



Young Farming Champions Alexander Stephens (far left) and Laura Bennett (far right) with students from the Year 9 Agricultural Science class of Calvary Christian College, with their Archibull in the design phase.

Painting cows

Artful cows and modern technology are helping schools reconnect farmers with their city cousins.

STORY + PHOTOS MANDY McKEESICK

A couple of years ago, a china-plate patterned fibreglass cow attended Flemington Racecourse, toured Australia and made an appearance at free-trade agreement discussions with China. The cow, designed by Sydney's Hurlstone Agricultural High School, was the winning entry of the annual Archibull Prize.

The Archibull Prize is run in primary and secondary schools by Art4Agriculture, whose vision is "to design and deliver community events that are a true celebration of the diversity, sustainability, creativity and progress of primary industries, their people, place and produce". Art4Agriculture founder Lynne Strong – winner of the 2012 Bob Hawke Landcare Award – believes

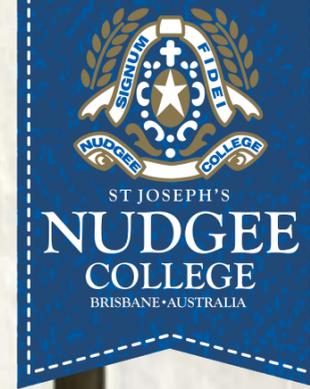
the education of school students is imperative to this vision. "We need to have these courageous conversations and take a somewhat nervous general community, who are becoming more wary of modern farming practices, along with us on our agricultural journey," she says. Enter the Archibull Prize, which exposes predominantly urban-based students to the world of food and fibre.

In the Archibull Prize, schools are assigned an agricultural industry (for example livestock, wool, cotton or grains), must decorate a life-sized fibreglass cow in this theme and use social media such as blogs and video to communicate their ideas. Along the way they are assisted by Young Farming Champions.

"The Young Farming Champions are progressive young people, involved

in agriculture, who have the ability to share their stories and have a two-way conversation with the most important person – the consumer," Lynne says.

Bessie Thomas, a sheep producer from Burragan station in western New South Wales, joined the Young Farming Champions program in 2013 after enthusiastically blogging about her life on the farm, and has worked with schools over two Archibulls. "The program begins with personal and professional workshops with experts in communication, public speaking and media relations, and teaches you how to speak in front of young people and students. By the end of the program you have a completed presentation about your story, your journey, your life, your industry and what you love about it,"



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Lynne Strong (far right in orange) with Young Farming Champions and the 2014 winning Archibull from Hurlstone Agricultural High School. Back row (l-r): Bessie Thomas, Martin Murray, Ben Egan, Josh Gilbert; front row (l-r): Georgia Clark, Jasmine Nixon, Dianne George.

in the past 10 years it's reduced water usage by 40 percent and Australia now has the most water-efficient cotton producers in the world," Kirsty says.

Cotton Australia provided a wealth of resources, ranging from fact sheets to raw cotton and has introduced the students to cotton producers at Brisbane's EKKA. "For just one pair of jeans you need sun, soil, water, care and an area of land that is 2.5 ping pong tables in size," student Mikayla de Oliveira writes on the school's Archibull blog. "It takes around 180 days for 50 cotton plants to produce 700 bolls of cotton for the jeans. But most important of all, you need a farmer!"

Across New South Wales and Queensland dozens of schools are participating in the 2016 Archibull Prize, vying for cash prizes and national recognition. Judging is in November.

The Archibull Prize
Lynne Strong, national program director,
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she says. "In the schools the students are generally really excited to have you there and they ask questions about what they should do with their cow. Last year my school totally based their cow on me and my farm. They built a mini Burragan station, which was modelled exactly on my house and yard and dam and everything," she laughs.

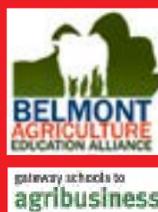
At Calvary Christian College in Brisbane, Young Farming Champions Laura Bennett and Alexander Stephens have shared their love for cotton with

primary students. They discussed cow designs and were given eggs from the school's farm before travelling to the Carbrook campus to meet the secondary students of the Year 9 Agricultural Science class. There the 23 students and their teacher Kirsty Hart had spent months researching the threats and opportunities to Australian cotton. "The kids really picked up on technology and water use and Alexander was able to say that although the cotton industry has had a bad rap,



The 2013 Grand Champion Archibull from Shoalhaven High, NSW, representing the dairy industry.

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