



Our First Year as a Pick of the Crop School

Back Plains State School (BPSS) is a small rural school of 28 students in the Darling Downs, 45 minutes south of Toowoomba.

The school is situated among the farms, with the local hall up the road. The agriculture surrounding the school is cropping and cattle.



Students from Back Plains State School planting in their garden bed.

We joined Pick of The Crop to strengthen connections

As a small rural school, BPSS joined Pick of the Crop (POTC) to strengthen our students' connection with where their food comes from and to encourage healthy eating habits from an early age. With strong ties to farming families in our community, we saw the program as a perfect fit to celebrate local agriculture while creating hands-on, engaging learning experiences for our students. We also wanted to make the most of our garden space and promote outdoor learning. It is important to us to bring

learning to life and give our students opportunities to apply the curriculum via learning in real situations.

What challenges have you faced in your POTC journey?

Being a small school with limited staff and resources, time has been one of our biggest challenges. Coordinating garden activities, cooking, and curriculum links can be a juggle alongside regular teaching demands. Additionally, our rural location can make access to external providers and fresh produce a bit more complex. However, we've overcome this by leaning on our local community and being flexible in our planning.

Are there any key items, physical or intangible, that have helped BPSS achieve its POTC actions?

Yes! Our raised garden beds, compost bins, and new kitchen tools have been invaluable. But just as important has been the enthusiasm of our staff and support from families. The students' curiosity and willingness to "give things a go" has driven our success. The POTC network has also been a great source of ideas and encouragement, especially through shared stories and inspiration from other small schools. We have found it invaluable to have nutrition students come out to our school to run activities showing our students the importance of healthy eating.

Our first-year highlight had to be our "My Kitchen Rules" cooking sessions

One of the most memorable moments was our "My Kitchen Rules" cooking sessions, where students harvested vegetables, they had grown themselves and used them in a cooking activity and had community members judging the 'best' dish. The

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pride on their faces as they served up their own dishes was priceless! Our students are trying vegetables they normally wouldn't eat. Another highlight is seeing our students head to the garden at lunch time to pull a carrot or pick a snow pea to eat!



Students from Back Plains SS planting in their garden bed.

In 2025, we plan to expand our orchard and develop a bush tucker garden.

We're also hoping to connect more with local farmers and run farm visits to deepen our understanding of the paddock-to-plate journey. We are starting a student-led garden club and plan to explore more cross-curricular links – especially in science, maths, and technology.

Our plan to maintain POTC at school beyond the funded years

Sustainability is important to us. We're building garden care and healthy eating into our regular routines and planning. By involving students in every step – from planting to cooking – we're creating a

culture that values fresh food and outdoor learning. We'll continue to seek support from our P&C and local businesses and explore grants to keep momentum going. Most importantly, we're nurturing student leaders who can keep the passion alive.



Student from Back Plains SS chopping produce.

Have you any advice for those schools contemplating becoming part of the POTC community?

Start small, and don't worry if you can't do everything at once. Let the students lead where possible – they often come up with the best ideas! Use your community; they're a great resource and love getting involved. POTC isn't just about food – it's about connection, creativity, and creating lifelong healthy habits in a really fun way. It's well worth it!

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