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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30525/978-9934-26-569-3-30>

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AS A KEY ELEMENT OF AGROHOLDINGS' IMAGE

In the modern globalized world, where consumers, investors, and society as a whole are placing increasingly high demands on business ethics and responsibility, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is acquiring critical importance. For agroholdings, which play a central role in ensuring food security, managing land resources, and impacting rural communities, CSR is becoming not just a fleeting trend, but a strategic imperative. The image of an agroholding, built on the principles of responsible business conduct, is a powerful asset that contributes to increased competitiveness, attraction of investments, retention of qualified personnel, and strengthening of stakeholder trust.

Despite the growing interest in CSR within the agricultural sector, there is a need for a deeper understanding of its role in shaping a positive image of agroholdings, especially in the context of Ukrainian realities and international experience.

The agro-industrial complex sector is one of the key drivers of Ukraine's economy. However, its development is accompanied by a number of challenges related to environmental impact, social tension in rural regions, and the necessity of adhering to high product quality standards. Under these conditions, the formation of a sustainable and positive image for agroholdings through the effective implementation of CSR strategies becomes an integral part of their successful functioning and development.

Issues of corporate social responsibility are actively investigated in global scientific thought. Specifically, Grassl W. examines business models of social enterprises, emphasizing the hybrid nature of their activities [1]. Carroll A.B. explores the evolution of the CSR construct, defining its multifaceted nature and significance for business and society [2]. The concept of sustainable development and its connection to

corporate sustainability is the subject of numerous studies, with a particular focus on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which serve as a global benchmark for responsible business [3]. The increasing importance of organizational corporate culture for key performance indicators of enterprises, such as profitability and competitiveness, as well as its role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in a broader context, is noted.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is an integrated concept that involves the voluntary incorporation of social and environmental aspects into a company's business operations and its interaction with stakeholders. For agroholdings, this means not only compliance with legislation but also active participation in solving social, environmental, and economic problems that arise during their activities. In particular, the main directions of modernizing the corporate culture of transport enterprises in the context of sustainable development include strengthening environmental responsibility (through reducing emissions, increasing energy efficiency, effective waste management), social responsibility (safety, social dialogue, community support), and economic sustainability (introduction of innovations, rational use of resources, reduction of material consumption and increase in productivity). These principles are universal and can be extrapolated to the activities of agroholdings.

The image of an agroholding is formed by the aggregate perceptions of various stakeholder groups – consumers, investors, local communities, employees, partners, and government bodies. The key components of image and their connection to CSR are presented in Table 1.

In Ukraine, recent years have seen a growing interest in CSR among large agro-industrial companies, driven both by the demands of international markets and the increasing awareness of Ukrainian society. However, as researchers note, most CSR initiatives in Ukraine still have a predominantly philanthropic rather than a strategic character, not yet fully integrated into business processes [4].

MHP (Myronivskyi Hliboproduct). One of the largest Ukrainian agroholdings, MHP, actively declares its commitment to CSR principles. Their programs include: supporting the development of rural areas (financing educational, medical, and cultural projects), energy efficiency programs, and reducing environmental impact (e.g., using biogas complexes), as well as social projects for employees and veterans [4]. These initiatives are key to forming a positive image of the company as a responsible player in the Ukrainian and international markets.

Table 1

**Interrelationship of Key Components
of Agroholding Image and CSR Directions**

Image Component	CSR Directions	Examples of Initiatives
Responsibility to Consumers	Product quality and safety, transparency, ethical marketing	Certification according to international standards (GlobalG.A.P.), eco-labeling, open information about product origin
Environmental Responsibility	Reduction of negative environmental impact, rational resource use	Implementation of resource-saving technologies (No-till), waste management, biodiversity programs
Social Responsibility to Communities	Rural development, support for local population	Social projects (education, medicine, infrastructure), job creation, charity
Responsibility to Employees	Decent working conditions, personnel development, social protection	Compliance with labor law, training and qualification improvement programs, health insurance
Investment Attractiveness	Transparency, stability, reputation	Ethical business standards, anti-corruption efforts, public CSR reporting

Source: Compiled by the authors

Another leading Ukrainian agroholding, Astarta-Kyiv, also demonstrates significant attention to CSR. The company implements projects for soil conservation (minimum tillage, crop rotation), social partnership programs with communities in its regions of presence (infrastructure repair, support for schools, hospitals), and actively introduces modern agricultural technologies to increase efficiency and reduce its ecological footprint [6]. Their image as a responsible producer of sugar and agricultural products is largely based on these efforts.

European agroholdings, such as the German concern Bayer, have long-standing experience in implementing CSR. Bayer, as a leader in the agrochemical and pharmaceutical industries, focuses on sustainable agriculture (developing solutions for efficient resource use, crop protection), health protection, and responsible production. Their CSR strategies include transparency in scientific research, ethical production, and responsible supply chain management, which significantly

strengthens their global image as an innovative and responsible company [5].

Effective communication of CSR initiatives is no less important than their implementation. The perception of an agroholding by various stakeholder groups directly depends on how transparently and consistently the company demonstrates its social and environmental responsibility. At the same time, it is crucial to mitigate the risk of greenwashing – the practice of conveying a false impression of environmental responsibility, which can undermine stakeholder trust and damage corporate reputation if CSR communication is not backed by genuine action.

Corporate Social Responsibility is an integral part of modern business, and for agroholdings, it is a key element in forming a sustainable and positive image. Effective integration of CSR into the development strategy allows agroholdings not only to meet the growing demands of society and international markets but also to gain significant competitive advantages. The implementation of comprehensive CSR initiatives, covering environmental, social, and economic aspects, combined with transparent communication, contributes to increased consumer loyalty, attraction of investments, improved relations with local communities, and retention of qualified personnel. The experience of Ukrainian [4, 6] and European [5] agroholdings confirms that a strategic approach to CSR is the foundation for long-term success and the formation of a strong reputation in the agricultural sector.

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