Student enrolments in agricultural courses at the secondary school level in Australia have been in decline for several decades, despite a rapidly growing population and an increasing demand for food and fibre. At the same time, university enrolments and graduations in agriculture-related degree programs have also diminished, to the extent that there are currently approximately six professional positions requiring degree-level qualifications for every agriculture graduate in Australia each year.

This decline in agricultural education and career pathways occurs within the context of Australia's highly urbanised population, with around 67% of the population residing in just five major cities. Additionally, agricultural work is often viewed by urban populations as primarily a rural pursuit. This perception may limit the recognition of the potential for significant engagement with agriculture among urban students, presenting an untapped demographic that could contribute to the future workforce of the sector.

This talk presents a case study of Barker College, a secondary school located in metropolitan Sydney, which has experienced a notable increase in urban, non-agriculture-background students enrolling in Agriculture courses from Years 9 to 12. Enrolment numbers have grown from approximately 100 students in 2010 to over 400 students in 2024. The study will explore the factors that attract metropolitan students to agriculture as a school subject, strategies for engaging academically able students in the field, and the key motivators that encourage these students to pursue further education and careers in the agricultural sector.