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# Envisioning ag understanding

PASSIONATE young teacher, Jessie Wythes, has a strong desire to apply similar principles to those she developed, of necessity, in Kenya to teaching agriculture to primary school children in NSW.

Raised on a rice farm at Coleambally, Jessica (pictured with one of the children she worked with in Kenya) did her Higher School Certificate at Frensham in Mittagong.

Though she had always wanted to teach, Jessie's first move after high school was to spend a gap year as a jillaroo on a property at Julia Creek in outback Queensland.

She then did two years of an agribusiness degree at the University of New England (UNE).

"Then I went back to teaching and I haven't looked back. It's who I am. I love it."

Jessie completed her degree at Charles Sturt University in Wagga Wagga, and is now teaching as a casual in that city, and expects to

use her NSW Farmers' Association tertiary scholarship money to help her complete her interrupted business degree at UNE.

But Jessie's burning ambition is now to write curricula and develop ways to teach agriculture to primary school children.

She said environmental studies had now replaced agriculture in primary schools.

"Many children have lost the knowledge of where their food comes from and develop a misconception that farmers are not good people."

This applied particularly to city children, Jessie said.

For country children, she will seek to relate her teaching to everyday things: dealing with pests, the state of their local river.

It will encompass key learning areas (English and maths) and will aim to solve particular problems related to the community in which the children live, and be far removed from the traditional

authoritarian model of teaching.

"I want to have more control by running engaging lessons," Jessie said.

"It is not an easy thing to do and takes a lot of hard work."

She called it "contextual teaching" but acknowledged it was far from a new concept.

"At uni we have been studying theorists from 100 years ago who were saying this."

Jessie said she hoped to find a vehicle through the Primary Industries Education Foundation, a joint initiative of the Federal Government, organisations including the National Farmers' Federation and educational authorities, aimed at promoting agriculture in schools.

As she told the NSW Farmers' conference: "I am hoping my vision as a teacher will ensure more rural kids stay at school and invest themselves in the land, and build and feel a love for rural Australia, just as I have."

