

*Working at home using*  
**HOME ECONOMICS**  
*skills*

BY F. COLLEEN STECK

**F**or a variety of reasons, the home is increasingly becoming the site of economic activity. In the Western world many women have begun home-based businesses as a natural extension of their roles and interests. In most of these cases, the woman works because of financial need. Other women have deliberately chosen to combine work and parenting.

In the developing world, poor women (and men) are receiving training from international agencies so that they can work from their homes. Home-based projects have improved the well being of thousands of families.

This article will highlight the potential of the home-based business to solve the economic problems of families and lend support to parenting while providing for the family's economic needs. The topics will be divided into three sections: a discussion of home-based entrepreneurship in the United States and other Western countries; the contribution of home-based businesses for poor families in the developing world; and ways the home-economics curriculum addresses the needs of both of these groups.

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**Home-based Businesses in the U.S.**

Working at home is as American as apple pie and the fourth of July. In past generations children grew up in home-based businesses. Families lived on

farms, over stores, or blacksmith shops. Women took in laundry or sewed. Doctors and lawyers hung their shingles from their homes.

With the Industrial Revolution people in the United States and other Western countries moved to the cities to work in offices and factories. As a result, home-based businesses became the exception rather than the rule.

Until recently, dual-career families have had to find ways to combine career and family, with both often getting short shrift. Families rise early, rush about getting groomed and ready for work or school, then spend an hour or more commuting to work. After eight hours at the office, they rush to pick up children or run errands, and then return to the never-ending work waiting at home. Parents find it difficult to face the endless stacks of laundry, unmowed lawns, cleaning, and household repairs after a long day of work and commuting. Weekends are just a continuation of the weekday schedule, with little time left for family togetherness.

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However, with the dawn of the Information Age, we are seeing a reversal of this trend. The nature of work has changed. No longer do people necessarily have to work in group settings. By working at home, individuals can eliminate some of the stresses of combining job and family.

More and more parents want to care for their own children, take responsibility for the value system of their family, and spend more time together. Working at home helps them combine career and family.

Working at home has many advantages. They include the following:

1. The family can share common goals as they work together.
2. As children see parents working, they learn to respect work and its responsibilities.
3. At an early age children begin to think about their own career choices.
4. Working at home saves on child care, commuting, and clothing.

**Will It Work?**

Questions parents need to ask about working at home relate to the impact on the family.

1. Can they concentrate on work and be productive while having responsibility for other family members?
2. What kind of discipline does each family member need to have for a parent to work at home? This includes children and grown-ups alike. Can work hours be flexible enough to accomplish both parenting roles and work?
3. What effect would increased contact among family members have on the parent and child?

*Continued on page 45*

# TRAINING FOR UP-TO-DATE CAREERS IN HOME ECONOMICS

Continued from page 16

(1) Administration/Management and (2) Marketing, Merchandising, and Finances. Therefore, it would seem reasonable to devise a home economics major that deals with fashion management or merchandising. The same method could be used to devise programs in food service management, interior design, and other areas.

A major with a core of general home economics classes and emphasis in a specialty area provides the kind of broad education that will enable students to adapt to changing environments and acquire practical Christian living skills. It also prepares them for a variety of careers within a particular cluster. Many of the career opportunities listed by Coulter (See "Examples of Job Opportunities within Employment Clusters") involve business theory. Accordingly, specialization could include business classes. This would result in increased institutional efficiency while providing needed background for home economics majors.

College home economics departments should continue to provide teacher education as an option so that our academies can be staffed with professional home economists. However, the technological, demographic, and social shifts of American society have also made it imperative that new avenues for career development be made available to students. □

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Cope, "Planning for the Future Strategically: The Case of Bourbon College of Home Economics," *Proceedings at the Joint Conference of the Association of Administrators of Home Economics and National Council of Administrators of Home Economics* (San Francisco, California, February 18-21, 1987), p. 48; Rees, Ezell, and Firebaugh, p. 30.

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<sup>10</sup> L. Bailey, F. Firebaugh, S. Jorgensen, and J. Lillistol, *Strengthening Home Economics Programs in Higher Education* (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University, 1986), cited in Rees, Ezell, and Firebaugh, p. 31.

<sup>11</sup> Jane Coulter, Marge Stanton, Norma Bobbitt, *Employment Opportunities for College Graduates in the Food and Agricultural Sciences: Home Economics* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1987).

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Green, p. 184.

## WORKING AT HOME USING HOME ECONOMICS SKILLS

Continued from page 33

4. How will a rate of pay be established? Will the person be able to earn a decent living? What about fringe benefits such as retirement, vacations, and medical insurance? Is the worker sufficiently informed about the business aspects of the job?

5. Will the home need a special location to be designated as the office or workplace? What legal requirements need to be met? How will tax laws affect the home-based business? What government and health regulations apply?

### Productivity

Although working at home may be convenient, there may be some problems:

1. Will isolation from other workers affect the person's productivity and creativity?

2. Does the home worker have sound business acumen and understand the need for planning and risk taking to ensure the success of the business?

3. Will the person miss the intellectual stimulation and socialization that occurs in the typical work setting? Will career development be restricted?

4. If the person has never operated a business before, does he or she understand business folkways, methods of establishing business relationships, or what procedures to take to develop such relationships? Is the person informed about techniques for marketing and advertising?

5. Eighty percent of small businesses fail within the first five years. What impact would failure of the business have on the family?

Most of the issues above can be resolved with training and careful planning. Home-based businesses have the potential to help parents achieve a good living as well as a productive, family-centered life.

### Home-Based Businesses in Developing Countries

Today most countries and international agencies recognize the distinctive and crucial role that the home can play in the development process, with women as major contributors. Home-based businesses have brought great benefits not only to the women concerned, but also to their families and local communities.

According to reports published by the United Nations Development Fund for Women, thousands of poor, often ill-educated women around the world have set up successful home businesses and are earning decent livings.

In many countries manufacturing occurs largely in the home. Family members produce a variety of products for high-tech life styles in other parts of the world.

Honduran women increase their family incomes through beekeeping. In Zimbabwe formerly nomadic women produce school uniforms to earn needed income, while at the same time increasing their children's school attendance. Nepali women have increased their incomes and improved community nutrition by using newly acquired orange juice production and preservation techniques.

In many developing nations the home has become the local storefront, bakery, or restaurant. In other areas the home is the location for manufacturing goods such as cotton textile products. Swaziland women sew school uniforms at a much lower cost than those previously available, producing and repairing school shoes, and weaving and dyeing fabrics such as batiks that are sold in developed countries.

In many developing countries today, the informed and trained family member, usually the woman working out of the home, is able to provide for the family's basic needs such as food, health, and education. As families, especially women, are empowered to provide for their own well-being, most fundamental causes of poverty, injustice, illness, and premature death can be overcome.

### Home Economics Curricula

Home economics at the secondary, college, and university level is a natural beginning point in defining what types of skills would be needed in home-based endeavors. Secondary home economics programs should help young people examine the possibility of combining parenting and careers.

College-level home economics should offer entrepreneurial training, including the study of careers, philosophy, and work's relation to marriage and the family. Every major ought to be required to take a course in setting up a home-based business.

Professional home economists should also be trained to function as international educators who can assist families, especially women, to combat poverty and its devastating effects in developing countries.

Every other summer the Department of Home Economics at Andrews University offers a specialized workshop on starting home-based businesses. This workshop provides students with necessary information to develop a plan for a home-based business within the scope of the student's major or area of interest.

The workshop attracts majors in areas other than home economics, as well as members of the community. Some of the enrollees say they want to learn how to use home-related skills and interests to pursue the American dream of "being my own boss." Others say they need to work but believe in raising their own children, so they are searching for a way to combine work and family. Several international students said they wanted to learn to teach entrepreneurial skills to families in their own countries. During the summer of 1988 a missionary on study furlough wanted to find ways for her college to assist families in setting up home-based restaurants and thereby expand the church's outreach.

During the summer of 1986 three students from different countries in Africa developed plans to start businesses baking whole wheat bread and selling it to a population that had limited access to good bread. They also wanted to conduct classes in breadmaking for personal outreach.

The workshop curriculum includes (1) taking a personality profile to measure likelihood of success; (2) assessing risks, pitfalls, and the need for a sound business plan, and (3) developing a plan that includes the type of business, information about loans, local and state legal requirements, copyright laws, insurance, time and space management, maintaining records, finances, scheduling work time in relation to family functions, establishing a dollar value on the merchandise or service offered, marketing, and other topics.

Home economics teachers enrolled in the workshop are required to develop a unit plan they can incorporate into their classes. Each student leaves the workshop with a plan that has been evaluated by classmates.

## Home-based Opportunities Utilizing Selected Home Economics Skills

Programs	Secondary	College & University
<b>Foods &amp; Nutrition</b>		
Dietetics—Consulting .....		X
Food photography .....		X
Food styling .....		X
Cooking schools .....		X
Product development/test kitchen .....		X
Catering .....	X	X
<b>Clothing/Textiles</b>		
Clothing design and production .....	X	X
Alterations—children, men, women .....	X	X
Wardrobe consulting, home shopper .....	X	X
Upholstery .....	X	X
<b>Family Studies</b>		
Day care .....	X	X
• Elderly .....	X	X
• Children .....	X	X
Consulting—management .....		X
Adoption services .....		X
Home maintenance—housekeeping/cleaning .....	X	X
Children's parties (special occasions) .....	X	X
<b>Interior Design</b>		
Consulting .....		X
Decorating .....	X	X
• wallpapering .....	X	X
• painting .....	X	X
• pillows .....	X	X
• draperies .....	X	X
Computer design .....		X
<b>Home Economics Education</b>		
Tutor .....		X
Consulting .....		X
Cooking schools .....		X
Home management consulting .....		X

*Note: A person utilizing skills learned at the secondary level will need an in-depth study program.*

The home economics curriculum is a natural place to identify skills for developing home-based businesses in both industrial and developing nations. The chart above suggests secondary and higher education curricula that relates to the development of home-based businesses.

### Conclusion

Home economists have a role to play in helping people combine work, careers, and family. They also have a special responsibility to help families, especially women in developing countries, to improve their economic condition. Only as their basic needs are met can individuals and families achieve their potential. Home-based businesses provide the

means of accomplishing these objectives simultaneously. □

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