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Corporate America Gives Back: Exploring the Best Practices and Implemented Programs That Help Combat Food Insecurity in America

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**Corporate America Gives Back: Exploring the Best Practices and Implemented Programs
That Help Combat Food Insecurity in America**

by

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Advisor: Dr. Molly Rapert

**An Honors Thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of
Science in International Business in Marketing**

**Sam M. Walton College of Business
University of Arkansas
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Introduction

As businesses of all types become more self-aware and responsive to consumers' interests, they are quickly adapting their business models to include pillars of philanthropy. Philanthropic qualities are especially important in regards to the CPG industry (consumer packaged goods) since they often produce food products. Many consumers and analysts believe that CPGs have a moral obligation to cater to people with various types of dietary needs, restrictions, and preferences while also helping customers meet their nutritional minimums. Companies can aid consumers in a plethora of ways. Beneficial programs can include initiatives like fundraising, food drives, internal employee assistance programs, and creating products that cater to the needs of food insecure customers. Many consumer packaged goods companies also serve their customers by offering WIC (Women, Infants, Children) eligible products. Through these efforts and many more, businesses are prioritizing consumer well-being while simultaneously elevating their brand.

Over the span of two summers in 2020 and 2021, I had the opportunity to intern with one of the cereal-giants, Post Consumer Brands. I served as the Sales Intern at the Bentonville, Arkansas Walmart Sales Team office both years. As a marketing major, I have always been passionate about the inner workings of 'Corporate America' and the ever-changing, dynamic relationship between business and consumer. The sales internship allowed me to pursue my career passions coupled with my academic interest in corporate social responsibility programs. Seeing and being part of a company that gives back to the local and global community resonated with me so much that I opted to further pursue how CPGs are combating food insecurity across the nation. Initially, I planned on completing an internship-only thesis and gathered information accordingly for that. After further solidifying my topic however, I wanted to take full advantage of the opportunity writing a thesis provides by offering other firms perspectives. This being said, I decided to layer on additional aspects (interviews, website audits, WIC callouts) that were beyond the thesis requirements.

I chose to research Post Consumer Brands, General Mills, and Kellogg's websites, ESG reports, as well as interview industry experts on their point of views of food insecurity, seeing as many of their positions wouldn't exist without the philanthropic programs. I discuss the implications of COVID-19 on food insecure households and what impacts we saw play out over the years 2020 and 2021. Using secondary data and the aforementioned information, I provide my overall takeaways and recommendations to businesses.



Part I – The Inspiration

Due to my internships with Post, I learned firsthand how businesses are giving back to their local and national communities. This sparked my intrigue in how other CPGs compare, and drove me to evaluate the best practices and implemented programs companies employ to combat hunger. Programs include food drives, donations, fundraisers, employee assistance programs, and the creation of WIC eligible products.

Internship: Post Consumer Brands

Summer I Context

During the summer of 2020, I landed my first ever internship with Post Consumer Brands (PCB) as the Walmart Sales Intern at their Bentonville, Arkansas office. Getting an internship early in my college career was something I always wanted to pursue because I knew it would make me a competitive job candidate come graduation.

I first learned about Post Consumer Brands at the Fall 2019 business career fair. They had a booth fully stacked with the cereals I have always known and loved ever since I was a kid. Products from Malt-O-Meal, to Honey Bunches of Oats, and the famed Pebbles brands decorated the table. That alone drew me in, and after talking to their representative, I signed up for the first interview slot the very next morning. Following the interview where I met with three women from the Bentonville office, I received a phone call offering me the internship position for the summer! I was ecstatic to finally be getting my foot-in-the-door to adulthood and some valuable experience on my résumé. They informed me that it would be a project-based position with hourly pay over a twelve-week period during the summer. I would however be remiss if I didn't mention how accommodating, patient, and flexible the company and my specific team was once the pandemic hit. COVID-19 impacted all our lives, but my manager and the PCB Walmart Sales Team was undoubtedly dedicated to continuing the intern program. Their reassurance was a testament to the pillars and values of PCB that I saw upheld throughout the entirety of my internship. Although I knew my experience would look a little different than anticipated, I was still excited.

Post is driven by the motto "*Make Better Happen*" and that resonated with me as a person and jobseeker because of how I was raised and what I try to live out every day through my words and actions. PCB exemplifies this in many ways, the first being their five company values: Put Safety First, Win Together, Act With Integrity, Be Courageous, and Drive For Results. I saw the first value 'Put Safety First' in action during my internship amid the pandemic. My supervisors reassured me numerous times that I could work in whatever setting made me the most comfortable. My team consisted of only fourteen people, so we had the ability to social distance in the office if needed. Most of my team members opted to work from home with only three or four team members coming into the office on a daily or regular basis. Everyone was incredibly respectful given the circumstances and accommodating to each person's situation during that time. Because the option was available to me and I felt safe doing so, I chose to work in a hybrid setting for my internship. My supervisor, Casey Vazquez, and I decided that I would start my first three weeks of the internship remote then use our best judgement as the summer progressed. Thankfully, I was able to work in the office eventually with other team members on multiple occasions.

The scope of my internship was open-ended from the beginning. I was informed that under normal circumstances, previous interns composed their final projects over the recurring modular resets that take place at Walmart in early June, however, Walmart had delayed their mod reset to August which no longer made it a feasible project for me. That left a unique window of opportunity open for me to explore what I wanted for my final presentation. Despite my initial lack of enthusiasm, this assignment was a blessing in disguise because it helped me learn how to

navigate ambiguity. After suggestions from Casey, and guidance from my mentor, Jennifer Beard, I decided to investigate PCB's pricing strategies on the Malt-O-Meal bagged cereal category. In addition to forming my intern project I was also given different goals, markers, and checkpoints to monitor my progress. I was evaluated on three different levels. My first goal was to be actively involved in the community and show servant leadership both in and out of the office. The second goal was to develop and own reporting structures for the Walmart Sales Team. The final objective was to conduct a category deep dive and strategic assessment of the RTE (ready-to-eat) bag cereal category at Walmart.

Objective #1: Community Involvement

My manager challenged me to be an active participant in company events plus local and national community events. Although most events were in an online and remote setting, I still experienced a breadth of activities. My goals included assisting and planning community events (if applicable) and providing support to the Sales Development Specialist, Megan Robison when needed. She was the primary planner in terms of Northwest Arkansas involvement and relayed many of her connections to me. I was excited to include this goal into my final evaluation and internship because I have years of volunteerism experience from both high school and college.

By the end of the summer, I participated in numerous community events and company seminars.

- Virtual LPGA Miles for Mercy
- Became a member of the NWA Network of Executive Women organization
- Participated in the Virtual Cancer Challenge 5K
- Engaged in various 2020 Intern Cohort events such as:
 - o Lunch & Learn with C-Suite Executives
 - o Former PCB Intern Panel
 - o PCB Baking Challenge
 - o Social Media Activities (LinkedIn & Tik Tok)
 - o End of Summer Virtual Celebration & Happy Hour

Seeing this side of the business made me a well-rounded employee and allowed me to fully embrace PCB's motto of *Making Better Happen*.

Objective #2: Sales Reporting

On a more technical note, my second professional goal was to successfully learn and manage the sales reporting structures. I was tasked with minimizing redundancy where necessary and confidently own ad hoc projects and reports. Casey specified that I would learn about the various reports utilized in the Walmart business. I would find ways to elevate the processes already in place and review regional and store level sales while identifying key opportunities in those areas. I was especially eager for these tasks as it was a great way to put my academic learnings to the test after taking Information Systems classes and honing my Microsoft Excel skills.

I spent the first few weeks training and getting to know my intern cohort along with my coworkers at the Bentonville, AR office. I developed competencies in the following (reporting) systems: ATLAS DSR, Walmart Retail Link, and Nielsen IQ. I utilized these systems on a

weekly basis to produce my daily sales reports and weekly business reviews. By the start of Week 4, I was running the daily sales report independently and sending it to leadership and the home office sales team. I also sent seven Weekly Business Reviews during my 12 weeks where we presented a top-line overview of the high performing brands for that week and tracked products performances. Using the same systems, specifically Retail Link, I learned how to build ad hoc reports that would tell the story I was trying to convey for a certain brand, in a certain place, during a certain time.

Objective #3: Intern Project

The third benchmark of my final evaluation was my intern project presentation. As stated earlier, there was a lot of ambiguity surrounding my project since the pandemic had impacted normal business operations. My manager and I eventually decided I'd perform a strategic category assessment on RTE bag cereal at Walmart which translated to primarily researching MOM bags. Casey defined some parameters of the project for me. I reviewed competitive items and PCB items that were under or over spaced based on velocity and performance. I analyzed consumer insights to see if there were any overlooked key metrics. Last I researched mod set and regional performance opportunities to see if PCB was capitalizing on shelf space per region for MOM brand.

Starting this project from scratch was a daunting task, but overtime became more manageable as the action items came into focus. Using Retail Link, I found the 10 top selling MOM bags and presented on where sales were being undermined in certain regions and why. I also shed light on category trends of the time and how COVID-19 was impacting sales. I defined how pantry loading and the summer-long quarantine affected sales in the short and long run. My final recommendations were to callout findings to the Walmart buyer, raise store specific retail prices where possible, and continue tracking the top 10 performing items. Parallel to the MOM bag project, I worked with another Walmart intern at the time who was focusing on the entire bagged cereal category. Both of us were looking at pricing strategies in Walmart and it was interesting to work cross-functionally across both businesses to further understand operations. I provided a fresh perspective on these items and received positive feedback on my findings in return.

Summer I Takeaways

My first internship with Post was invaluable as it set the foundation for future positions I hope to have. I know what kind of company culture resonates with me the most and what kind of tasks invigorate me. I would challenge myself to be more comfortable being uncomfortable with tasks that are unfamiliar to me. My manager gave me valuable feedback on my research, networking, and presentation skills that enabled me to improve upon these strengths. Overall, I enjoyed the experience immensely and got along well with the team, so I was offered to come back for a second summer.

Summer II Context

My supervisor graciously offered me the position again for the following Summer 2021 after completing my internship in 2020. I maintained communication with them throughout the school year before returning to the office in June. The transition back was seamless as I was welcomed by the team again and didn't need to spend as long training. Although COVID-19 hadn't subsided yet, I did get to spend more time in the office. Everyone took the necessary precautions by wearing masks and social distancing when possible. I learned even more from the internship the second time around because I already felt like a valued member of the team and was able to basically pick up exactly where I left off. The nature of the position remained the same, however I could now explore other facets of the business. I was tasked with three objectives similar to my first summer. My two professional goals were promoting community involvement and owning reporting structures again but with added responsibility compared to the previous summer. For my final intern project, I presented a comprehensive SWOT analysis over PCB's Walmart.com business.

Objective #1: Community & Company Involvement

Many of the same tasks remained from the first summer, however there was a different addition this time. I was encouraged to participate in PCB's Women's Development Network (WDN) mentorship program. WDN was another layer of networking built into the company that allows people to connect and grow both professionally and personally. I joined the various WDN meet-and-greets and engaged in their monthly book club meetings as well.

At the end of the summer, I had engaged in the each of the following events and seminars:

- Northwest Arkansas Cancer Challenge Fundraiser
- Attended and donated at Ronald McDonald Charity House Arkoma Soiree
- Network of Executive Women NWA webinars
 - o Women's Empowerment Summit
 - o Mentoring Power Hour: Adapting to a Changing Environment
 - o Empower-Me Leadership Series: Managing Tough Conversations
- WDN Book Club (*Dare to Lead by Brene Brown*)
- Teamed up for Big Brothers, Big Sisters Quiz Bowl
- Researched PCB charitable giving & WIC programs
- Connected with partners at Feeding America
- Brand Marketing Shadowing
- eCommerce & Sales Intern Collaboration
- 2021 Intern Cohort Events
 - o Lunch & Learn with C-Suite Executives
 - o Former PCB Intern Panel
 - o PCB Baking Challenge
 - o Social Media & Communication (LinkedIn & newsletters)

Objective #2: Sales & Ad Hoc Reporting

I easily transitioned into running reports again like the week-to-date sales projections and weekly business reviews. The platforms and systems were no longer new to me, so it was just a matter of getting my accounts setup and minor refreshers. Because of my prior knowledge, I was sending the WTD sales report by Week 2 and sent 10 total weekly business reviews. In addition to owning the same reports as the previous year, I also began managing a daily pound shipments tracker which was a microscale report used for trends. The WTD sales projections were sent to select team members so they could evaluate on a short-term level how overall sales were performing. The weekly business review was an overarching evaluation of top-performing brands and current running promotions that the whole team could go over. I utilized all the same platforms as before with the exception of some new ones like Salsify, a commerce experience management platform. I also ran more ad-hoc reports using Retail Link and Nielsen IQ to support my main project.

Objective #3: Walmart eCommerce SWOT Analysis

In terms of project development, I was tasked with compiling the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) in PCB's Walmart.com business. Within the SWOT analysis I was looking for areas involving competitive assessments, assortment gaps, growth areas, and content recommendations. This was an incredibly relevant and value-based project in terms of timing and scope due to the huge shift in e-commerce over the years. My manager wanted me to look for where the overall .COM experience could be improved and ultimately present my recommendations to the PCB Walmart sales and e-commerce teams.

I structured the presentation by discussing the state of e-commerce during that time, clarifying PCB's e-comm goals, diving into the SWOT analysis, calling out discrepancies, and ending with my priority recommendations. My final proposals called out website and product discrepancies, provided actionable proposals, and offered creative innovations. The project was relevant, interesting, and dynamic in nature yet still challenging. E-commerce is still a newly prioritized space so there's lots of room for development and improvements. I researched demographic characteristics about the Walmart shopper, the e-comm shopper, and general cereal consumers and used those findings to make informed business recommendations. The entire project compelled me to work cross-functionally with e-comm teams, sales teams, marketing teams, and replenishment teams.

Summer II Takeaways

I was able to really build on my relationships with the team during my second summer back which helped strengthen my confidence in the workplace. My overall intern score and feedback ranked higher than the previous summer. I showed improvement in different leadership expectations like Win Together, Be Courageous, and Think Strategically. I was able to compare firsthand the benefits of working in office versus from home and really solidified what values I look for in a company. Working at PCB sparked my interest in the CPG industry and led me to pursue the idea of charitable giving programs in relation to food insecurity academically.



Part II – The Research

I begin by discussing the significance of food insecurity in America today. Following that, I describe some key takeaways from interviewing different industry experts at organizations like Feeding America, Post Consumer Brands, and other CPGs. After conducting various article reviews and website audits, I also report on insightful learnings in order to make meaningful recommendations.

Food Insecurity in America Today

Unfortunately the concept of food insecurity is one that America, and even the world at large, has grown used to. It can be defined as a “lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life” (Feeding America). While it is a recurring problem that affects millions of people, that shouldn’t and oftentimes doesn’t deter others from helping. From personal experience, I’ve seen how businesses are prioritizing the well-being of the nation in ways that used to be ignored or were simply unknown.

In detail, Feeding America describes three devastating effects hunger can take on one’s body. First, hunger affects one’s mental health. The stress that stems from worrying when and where your next meal will come from can lead to depression, anxiety, and even posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Next, hunger can impact one’s body in terms of academic development. Hunger makes it harder to focus causing behavioral problems in children like hyperactivity, crankiness, and aggressiveness. Lastly, a lack of food and nutrition increases a person’s risk to chronic diseases. The USDA ERS found that low food secure households are more likely to experience hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, asthma, and COPD (Figure 1). While these are not the only implications of hunger, they are some of the most significant.

It is important to note that food insecurity doesn’t affect everyone in the same way either. Not only can it lead to generational implications putting children at risk from reaching their full potential, but it also disproportionately affects racial and ethnic groups such as Native Americans, Black individuals, Latino and Hispanic individuals. This very apparent disparity lies in the presence of societal structural racism and discrimination since hunger and poverty are so closely correlated. In addition, there are also differences among communities that reside in urban versus rural areas. Consequently, the existence of countless factors (geography, socioeconomic status, household size, race, unemployment rate, etc.) can lead to enduring the vicious cycle of hunger. Seeing as though this issue is apparent, I pursued other avenues of research like interviewing industry experts.

Feeding America Insight

In order to further educate myself on this issue and gain a new perspective, I met with a current representative from Feeding America. Feeding America is a network of 200 food banks and 60,000 partner food pantries/meal programs that work to provide food assistance to millions of people in the United States through an active partnership with the USDA. I spoke with the Specialist for New Partnerships, Nicolette Bartiz, where we discussed her role at Feeding America and the relevance of this issue in the world and business today. Her role consists of maintaining relationships with managers of companies like Post on a national scale. She also works with mid-level donors and various stewardship opportunities. Since I interned at PCB from 2020 – 2021, most of the data provided by Feeding America revolves around this time period, give or take a few years.

COVID-19 Ramifications

To not discuss the influence of COVID-19 on food insecurity would be a huge oversight. The food insecurity rate prior to the pandemic was the lowest it had been in more than 20 years. At that time 35 million people in the U.S. struggled with hunger, 11 million of which were children. All over the world people were tackling unforeseen circumstances and navigating how to put food on the table when many children for example relied on schools for consistent meals. Feeding America described one of their key findings to be that people who were food insecure or at risk of it before the pandemic, faced greater hardship because of COVID. A silver lining of the pandemic however was that a newfound intrinsic focus and appreciation stemmed from the isolation, leading individuals, corporations, and communities to help those in need. Overall, the Feeding America network “distributed 6.1 billion meals (7.5 billion pounds of food) in 2020, a 44% increase from the previous year.” The following statistics are provided from both the interview with Ms. Bartiz and Feeding America’s website.

Food Bank Food Crisis

- Feeding America network of food banks reported seeing an average sustained 60% increase in demand for food assistance since the start of COVID-19.
- 1.7 billion meals were provided by the USDA in 2020. Projections of early 2021 showed food banks losing about 50% (appx 850 million meals nationwide) of the food they receive from the USDA.
- In addition to the need for more USDA food purchases, Congress is urged to make deep investments in federal nutrition programs like SNAP.
- Feeding America food banks distributed more than 5 billion meals during FY20 (more than 6.5 billion pounds), 24% higher than FY19.

Taking Action

- Each year Congress provides funding for The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) helping to assist in the distribution of food to families and individuals.
- In 2020, Congress took action by providing \$850 million (\$600M for food & \$250M for storage and transportation) for TEFAP via the CARES and Families First Acts.
- USDA also supplied additional food through a Food Purchase & Distribution Program which totaled to \$1 billion in 2019 and \$1.1 billion in 2020 that was largely distributed through food banks.

Many of Feeding America’s partner corporations have stepped up since 2020 and increased their efforts to alleviate hunger in the U.S. like the companies discussed below: General Mills, Kellogg’s, and Post Consumer Brands.

The solution to combating the hunger crisis is largely tied to organizations like Feeding America. This non-profit has been working to alleviate food insecurity since the 1960's when John van Hengel developed the concept of food banking. Feeding America today is a network of 200 food banks across the country that provide nourishing and safe food to people in need. Proper nutrition can positively influence one's health and promote the prevention of common non-communicable diseases (NCDs) (Cena & Calder, 2020). Good nutrition includes but is not limited to, eating plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Individuals or households that fall victim to food insecurity are at risk of getting stuck in its positive feedback loop. The cycle starts when a person or family cannot afford nutritious food. Then the combination of financial stress and inadequate nutrition can result in poor disease management. More time and money are then required to treat and respond to worsening health crises which in turn, further drains the household budget. This eventually leaves the person or family with even less money for nutrition and care (Feeding America, 2021). For reasons like this, it is important that trusted CPG brands such as General Mills, Post Consumer Brands, Kellogg's, and many others provide affordable, nutritious products. In doing so, this allows them to capture more market share by not excluding lower socioeconomic groups. Businesses that participate in corporate social responsibility initiatives essentially enter into a mutually beneficial relationship with the consumer; customers benefit by having their nutritional needs met and businesses accrue increased customer loyalty and engagement. This project will highlight the three aforementioned companies' initiatives, but numerable organizations are serving their customers through other philanthropic programs across the globe.

Interviews

Following my internship, I wanted to learn more about how other companies are providing to people in need. In addition to Post, I chose General Mills and Kellogg's since they are the three largest cereal companies in the United States. Once I finalized which companies to focus on, I began sourcing for interviewees that would be relevant informants for the topic of food insecurity. I utilized my personal connections and social media to contact the desired parties and scheduled roughly 30 minute interviews with each of them.

Post Consumer Brands

During my internship, I had the opportunity to speak to the entire executive team along with the rest of my intern cohort. I met with a member of the C-Suite, Jill Bollettieri, who works as the Chief Legal Officer for Post. While she focuses on managing PCB's legal department, she also advises on all things related to trademarks, advertising law, and new product development and regulation too. She described to me her career experience thus far and shed some light on the business of PCB from her perspective. Interestingly, prior to her working for Post she was also employed at General Mills for 15 years. She had valuable insights to offer and lots of advice to give to soon-to-be grads entering the workforce. I knew Jill would be a great contact to follow-up with for my research thanks to all of her contributions at Post as well as her experience serving as a Board of Director at Second Harvest Heartland.




General Mills

I was connected to Amie Kegler through LinkedIn with the help of my online network. Amie works as the Associate Manager of Global Impact Initiatives at General Mills and has done so for the past 9 years. Amie explained to me her passion for aligning her interests with her day job and how General Mills was able to help her do just that through this role. She was extremely friendly and helpful in providing me with resources I could use in this deliverable.

Kellogg Company

I was thankful to be connected with not one but two different contacts at Kellogg's for the interview component. The first was Stephanie Slingerland who is the Senior Director of Philanthropy and Social Impact. The second was VP of Industry Initiatives and Customer Development, Joe Mueller. In addition to the description below, Joe's position is interesting because he also works with various organizations such as the Food Marketing Institute, the National Frozen and Refrigerated Foods Association, and the National Grocers Association. I connected with Stephanie and Joe through LinkedIn with the help of my network. Both individuals were extremely knowledgeable in Kellogg's charitable programs and offered unique perspectives to the issues at hand.

Interview Table

Topic	Companies			
				
Person Interviewed	<i>Jill Bollettieri</i>	<i>Amie Kegler</i>	<i>Stephanie Slingerland</i>	<i>Joe Mueller</i>
Position	Chief Legal Officer, General Counsel & External Relations	Associate Manager of Global Impact Initiatives	Senior Director of Philanthropy & Social Impact	VP of Industry Initiatives & Customer Development
Years of experience in field/company	6+ years & 15 years at GM prior	9+ years	16 years	30 years
Description of their current position	Responsible for managing the entire legal department at PCB; serves as a key point of contact for external company functions	Maintains strong partnerships with food banks; leads all global food recovery/security efforts; work on internal product donations; consults & educates on GM food donation policies	Oversees global philanthropy work (ex: hunger relief, \$ donations, grant work for children, product/in-kind donations, employee engagement & social causes, philanthropy communications)	Works with top customers & on Kellogg's internal strategy; serves as a representative for numerous industry events; works with government relations teams & represents retailers in DC for governance purposes; emphasis on sustainable programs
List of charitable giving programs & affiliations* includes but is not limited to...	Feeding America, Second Harvest Heartland, Operation Food Search, Feed the Children, Our Military Kids, United Way; <i>Better Together PCB Employee Foundation</i>	The Global FoodBanking Network, Feeding America, No Kid Hungry, Global Child Nutrition Foundation, FRAC, <i>General Mills Foundation</i>	<i>Kellogg's® Better Days Program</i> , Feeding America, FRAC, The Global FoodBanking Network, No Kid Hungry, United Way, World Food Program USA, Action for Healthy Kids	

*Although it's not explicitly stated, each company also participates in their local donation & volunteer opportunities.				
<p>Notable Quotes</p> <p>Food security in relation to CPGs</p>	<p><i>“CPGs are uniquely well-equipped. Shelf stable food lends itself to the food banks better than most because it’s non-perishable.”</i></p>	<p><i>“There’s a direct connection to understanding how supply chain works and being able to support external teams. Having expertise in supply chain helped with the food recovery process.”</i></p>	<p><i>“Kellogg’s gave out more food in 2021 than in 2020 and we don’t see that going away anytime soon.”</i></p>	<p><i>“There’s a shared interest between the retailer & the supplier to make sure [food security programs] happen.”</i></p>
<p>COVID – 19 Callouts</p>	<p>Overall demand skyrocketed due to factors like pantry loading; she discussed how Post received requests for extra production runs to supply more food</p>	<p>GM provided grants to general operating support & front-line workers; they enacted a “manufacture to donate” initiative providing \$5M worth of fresh product to Feeding America</p>	<p>Stephanie addressed how many kids across the U.S. receive their meals exclusively from supplemented breakfasts & lunches at schools; Kellogg’s helped by donating to the No Kind Hungry foundation</p>	<p>Consumers were stocking up on food so the ability to give away food vs shipping it to buyers was harder; food shipped to schools, hospitals, & universities were at risk of going to waste due to the mandatory quarantines</p>
<p>Donations & Overall Impacts in 2020</p>	<p>Donated \$7M which equates to 130M bowls of cereal in 2020; partnered with Feed the Children for a total impact of \$50K; \$150,000 total donations for ‘Fight Hunger, Spark Change’</p>	<p>Gave \$92M to charitable causes in FY20; provided 20M meals globally; 83% of all global employees volunteered in 2020</p>	<p>Donated more than \$18M in food and funds to global COVID-19 hunger relief efforts in 2020;</p> <p>Since 2015 Kellogg’s has fed nearly 200M people, reached nearly 3.7M children, and volunteered a total of 96,000 hours</p>	
<p>WIC Eligible Cereal Products</p> <p>includes but is not limited to...</p>	<p>HBO (Honey Roasted, Whole Grain, Almond, Vanilla), Grape-Nuts, Great Grains (Banana Nut Crunch &</p>	<p>Cheerios, Kix, Chex, Total Whole Grain & Wheaties (250+ products across 4 food categories)</p>	<p>Special K Original, Frosted Mini-Wheats Original, Corn Flakes, Rice Krispies, All-Bran Complete Wheat Flakes, Frosted Mini-Wheats Little Bites Original, Crispix, Frosted Mini-Wheats Touch of Fruit in the Middle Raspberry, Special K (Original Multigrain Cinnamon, Honey</p>	

*see appendix for images	Pecan), MOM Crispy Rice, MOM Mini Spooners (Original & Strawberry)		Almond Ancient Grains, Banana) Frosted Mini Wheats Strawberry, Frosted Mini Wheats Blueberry
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Table Summary & Key Takeaways

Each of the three companies has their own methods of giving back; however there is a fair amount of overlap since they operate within the same CPG industry. As many of the interviewees pointed out, there are shared interests between suppliers, retailers, and consumers when it comes to food security. This explains why far reaching organizations like Feeding America are so heavily integrated in their business operations. It was refreshing to see that although these companies are technically competitors, they are all equally dedicated to giving back. Further, compiling these different perspectives side-by-side adds credibility and relevance to the issue.

Below are a few added analyses from the table:

- ❖ Under the COVID–19 Callouts section, Joe Mueller described 2 hurdles encountered during the pandemic. Once people were sequestered to their homes, there were no longer bodies to fill places like grade schools, hospitals, and universities. It’s easy to overlook the fact that these institutions are customers of CPGs too. The food delivered to these places isn’t retail ready product or readily available for grocer sale so a lot of it was at risk of going to waste. To offset this loss, Kellogg’s and the institutions pivoted to using other creative ways of distributing product. Both Stephanie and Joe touched on the instance of school buses driving through neighborhoods to deliver meals to students during the pandemic. Joe drew an interesting parallel in regards to ‘heroes’ and first-responders by saying it was a “herculean” scenario the way people stepped up to get food out to those that needed it.
- ❖ With kids lacking the consistency of school meals during COVID, Stephanie mentioned how Kellogg’s responded by donating \$825,000 to No Kid Hungry in support of school breakfast programs.
- ❖ Looking at the 2020 Donations and Impacts row, I wanted to further clarify the extent of donations by General Mills. The \$92 million was made up of \$41M in food donations, \$30M in corporate contributions, and \$21M in foundation-managed giving.
- ❖ The last part of the table lists each company’s WIC eligible RTE cereal products that appeal to consumers in an exceptional way by meeting vital nutritional needs.

The WIC Program is one of the many ways that CPGs are helping to feed the hungry by offering healthier, nutritional options at an affordable price.

WIC Program

Another interesting component of all food CPG companies is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). As defined by the National WIC Association, this is a “public health nutrition program under the USDA providing nutrition education, nutritious foods, breastfeeding support, and healthcare referrals for income-eligible women who are pregnant or post-partum, infants, and children up to the age of 5.” In terms of scope, WIC served about 6.2 million participants per month from February 2020 to February 2021, including almost half of all infants born in the United States (USDA ERS, 2021). The program was developed because of the evident hunger deficiencies born out of the 1960’s.

Over time WIC has been proven to aid in the following ways:

- Improve birth weights (Figure 2A)
- Reduce the risk of adverse birth outcomes (Figure 2B)
- Lower infant mortality rates (Figure 2C)
- Increase the breastfeeding rate (Figure 2D)
- Improve diets
- Improve cognitive development
- Decreases iron deficiency anemia in children
- Pregnant women receive prenatal care with WIC
- Children are more likely to receive regular medical care and have up-to-date immunizations
- Provide nutrition education and counseling
- Offer a money-saving system used to purchase fresh foods

WIC allows companies to reach a broader consumer base of those who may struggle to afford basic nutritional items. WIC now serves over 6 million pregnant and post-partum women, infants, and children and studies show women who participate in WIC give birth to healthier babies that are more likely to survive infancy (Carlson & Neuberger, 2021). In association with CPGs, companies produce food items, like cereal for example, that fit to the nutritional parameters of WIC. This program is essential to reaching people who would otherwise struggle to meet their nutritional minimums.

**Note: WIC redemptions may vary per state so examples listed in the Appendix were taken from the Arkansas WIC Program Approved Food List.*

Website Audits (Completed March 2022)

In order to dive deeper into the foundation of these companies, I conducted website audits using a few metrics to show clear comparisons. I was primarily looking for the presence or absence of consistency in internal and external messaging throughout each one.

			
MAIN URL	www.postconsumerbrands.com/	www.generalmills.com/	www.kelloggs.com/en_US/home.html
CSR URL	www.postconsumerbrands.com/responsibility/	globalresponsibility.generalmills.com/	crreport.kelloggcompany.com/
ARE SDG's MENTIONED?	YES	YES	YES
COMPANY VALUES	Put Safety First, Win Together, Act With Integrity, Be Courageous, Drive for Results	Building a Creating Culture, Making Food with Passion, Putting People First, Earning Trust, Caring for the World	Integrity, Accountability, Passion, Humility, Simplicity, Results
SLOGAN	<i>"Making Better Happen"</i>	<i>"Making Food People Love"</i>	<i>"Let's Make Today Great"</i>
# DONATION PROGRAMS	7	6	8
VISUALS	YES	YES	YES
ARTICLES	YES	YES	YES
# OF CEREAL RECIPES	150+	150+	150+
# OF CEREAL BRANDS*	19	15	18

Audit Takeaways

I found that in terms of the cereal category, these three are operating on similar levels regarding consumer-facing features, website user-friendliness, mission statements, and overall accessibility. They have a comparable number of cereal brands with each brand dividing into different products.



Part III – The Reason

Why does this matter? Addressing food insecure households not only makes good business sense, but is the morally responsible thing to do. Every day consumers are becoming more conscious of how their purchase decisions impact the community, and businesses are taking note of that. In doing so, companies that prioritize "doing good" reap the greatest rewards.

Increase in Conscious Consumerism

Conscious consumerism can be defined as a trend “driven by consumers who make purchasing decisions based on their core values rather than income, demographics, geography or other factors” (Goodwin, 2009). With the threat of looming issues like climate change, social injustice, or hunger, sustainable action is at the forefront of every business conversation. For consumers, this awareness intentionally or unintentionally translates through their consumption habits whether it be purchasing sustainable locally-sourced produce, neglecting fast-fashion, supporting environmentally-friendly operations, promoting DEI functions, or reinforcing ethically humane business practices. Addressing food insecurity is just one of the many ways that a business can strive to do good. There is an emphasis on why doing good is good for business because “companies motivated by a greater societal purpose will be stronger, more successful businesses in the long run” (Forbes, 2020). Because conscious consumerism has taken such a deep root in today’s age, businesses need to pay attention in order to capitalize both socially and economically.

Benefits of Corporate Social Responsibility

How does CSR impact the triple bottom line (TBL)? While the argument exists that correlation does not equal causation, meaning just because you implement ESG practices does not mean you are guaranteed higher profits, one study shows a substantial benefit to being socially responsible. “The evidence that socially responsible firms have lower discount rates, and thereby investors have lower expected returns, is stronger than the evidence that socially responsible firms deliver higher profits or growth” (Cornell & Damodaran, 2020). Additionally, Cornell and Damodaran summarized that improving your ESG standing has the possibility of making a firm more valuable, either by “increasing profitability and cash flows or by reducing the discount rate.” This aspect is better viewed as a collaborative opportunity rather than a conditional one. Ultimately, there is limited assurance that instituting CSR practices increases a firm’s triple bottom line, but it does offer incentives in other ways to businesses and society.

One of the more pronounced business benefits has to do with competitive advantage. Depending on your industry, market, or firm there is opportunity for competitive advantage through CSR which presents itself as brand differentiation. If your business is prioritizing an issue that your competitors are not, it can set you apart in a positive way that consumers remember. In addition to gaining competitive advantage, there are over 20+ supplemental benefits to business and society (ref. Figure 3A and 3B). Książak (2017) claims “the good of the business and the well-being of the society should not be put against one another...they often are the same thing.”

This brings us back to General Mills, Kellogg Company, and Post Consumer Brands and their implemented CSR programs. They have firmly established themselves within their industry and their success speaks for itself. While their achievements are not solely based on CSR food insecurity initiatives, it would be negligent to ignore its role. After a thorough analysis of each company, I’ve highlighted 5 of the key best practices below.

Takeaways & Recommendations

In culmination, I recommend that the following best practices be used as a model for other CPGs in the food industry to follow suit and consider implementing within their own organizations.

- 1. Create Annual ESG Reports** – This is an easy and transparent way to communicate your milestones, goals, ambitions, and successes to the public. Releasing a comprehensive report once a year that describes every facet of your business lets consumers understand your business on another level and speaks to your accountability and integrity.
- 2. Utilize Meal Connect, A Feeding America Platform** – Meal Connect is an undervalued asset that any company with a surplus of food should take advantage of. Not only are you putting product in the hands of people that need it, but you're also rewarded with tax benefits when you donate.
- 3. Develop a Corporate Foundation** – Pouring resources into a philanthropy of your design can be cost-effective, increase employee engagement and retention, and allow for greater financial/logistical control. We saw this component in action through PCB's Better Together Employee Foundation, General Mills Foundation, and Kellogg's Better Days 2030 Commitment.
- 4. Make Conscious & Informed Decisions** – We learned that all 3 businesses strive to capture as much market share as possible. That can only be accomplished by marketing towards all types of people and not excluding lower socioeconomic groups. WIC eligible products are a great example of this in that businesses make an intentional effort to formulate nutritional foods that charge our bodies.
- 5. Be Consistently Transparent** – In order to hold your organization accountable to the goals you set, I recommend posting a "Progress Report" throughout the year on your company's website and/or social media platforms. Modeled after Kellogg's implementation of this idea, consumers can see the level of follow-through and impact you're making versus your projections. In turn, this generates a new level of trust between the customer and your brands.

Limitations & Implications

I was able to provide one perspective of these firm's philanthropic initiatives from an external point of view. Had I received permission to include sales data and other proprietary information, then it would add a deeper level of analysis and tell a more complete story of the brands. I would have been interested in knowing and including what percent of sales WIC makes up and projections for pounds or dollars donated in future years. If a student were to pursue this topic in the future I would recommend adding another research method via survey. Collecting data from students, company employees, and/or the public at large would likely add new and insightful details that I was unable to explore in this project. I would suggest asking questions about how important company values are to the shopper, what their favorite company/brand/product is, or if they make purchase decisions based on social/environmental impact. These are just some of the many insights that could be included.

Conclusion

In summation, food insecurity is a pressing issue that companies of all shapes and sizes are working to alleviate. General Mills, Kellogg's, and Post Consumer Brands are exemplary role models in this space as seen from their many charitable giving initiatives. I'd like to thank Post Consumer Brands and the Walmart Sales team at Post for inspiring me to research the topic of food insecurity and philanthropy in businesses today. I also wanted to thank the Honors College for their financial support of my work through awarding me the research grant. The benefits to including and prioritizing CSR practices in a business model are vast. I thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to dive into a somewhat overlooked subject during a time when self-reflection and introspection is so prevalent. Ultimately, doing good is good for business and I'll end with this:

– We make a living by what we get, we make a life by what we give.

...Winston Churchill

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APPENDIX

Glossary: Acronyms & Key Terms

- *ATLAS DSR*: CPG data reporting platform provider used to compile and present business metrics and create ad hoc reports
- *CARES & FFCRA*: The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act was a \$2 trillion US package introduced in 2020 in response to COVID-19; the Families First Coronavirus Response Act provided flexibility for state unemployment insurance agencies & administrative funding
- *COPD*: Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease
- *CPG*: Consumer packaged goods is an industry term for merchandise that customers use and need replaced often
- *DEI*: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; diversity is the presence of differences like race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, language, etc.; equity is promoting justice, impartiality & fairness; inclusion is ensuring those that are diverse are welcomed & feel like it
- *ERS*: Economic Research Service
- *ESG*: Environmental & Social Governance
- *MOM*: Malt-O-Meal; PCB brand that leads the category in bagged cereal
- *Nielsen IQ*: Information services provider leading the industry in data analytics for retail and consumer intelligence
- *Pantry Loading*: Prominently took place during the pandemic; is the act of stocking up on a product because it is on sale or is promoted
- *PCB*: Post Consumer Brands
- *Retail Link*: Reporting software developed by Walmart; provides access to point of sale data, documentation, reports, store information, etc. that suppliers use to manage their business
- *RTE*: ready-to-eat; food that will not be cooked or reheated before serving
- *SNAP*: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (formerly known as Food Stamps Program)
- *SWOT*: A study that assess an organizations Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Threats
- *Triple Bottom Line (TBL)*: This is a business concept that says firms should commit to measuring their social & environmental impact in addition to their financial performance
- *USDA*: United States Department of Agriculture

Visual References

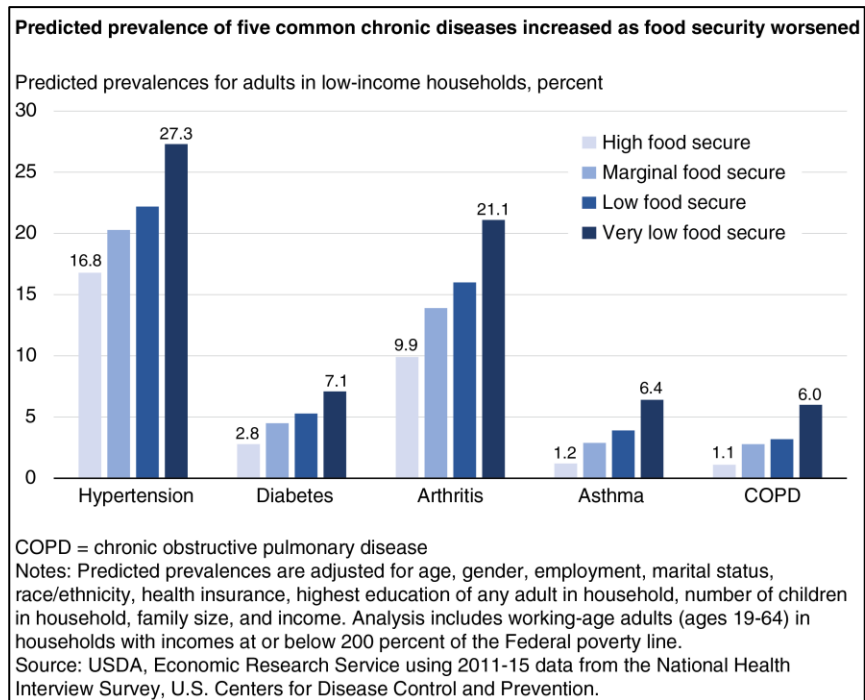


Figure 1 (USDA)

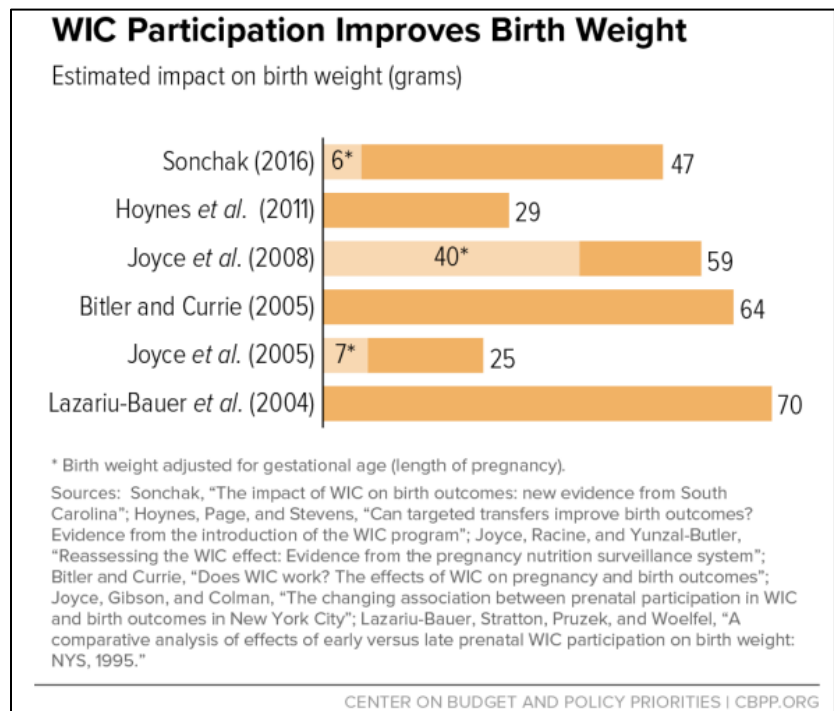


Figure 2A

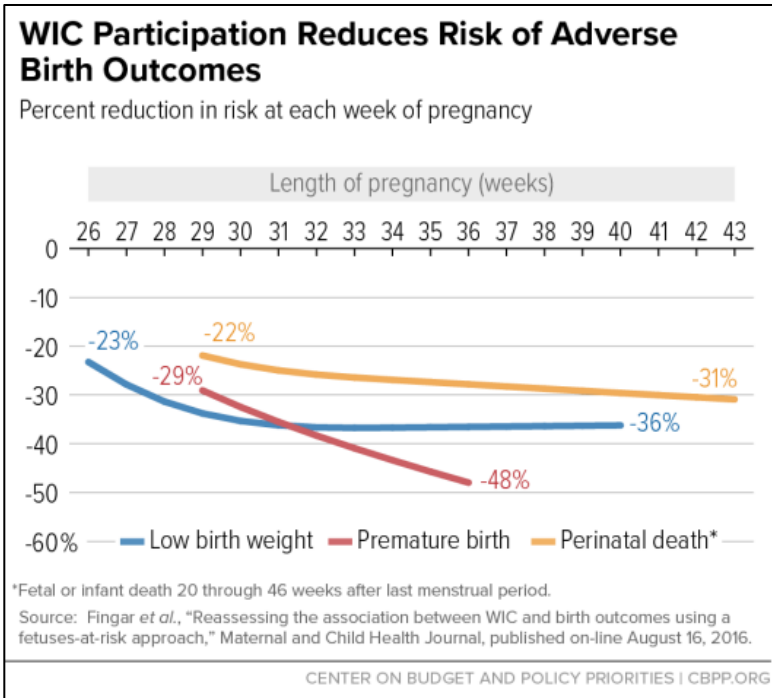


Figure 2B

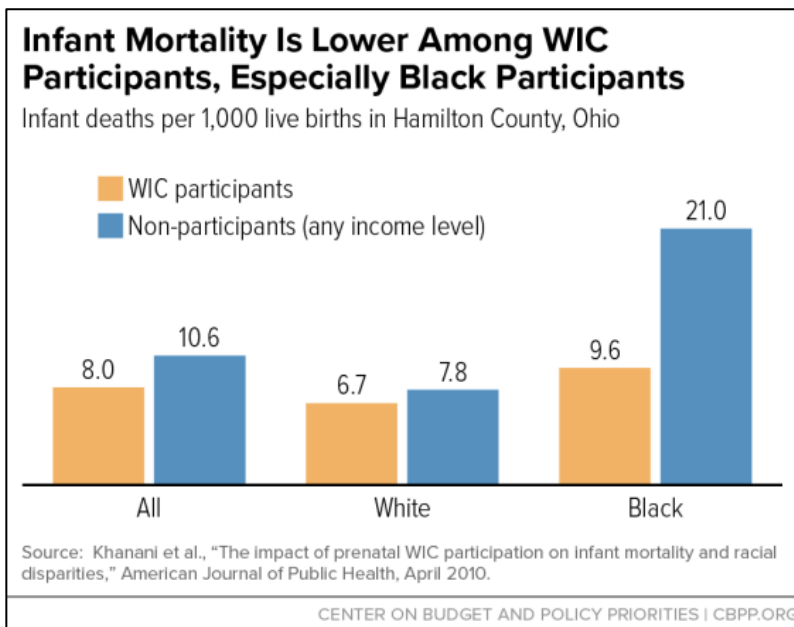


Figure 2C

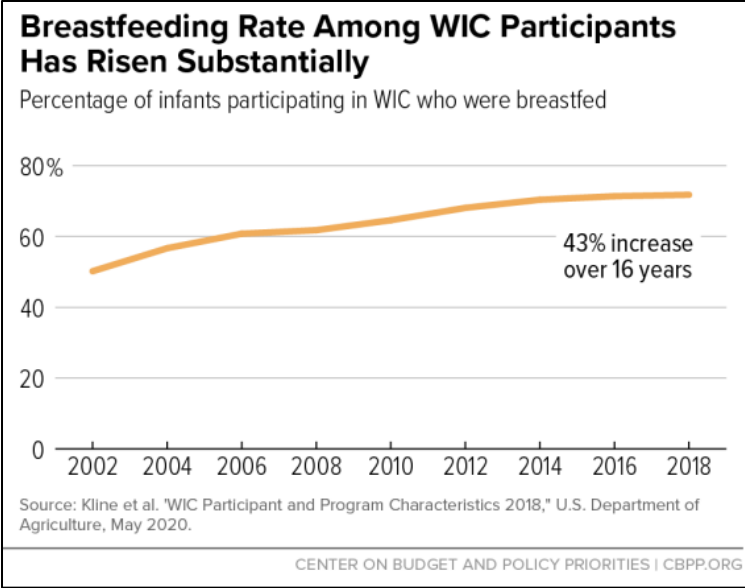


Figure 2D

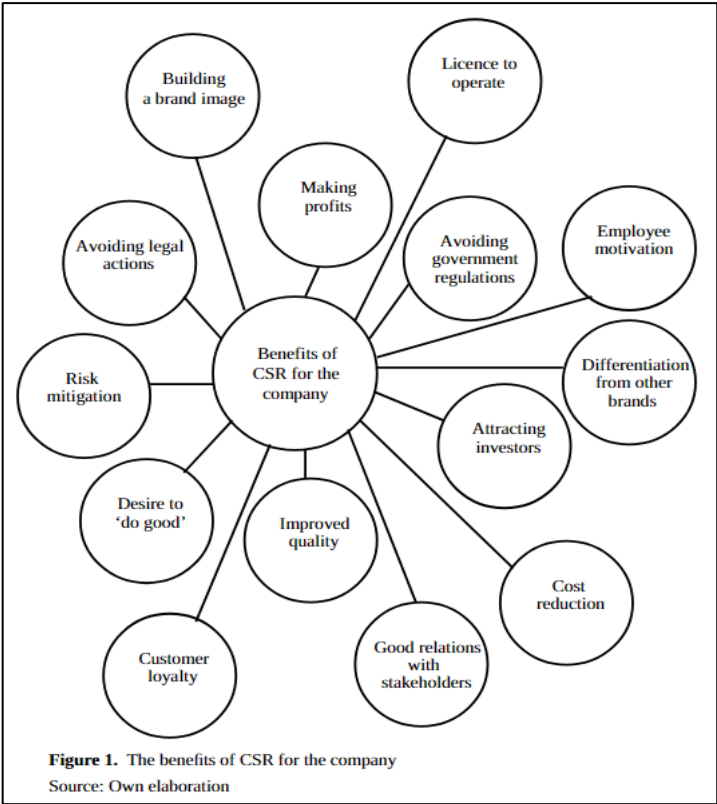


Figure 3A (Książak, 2017)

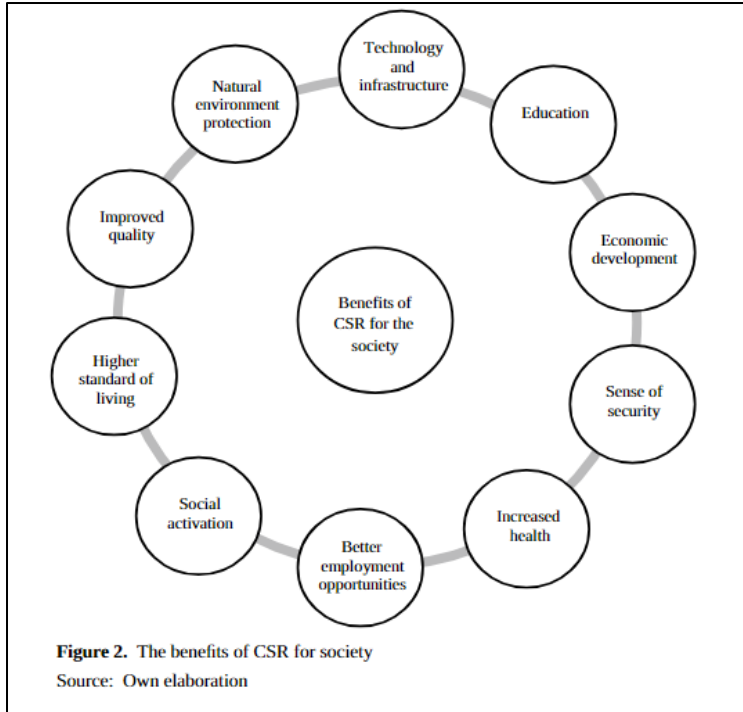
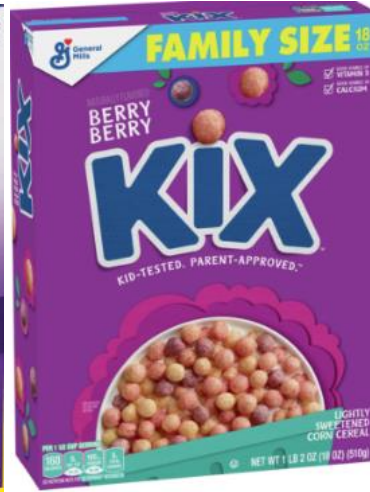


Figure 3B (Księżak, 2017)

WIC Cereal Image Examples









*Note: new packaging to launch on Malt-O-Meal bags

Internship References & Visuals

Other Activities

- Miles for Mercy & Cancer Challenge
- Sent 40+ daily sales reports
- Compiled one-pager for Walmart buyer
- Planogram Shadowing
- Developed foundation among 4 different reporting systems
- Compiled Weekly Business Review
- Dunkin' Scratch-n-Sniff
- Earned free 1 year NEW membership
- Topline Reviews
- Weekly Demand Calls
- Summer Intern Activities



PCB Internship Summer I (2020)

Other Activities

- ✓ Sent 10 Weekly Business Reviews
- ✓ Sent 40+ WTD Sales Projections
- ✓ Daily LBS Shipments Reporting
- ✓ The Cancer Challenge
- ✓ RMCH Red Shoe Soiree
- ✓ Mod Set Store Checks in AR & MO
- ✓ Intern Group Events
- ✓ Brand Marketing Shadowing
- ✓ eComm & Sales Intern Collaboration
- ✓ NEW NWA Webinars
- ✓ WDN Networking & Book Club



PCB Internship Summer II (2021)