

The Morning Walk That Changed Everything: How One Day in Narbal Turned Farmers into Disease Detectives

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Mohammad Amin Bhat used to start his day with tea and a cigarette. Now he starts with a walk the same walk, every morning through his orchard, looking closely at every leaf. "I used to spray first and ask questions later," he admits. "Now I ask questions first. Most days, I don't need to spray at all." This transformation did not take weeks or months. It took **seven hours** at the **Narbal Orchard Knowledge Centre**, where the **SKUAST-Kashmir** conducted a **one-day training program** on "**Good Agricultural Practices for Disease-Free Apple Cultivation.**" **Funded by MSME. 50 farmers** attended. By the end of the day, they had stopped being sprayers and started being observers.



The One Skill That Changed Everything

The training taught one deceptively simple habit: **the morning orchard walk.**

Time	Action
Before 8 AM	Walk every row. Look at the underside of leaves.
Spot something?	Identify: Is it scab? Powdery mildew? Or just dirt?
Act only if needed	Need-based spraying replaces calendar spraying.

Most farmers had never been taught to look. They sprayed every Tuesday, rain or shine. The training gave them a **laminated disease identification card** so they could name what they saw before mixing anything.

"My worst enemy was not the fungus," says Mohammad Amin. *"It was the old habit of spraying without looking. That one day taught me to observe first, then act."*

The Women Who Led the Change

Razia Begum came to the training uninvited. Her name was not on the list. But she sat in the back row and watched everything.

By lunch, she could name three stages of Apple Scab. By afternoon, she was correcting the men on sprayer calibration. The trainer pulled her aside: "You should be training, not just attending." She now leads **11 women** across three villages. Her WhatsApp group, "Narbal Orchard Sisters," has 47 members. They share photos of suspicious leaves at 7 PM. They

answer each other before morning. "My husband now asks my opinion before he mixes anything," she says. "That is worth more than any crop."

The Results

A 30-day assessment confirmed the shift:

10% drop in scab severity

10% reduction in fungicide spending (from 14 sprays to 9–10)

"I used to spend ₹45,000 on chemicals every season," says **Bashir Ahmad Wani**, another participant. "After that one day, I spent ₹32,000. My apples are cleaner. That one day paid for itself a hundred times over."

The Ripple

The success in Narbal has triggered requests for the same one-day model in **Chadoora, Beerwah, and Khag** blocks.

The District Horticulture Officer calls it "*the most cost-effective extension intervention in recent years.*"

But Razia Begum measures success differently.

"My husband used to say 'what do you know, you're just a woman,'" she says. "Now he says 'go look at the leaves and tell me.' That one day gave me a voice in my own orchard."

What Narbal Teaches Us

Farmers do not need more chemicals. They need better eyes. One day of training if it is the right training can turn a blind sprayer into a sharp observer.

And sometimes, the best observer in the village is sitting silently in the back row.

