AAEP’s Women in Agriculture in Kabul program has grown in 2013! Since March, 19 Farmer Field Schools have begun, extending the reach of AAEP into areas in Kabul where few NGO’s or government programs have ever reached.

Farmer field schools (FFS) in the WIA program are designed to teach but also to strengthen the ability and confidence of female extension agents and cooperatives leaders to teach other women. Each week starts on Saturday at the AAEP Demo plot on Darulaman Farm, a large piece of land owned by the government, managed by the Ministry of Agriculture (MAIL) and leased in small plots to vulnerable women for farming. Approximately 12 women (DAIL extension agents and women’s cooperative leaders) meet to learn new skills from gardening and poultry production to beekeeping and record keeping. The training is hands on, and new and traditional techniques are practiced side by side as a way to compare and test which method works best. After a long day of in the field, the work has only begun.

In the next week, each educator travels to one or two FFS’s with 5-20 women, and she teaches the same topics and techniques. AAEP staff travels to some locations as well to answer questions, check on progress, and assist the newly trained educators. And then the week begins again!

The FFS’s have a few very unique aspects: (1) They utilize technologies that are simple, affordable, and easy to replicate. For example, rather than irrigation, the demo plot has a cistern with micro watering systems, such as plastic bags and buckets. (2) The learning is experiential. The women learn and experiment with important technical aspects of horticulture and livestock management. However, they also learn and experience intangibles such as cooperation, leadership, experimentation and creativity. This is especially true of the cooperative leaders and their work in the villages. (3) The FFS’s are primarily in homes in remote neighborhoods in Kabul. As a result, women who have not had access to land or gardening inputs are now able to plant and grow food for their own homes. We are indeed reaching some of the most difficult, and needy population in Afghanistan - poor women with restricted movements. The women continue to be enthusiastic and are already making plans for next year’s school!