

ETHICAL LIVING

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Nappy endings

THE DILEMMA Given population growth I feel guilty about having a baby. Will eco nappies actually help or am I just trying to make myself feel better?

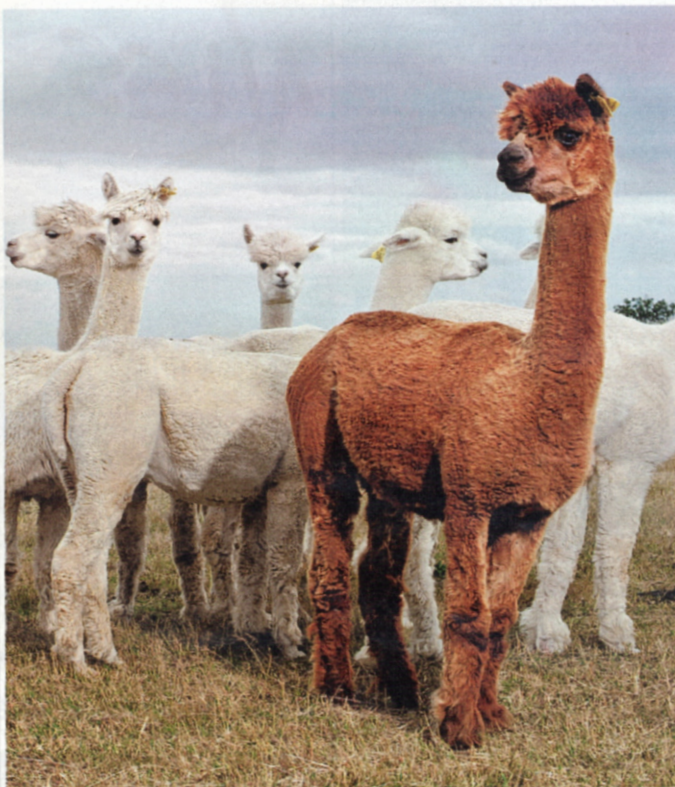
As humankind weighs in at 7 billion, it's impossible to avoid wondering how many of us the earth can sustain. Cue analysis as to how we came to be so many (quite a straightforward process, you'd think) and discussions on how we, in rich countries, might ease the pressure. Yes, population matters, but if we're at the point when we can't sustain even modest reproduction, surely it's game over? One answer is to stay calm and focus on what you can practically do.

Take disposable nappies. Each baby who uses them is responsible for 300lb of wood, 50lb of petroleum feedstocks and 20lb of chlorine in its first year. Then the 8m disposables used each day in the UK are shovelled into landfill, where they sit for hundred of years. Local authorities are trying to get parents to switch to non-disposables (for example, by offering cashback on the cost of a set of eco nappies).

Goreal.org.uk has comprehensive information on real nappy choices and nappyaddict.blogspot.com is a blog evaluating types of eco nappy. It's the hybrid model that has the potential to remove the drudgery from eco nappies. Whereas cloth nappies need a total wash, hybrid versions comprise a reusable waterproof cover with a disposable or compostable insert. As the insert is smaller than

Green crush of the week

Greetings from the most happening alpaca hangout in Warwickshire. From stud to spinning Toftalpacashop.co.uk hopes to revolutionise the knitwear industry and address sustainability issues – cruelty, chemicals, overgrazing – by promoting alpaca as an ethical fibre. It rears alpacas on free-range farms, where they scare off foxes and keep chickens safe. They aren't slaughtered for meat but sheared once a year for their fleece. The traditional sobriquet for their coat, by the way, is "fibre of the gods", which makes cashmere's "diamond fibre" sound almost prosaic.



a conventional nappy, this is already an environmental winner.

But real eco nappies also dispense with the plastics and super-absorbent polymers and chemicals in disposable nappies, replacing them with biodegradable options, and real-nappy campaigners insist they have the added benefit of exposing a baby to less unnecessary toxicity. The gNappy (gnappies.co.uk) is the brainchild of Kim Graham-Nye – listed as one of *Forbes* magazine's 10 most powerful women entrepreneurs – and is now available in Britain. Most of the environmental attributes

of the gNappy are "upstream" – it is made from microfibre and hemp fleece, which removes the three-quarters of a cup of oil it takes to make a conventional disposable. But wet inserts can also be home composted. Graham-Nye says the average time they take to break down is 55 days (less than a banana skin). Many products claim to be biodegradable; with gNappy this has been independently certified.

The problems of population growth will not melt away, but we can at least take a smarter approach to the next generation. ■

ON THE WEB

If you have an ethical dilemma, send an email to Lucy at lucy.siegle@observer.co.uk or visit guardian.co.uk/profile/lucysiegle to read all her articles in one place

Greenspeak **Negawatt** {NEG-a-wot} noun

Energy conservation has been dubbed the fifth fuel. Negawatt is environmental scientist Amory Lovins's term for a unit of saved energy. Turn the thermostat down and you save negawatts. One (green) day you'll be able to trade in them, too.

