissions	√	√		√	√	√	√
Effluents and waste	√	√		√	√	√	√
Products and services		√		√		√	√
Compliance							
Transport					√	√	
Supplier environmental assessment							
Environmental grievance mechanisms							

Source: Authors

Tab. 5 – The Social Area

Aspect	AHOLD	BILLA	Globus	Tesco	Penny	Kaufland	Lidl
Employment	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Labour/management relations					√		√
Occupational health and safety	√	√			√		
Training and education	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Diversity and equal opportunity							
Equal remuneration for women and men		√			√		
Non-discrimination		√			√		
Collective bargaining		√			√		
Human right							
Local communities	√	√		√	√	√	√
Anti-corruption				√			
Public policy							
Anti-competitive behaviour							
Compliance							
Supplier assessment	√			√	√	√	√
Grievance mechanisms							
Customer health and safety							√
Product and service labelling	√	√			√	√	√
Marketing communication					√		

Source: Authors

All chains inform about its economic performance. From information on their web pages it is clear that they see the economic performance as a significant aspect of the CSR. All chains publish annual reports. Stakeholders can get detailed information about company assets, ways of financing and on economic results from the annual reports. Purchasing processes can be considered to be another significant aspect. The chains publicly declare that they put emphasis on the quality of goods sold and they inform interested parties about cooperation with regional suppliers. Some chains provide more detailed information about the share of purchasing from local suppliers and they point out that this purchasing policy is, also in the long-term view, a part of their strategy (for instance Tesco). The significance of these aspects is fully in accord with the dimensions of CSR as recommended for food retail chains by Maloni and Brown (7); the dimension *Procurement* is supported as well as the dimension *Community*. The retail chains do not find it essential to provide information that can be, under the GRI recommendation, put into the categories *Market presence* and *Indirect economic impacts*.

All retail chains (with the exception of company Globus) consider significant the following aspects from the environment area: aspects concerning energy, emissions and manner of waste disposal. They inform about savings in energy consumption, about shops modernizations where the objective of such modernization is reduction of energy consumption, about new cooling systems projects and about utilization of waste heat. Some chains publish information about projects to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, information about greenhouses gases production reduction respectively (e.g. Kaufland, AHOLD) and they also mention projects for car fleet upgrade. The chains consider waste management to be a significant environmental aspect; some companies inform about the establishment of places for reverse purchase of products (e.g. BILLA, Kaufland, Lidl) or about participation in projects focused on food waste reduction (Tesco). Also in this case the significant aspects are in line with the CSR dimensions as recommended, for food chains, by Maloni and Brown (7); CSR dimension *Environment* is supported. None of the observed chains think it is important to provide information about material consumption (this aspect is significant primarily for producing companies), about water management, about their impacts on biodiversity, about laws and by laws abidance in the area of the environment and about mechanism how complaints related to the environmental aspects and impacts are managed.

The food chains consider the following area to be the most significant social aspects: employment, training and education and their activities' impacts on the local community, participation of the local community in the food chains' activities respectively. The companies stress the importance of employees for the success of their respective businesses, they inform about the number of employees and also from other related information regarding e.g. occupational health and safety and equal pay for men and women it is unambiguously clear that they consider employees to be a very significant stakeholder from the CSR point of view. Chains provide information about their approach to employee education, about executed educational programs respectively, and about the manner how such programs are financed. Chains consider the local community to be another very significant stakeholder in CSR. They declare their efforts to be „good neighbour“ (e.g. AHOLD, Tesco),

they support projects contributing to higher quality of life (focused on healthy nutrition, healthy life style, active past time activities, integration of children from children's home to regular daily life and similar) and they also demonstrate efforts to offer local production, products made by Czech producers and they promote local specialities. Evaluation of suppliers from the point of view of those suppliers' social impacts and product labelling (e.g. AHOLD has on offer for its customers a large assortment of products under its own brands) belong to significant social aspects next to other activities. Also in the social area it is possible to find harmony with CSR dimensions in the manner in which they are recommended for food chains by Maloni and Brown (7); CSR dimensions *Health and safety* and *Labour and human rights* are supported. Food chains completely ignore social aspects *Diversity and equal opportunity*, *Human right*, *Public policy*, *Anti-competitive behaviour*, *Compliance* and *Grievance mechanisms*.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the results of the executed research it unambiguously issues that retail chains that operate their business activities in the Czech Republic territory do strive to profile themselves as socially responsible companies. Their customers, employees and the local communities belong among their significant stakeholders. Under the CSR communication activities they stress primarily their economic performance, management of environmental impacts of their activities (with focus on the most significant current environmental issues) and approach to their employees. They declare they strive to develop relations with the local community. They publish information about already implemented projects and projects' results and they provide information about planned projects, projects that have, unambiguously, preventive character.

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