

City kids grow into agriculture

An increasing number of students are studying agriculture at school, writes **Jackie Chownis**.

Brochures for agriculture study at Sydney's Barker College include images of rolling green hills and teens on horseback.

Whether the bucolic shots are a drawcard is debatable. What's not is Barker's growth in students studying agriculture.

Where there were four agriculture classes offered at the school in years 9-12 in 2007, now there are 15, including 68 students studying HSC agriculture this year. Between 1300-1400 students across NSW each year sit the HSC agriculture exam.

Scott Graham, Barker's head of agriculture, attributes the growth in student interest in part to Australia's highly technologically advanced industry and its relevance to students' lives.

"We impress on students the impact they can have in the world if they do something related to agriculture, since everyone needs food and fibre."

Students who graduate from agriculture at university level can move into careers as diverse as biosecurity, commodities trading,



Barker College HSC Agriculture student Jacquie Pienaar.

banking, carbon and water trading as well as animal sciences, grazing and farming.

Graham estimates about 60 per cent of agriculture jobs are based in cities.

Year 12 student Jacquie Pienaar has been studying agriculture at Barker since Year 10. "It's a really content-heavy course but I like the practical work with animals most," she says.

Students learn about viticulture,

21st-century farming, genetic modification, beef breeding, orchards and fruit, ethical eating, sustainability and international markets, among other course elements.

Pienaar's future study is likely to take a more traditional route: she's aiming to enrol in a bachelor of animal science at UNE after the HSC and wants to run her own sheep farm.

Other Barker students have

diverse aims. "Some want to do more of a management role and working with the property, some are interested in creating new technologies for farming, others are interested in the business side," Pienaar says.

Pymble Ladies College principal Mrs Vicky Waters says her school is also seeing an increase in students studying agriculture.

"As a college, we are committed to sustainability. We believe the

growing interest in agriculture stems from our students' passion for environmental stewardship and knowing where their food and fibre comes from," Waters says.

"Students like studying agriculture because of its broad syllabus. It covers the science behind plant and animal production as well as sustainable farming."

"It's also a hands-on course, with a 30 per cent practical requirement in workplace environments such as farms, which appeals to students who have a genuine interest in and passion for farming and animals."

A boarding school, Pymble has offered agricultural studies since the 1950s, and HSC-level study since the early 1970s. However, Pymble's day students, not its boarders, are now in the majority in agriculture classes.

Veterinary science, agri-business and agricultural science are popular tertiary courses, Waters says.

Scott Graham says agricultural science is growing in significance. "As a country we will potentially need to produce more food on less land, due to land degradation such as salinity," he says.

"The two biggest issues in the world in the next decades will be feeding the expected nine billion people in the world by 2050 and addressing climate change."

"The pressure will increase for Australia to produce more food to feed more people, at the same time as the effects of climate change will be felt. Agricultural science will be the way of achieving this."