

MARK PALMER ON WORRALL THOMPSON
Book of the Week page 20

SHOULD WE SHOOT HARES?
Country page 13

WHY GM FOOD IS THE 'GREENER' CHOICE
(page before page)

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YOUR FUTURE IS IN YOUR HANDS
FACE AT THE MERRY, MERRY GO

Weekend

WELLBEING ♦ FOOD & DRINK ♦ FAMILY ♦ COUNTRY



MOTHERS OF INVENTION

On the eve of Mother's Day, Tamsin Kelly salutes the kitchen-table tycoons whose new babies are booming businesses

For most working mothers, morning security here, then organisational powers, and that's just to get the children out of the door and themselves into work looking vaguely presentable. Once there, she may find herself overcooked, or a stomach-churning race against the clock to be back at home for her second domestic shift. Her salary covers childcare costs, the domestic and, if she is lucky, some reward yourself shoes. Small wonder, then, that only six per cent of employed mothers actually want to work full time, or that one in three new and expectant mothers is planning to set up her own business. A bunch of Mother's Day flowers and a homemade card will be lovely tokens, of course, but what most working mums really want is the gift of time - time to spend with their families, rather than a draining commute or a frantic lunchtime dash to buy socks for the children. In pursuit of such happiness, a new generation of mothers is branching out into enterprising, home-based businesses, hoping to find more stability and creativity. Child-minding and nannies are the most popular ideas, followed by baby goods and services. These business choices are very much inspired by personal experience. Lucy Martin, 38, started her own Winkleshill nannies agency, Ginx's Nannies, five years ago, or being sidelined as a City solicitor and saying that the local agencies weren't suited to elegant working women like herself taking care of the most precious people in our lives' (and to Stephanie Jones, Groggins (10) and (four), Lucy says: "I wanted to be in charge

of something and felt there was a gap in the market. I designed my business to fit into school hours, though I work evenings and weekends." With co-author Bella Mehra, Lucy has written *Made It Your Business* (Spring, £12), a start-up business guide specifically for women.

"Women are more likely to prioritise a work-life balance, whereas men are more likely to just making a million over fitting in with the family. Women tend to set up small, kitchen-table businesses, but we must also challenge the presumption that we need to be of the school

gains, to think whether we can be deliberately stilling our own potential and not allowing our businesses to evolve. "Women are better at multi-tasking, but also too inclined to multi-task business with home and then feel guilty we're not doing other

properly. Why is it that men come home from work and feel they've earned the right to put their feet up, while women run around putting on laundry loads, shopping and cooking?" Women must also contend with Netcare (see front) the banks against female entrepreneurs. Margaret Hodge, the government minister responsible for women and enterprise, is determined to know why women are currently charged 14 per cent more interest on bank loans than men, according to a study by the University of Warwick. "I know women are much more risk-averse than men. If it costs them more to borrow, that's another barrier that stops us seeing their potential," she says. "The asked why it costs them more. So far no one has given a credible answer." In another survey, more than a third of businesswomen say that their "big idea" is based on a career that enables them to work from home and juggle parenthood. Two thirds of those "kitchen-table tycoons" are more satisfied running their own businesses than in their previous jobs. But there's a cautionary note, too: more than a quarter admit that their relationship with their partner has suffered and a third say they struggle to find "me time". It seems that "having it all" remains as elusive as ever.

The Babyfood Queen
Stephie Willis was inspired to set up her baby food business after the birth of her third child, Francesca, known as Minky. "I knew mothers

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