GIANT pumpkins, three little pigs and a billy goat might not come to mind when thinking about dairy careers, but they are part of the Timboon Agriculture Project, a key element of WestVic Dairy’s Promoting Dairy Careers Project.

In this partnership between Timboon P-12 School and WestVic Dairy, Timboon P-12 teachers and TAP co-ordinator Andrea Vallance are creative in the ways they engage students in agriculture.

From exploring the ways agriculture is represented in fairytales (year 1-2) to Dairy Farm Safety and duck farming (year 5), to the study of microbiology through making cheese (year 8), the exploration of genetics through DNA manipulation workshops (year 10) and TAFE training in agriculture, students are getting hands-on experience of and exposure to productive agriculture and related industries and their supporting science, maths and business skills.

The breadth and diversity of the career and education pathways available are given tangible form in the industry personnel who engage directly with the students.

The project has completed its “scoping” phase, funded by the Gardiner Foundation. This stage of the TAP was planned to try out different ways to integrate agriculture into the curriculum in support of student learning, and to develop relationships between the school and industry to support curriculum development and delivery.

In the first 12 months of the TAP, new curriculum developed and delivered ranged from year 1 students right up to year 10, across the curriculum at primary levels, and at secondary level in science, maths, commerce and food technology — 14 separate units. A further nine new curriculum units are under development or in trial delivery. VET Agriculture is being delivered on campus by the National Centre for Dairy Education Australia.

A dedicated agriculture precinct on the school campus, including classroom, is developing with substantial industry input, and already adds value to several curriculum activities.

Twelve teachers have engaged in industry-based professional development activities, and classroom work has been supported by industry visitors to the classroom and curriculum based excursions to farms, boutique food manufacturers and non-farm agricultural businesses.

Fifty-eight industry and 10 non-agriculture community members have been directly engaged with teachers and/or students in curriculum development and delivery, or in developing the agriculture precinct at the school — 16 of them with two or more different year levels or teacher groups — representing 15 dairy farm and 19 dairy service or manufacturing businesses, and five non-dairy farm businesses.

This is a meaningful investment by farm and non-farm agricultural business operators in support of the school and the project, and the return to the community of their investment will be a student population with an active engagement with the industry, enhanced educational outcomes, and an understanding of and preparation for the career pathways available in the industry.

TAP has already achieved a state-wide and national profile. The school was a finalist in two categories of this year’s Victorian Educational Excellence Awards for the project, and was the subject of a presentation to the national conference of the Primary Industries Education Foundation in Canberra in June.

The Timboon Agriculture Project is now at the stage where it is seeking ongoing sponsorship from the corporate sector.