USAID’s Afghanistan Agricultural Extension Project-II (AAEP-II) helps Afghanistan’s Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) deliver extension services to rural clientele by strengthening cooperation and linkages between MAIL and the other government agencies like Directorates of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (DAILs).

Key components of AAEP-II are applied training in appropriate agriculture technologies for DAIL extension staff, administrative capacity building, and utilization of teaching farms, (Provincial Model Teaching Farms (PMTF)), farmer field schools, farmer field demonstrations, and other resources to teach and demonstrate the benefits of improved farming, crop storage, and other technologies in five core provinces (Balkh, Herat, Kabul, Nangarhar, and Kunduz). Purdue leads the efforts in Herat Province. UC Davis, Washington State University, Texas A&M, and University of Maryland lead the efforts in the other targeted provinces. The project also provides small grants for working groups to facilitate projects that improve extension worker capacity and provide a sustainable benefit to farmers.

Purdue has a focus on building capacity in postharvest storage and integrated pest management. Purdue faculty are working directly with Herat DAIL employees to teach them storage and pest management concepts so they will be able to teach other extension staff the techniques.
Overview:
The Farmer Field School (FFS) program is an essential part of AAEPII. FFSs are established in rural communities in cooperation with district-based extension workers to work directly with farmers. Initially, DAIL Extension Workers were brought to the provincial capital (Herat City) to be trained in FFS establishment, their management, and expected outcomes. After the training, extension workers were instructed to return to their districts to identify community groups willing to participate. In June 2015 AAEPII’s Mohammad Shah Rauf, alongside the responsible extension worker met with the group to begin a FFS in Urdubah Village.

Training Objective:
The objective of this training was to build the capacity of extension worker skills in the field, establish leadership within the FFS; clearly convey the expectations of farmers DAIL, and AAEPII; and generate a demand-driven FFS topic.

These objectives can benefit the knowledge, skills, and leadership ability of the extension worker as well as introduce and teach farmers about a new agricultural topic.

Workshop Activities:
AAEPII met with the DAIL Extension Worker at the Guzara District office then travelled together to Urdubah Village. There they met with the community to discuss participation in the FFS. After a general introduction, AAEPII shared how a FFS could benefit the community by giving examples of other FFS. Once the group agreed to participate, the extension worker helped select leadership (Chairman, Secretary, and Treasurer).

AAEPII asked the community to make a list of interests and challenges. The list was used to identify potential activities. Once the list was complete the FFS members voted on the interests/challenges they felt most important. The rank-order list was finalized and their challenge with squash seed was ranked highest.
**Workshop Outcomes:**
With oversight from AAEP II, the DAIL Extension Worker gained management skills that will improve his job performance. The training gave him the opportunity and responsibility to inform, mobilize, and lead a community group. In the future he should have the skills and confidence to initiate a FFS on his own.

As a community, the Urdubah FFS learned about the FFS concept. The initiative brought community members together where they learned how to conduct a needs assessment. Their FFS should encourage the community to work together and solve other challenges. The group created a rank-order list of interests and challenges they can learn about.

**Next Steps:**
Once the group agreed on the squash FFS, the extension worker helped arrange the next meeting. Next week the group will meet to choose the field site local for their demo plots. Farmer Field Demonstrations (FFDs) will be created as side-by-side comparisons of local and hybrid squash varieties. The group will meet in the field 1 time a week to view the progress, address issues (pest, disease, etc.), and manage the plot. As the crop matures, the DAIL Extension Worker will provide on-site trainings on best management practices that coincide with crop development (IPM, fertilizer application etc.).