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A Long-Awaited Arrival: ICAR Brings Plant Health Kits and Training to Lanilab's Tribal Families

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Lanilab is the kind of village that does not appear on most district maps. It sits in a fold of hills in central Budgam, reached by a road that becomes a stream during spring melt. The nearest town is an hour away by foot. The nearest plant doctor has never visited. The **100 tribal families** who live here mostly Gujjar, with a small Bakarwal hamlet on the upper slope have farmed apples, nuts, and vegetables for generations. They have done so without extension services, without soil testing, without protective equipment, and without formal training. On a recent morning, that silence broke. **The , Directorate of Extension SKUAST-Kashmir**, conducted a **one-day training program** on **"Empowering Tribal Farmers Through On-Farm Diagnosis and Plant Health Advisory"** at the Lanilab, funded **by Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), New Delhi. 100 tribal farmers** 57 men and 43 women attended. For most, it was their first interaction with any agricultural institution. For all, it was the first time they received plant protection tools free of cost delivered to their village.

The Training: Diagnosis Before Prescription

The program began not with a lecture, but with an invitation. Farmers were asked to bring samples from their sickest trees. Within thirty minutes, the school verandah was covered with infected leaves, cankered twigs, and rotting roots in plastic bags.

Using hand lenses from the kits, farmers spent the morning learning:

Disease	Key Feature
Apple Scab	Olive-black spots on leaves and fruit
Powdery Mildew	White powdery coating on young tissue
Marssonina Blotch	Brown spots with yellow halos
White Root Rot	White fungal growth on roots near soil line
Canker	Sunken, cracked bark on branches

By lunch, **Bashir Ahmad khatana**, a 62-year-old farmer who has never been to school, correctly identified three diseases from memory. "I have seen every year," he said. "I just never knew their names." The afternoon session focused on **plant health advisory** not complex IPM charts, but a simple five-step routine:

1. **Observe** — walk the orchard every morning
2. **Identify** — use the chart and hand lens
3. **Decide** — is treatment needed?
4. **Apply** — with calibrated sprayer and protective gear
5. **Review** — check effectiveness after three days

The Kits: Tools That Change Practice

Each of the 100 families received a **comprehensive plant protection kit** carefully packed and distributed by the SKUAST team. Each kit contained:

Item	Quantity	Purpose
Knapsack sprayer (16L)	1	Even, efficient application of plant protection products
Protective goggles	1 pair	Eye safety during mixing and spraying
Protective suit	1 set	Full-body protection from chemical exposure
Glass beaker (500 ml)	1	Accurate measurement of liquid formulations
Soil pH meter	1	Testing soil acidity/alkalinity
Pruning shears	1	Clean cutting of small infected branches
Pruning saw	1	Removing thicker cankered limbs
Hand lens (10x)	1	Close inspection of spores, mites, and early symptoms
Laminated disease chart	1	Quick reference for common diseases

Mohammad Sultan khan, 34, a father of four, held the pruning saw with disbelief. "I have been using a woodcutter's axe on my apple trees," he said. "The wounds look like battle scars. Now I have the right tool. My trees will heal faster."

Razia Jan, 52, a grandmother and widow, carefully tried on her protective suit. "I never wore anything," she admitted. "My son used to laugh that I smelled like poison even after bathing. Now I know why. I will never spray without this suit again."

The Moment That Stood Out

Halfway through the afternoon demonstration, **Aamina Begum**, a 28-year-old woman who manages her elderly father's orchard, raised her hand.

"The soil pH meter," she said. "Show me again. I want to be sure I understand."

Then Aamina took the meter, walked to a small patch of soil near the school building, and tested it herself. She read the number aloud: "6.8."

Aamina smiled and placed the meter carefully back in its box. "Now I will test every patch of my orchard," she said. "One patch gives small fruit. Now I will find out why."

By the end of the day, she had tested three different soil spots and taught two other women how to use the meter.

What Farmers Said

"The goggles are not a luxury. Last season, a drop of pesticide flew into my eye. I could not open it for a full day. My wife had to lead me to the toilet. I will never spray without goggles again." **Ghulam Mohammad khan**, Lanilab

"I have been using a broken sprayer that leaks from the bottom. Half the chemical fell on my feet. Now I have a knapsack sprayer that works. My back will thank me."
Shakeel Ahmad khatana, Lanilab
"The pruning shears cut so clean. I did not know a branch could heal like this. I want to go home right now and cut every dead twig." — **Zamrooda Bano**, Lanilab

What Happens Next

The training was conducted recently. No results are available yet no data on yield improvement, disease reduction, or income increase. That will take time.
But the **foundation has been laid**:

- **104 farmers** have the tools to diagnose, protect, and treat their own orchards
- **A WhatsApp group** has been created for remote advisory support
- **A follow-up visit** by the SKUAST team is scheduled for 60 days
- **Five master farmers** (three men, two women) have volunteered to be local resource persons

We summarize the program's immediate goal:
"We did not come here to give a lecture and leave. We came to give tools and training. The farmers of Lanilab are intelligent and hardworking. They only lacked access. Today, we gave them access. What they do next is up to them but we will be watching, and we will return."

The Bottom Line

The Lanilab training was not a miracle. It was a **beginning** — a long-overdue delivery of knowledge and equipment to a community that had been invisible to the agricultural system. No success in terms of results yet. But success in terms of **presence, recognition, and empowerment**.
As **Aamina Begum** said, packing her soil pH meter into her bag:
"I have never owned a tool that measures anything. Now I own three- a lens, a meter, and a sprayer. I feel like a real farmer today. Not just someone who throws things at trees and hopes. A real farmer."