Policy Innovation Lab
KIM Muzaffarabad

Public Policy Proposal

Amlok Revelution in AJK

Transforming AJK's Agriculture Sector through

Mass Level Grafting

of Wild Amlok (Parsimmon) with Hybrid Amlok (Parsimmon)

Rewiring Minds



Courtesy: Kashmir Institute of Management, Muzaffarabad

PREFACE

Azad Jammu and Kashmir is blessed with extraordinary natural environment, yet one of its greatest agricultural treasures stands largely unrecognized across our mountains and valleys: tens of millions of wild Amlok (Diospyros lotus) Persimmon trees. These resilient trees—rich in genetic strength, climate adaptability, and ecological resilience—have for generations produced small, astringent fruit with limited market value. As a result, their immense economic potential has remained underutilized.

This Public Policy Note and Technical Proposal provides a science-based, economically sound, and highly practical roadmap for transforming this ignored resource into one of AJK's most valuable horticultural industries. Central to this transformation is a simple, proven intervention: grafting high-value hybrid persimmon (Diospyros kaki) cultivars onto our naturally abundant wild rootstock. This approach offers a rapid, sustainable, and high-return pathway for agricultural modernization and rural prosperity.

Our native Amlok trees are internationally recognized as ideal rootstock for premium non-astringent persimmons. While countries around the world must invest years into raising rootstocks in nurseries, AJK already possesses them in the wild—fully grown, deeply rooted, drought-tolerant, cold-hardy, and distributed in unparalleled density across the region. By grafting these trees with superior cultivars such as Fuyu, Jiro, Suruga, Hana Fuyu, and Rojo Brillante, we can convert today's low-value wild groves into tomorrow's high-yield orchards.

Within three to four years of grafting, each tree produces large, sweet, seedless fruit that commands a premium in domestic and international markets. This transformation requires no new land, no major irrigation schemes, and no decades-long investment. The trees exist. The climate is ideal. The grafting has been tested in AJK. And global demand for high-quality persimmons continues to grow.

A New Dimension: Turning Persimmons into a High-Value Dried Export Product

In addition to fresh-fruit markets, this proposal emphasizes a crucial marketing innovation that significantly reduces risk and increases profitability: drying hybrid persimmons for long-term storage and export.

Fresh fruit markets carry high risks—price fluctuations, transportation losses, delayed payments, perishability, and unpredictable weather. In contrast, dried persimmons offer:

- High shelf life (12–18 months)
- Low transport risk
- Attractive export market in the Gulf, Central Asia, and within Pakistan
- Premium prices compared to fresh fruit
- Value addition within AJK instead of outside

Internationally, dried persimmon is a luxury product in Japan (Hoshigaki), Korea (Gotgam), China (Shibing), and Spain (Caqui Seco), often selling for 8 to 20 times the price of fresh fruit. AJK can enter this market competitively.

Even more importantly, AJK possesses a unique comparative advantage: cheap electricity, with hydropower supplying energy at nearly Rs. 3 per unit. This creates an unprecedented opportunity for establishing electric drying facilities, community-level dehydrators, and industrial-scale fruit dryers—all at extremely low operational cost.

By combining grafting with value-added drying, AJK can:

- Stabilize farmer income
- Reduce post-harvest losses
- Create new rural enterprises
- Expand female-led home-based processing
- Position AJK as a major supplier of dried persimmon to Gulf markets

This dual strategy—grafting + drying—ensures both productivity and profitability.

A Transformative Impact for AJK

What this initiative means for our people is transformative. Rural households earning little from wild fruit will see substantial income increases. Women can be trained as grafters, pruners, packers, and operators of electric drying units—opening pathways to economic independence. Youth will find meaningful work in orchards, processing units, and drying facilities, reducing outward migration. Entire districts will shift from subsistence production to high-value commercial agriculture.

This is the rare agricultural revolution that enriches without displacing. No forest is cut. No village is moved. The very trees that have stood for centuries become living assets—valued and protected by the communities among whom they grow.

Policy Vision: The Amlok Revolution

This proposal recommends launching the Amlok Revolution as a flagship initiative under the AJK Agriculture Vision 2035, including:

- Establishing an Amlok Development Unit to coordinate region-wide grafting campaigns.
- Implementing a ten-year phased grafting drive across all major districts.
- Training women and youth as master grafters and drying technicians.
- Setting up electric drying centers powered by cheap local electricity.
- Building packing houses, cold-storage units, and export linkages.
- Pursuing a Geographical Indication (GI) label: “Kashmir Himalayan Persimmon.”
- Partnering with countries leading in persimmon cultivation for scion supply, training, and export agreements.

A Call to Action

We have watched valuable fruit fall unused to the ground for far too long. The science is clear. The opportunity is real. The markets are open. The only missing element is decisive policy commitment.

This document is therefore shared as a wake-up call and an invitation for joint action—by policymakers, researchers, field experts, communities, and development partners. Public institutions must innovate and seize emerging opportunities that uplift our people. Grafting and value-added drying of wild Amlok is one such opportunity: scientifically robust, economically transformative, and socially inclusive.

I hope this proposal inspires meaningful policy attention and leads to coordinated implementation. The future of AJK’s agricultural prosperity depends on bold, evidence-driven actions.

Let the wild Amlok of yesterday become the wealth, dignity, and pride of tomorrow.
Let AJK lead Pakistan—and the world—in converting forgotten forests into engines of prosperity.

Dr. Muqeem ul Islam
Phd (Public Policy & Governance) NDU
MPhil Economic Development
Director General
Kashmir Institute of Management
Muzaffarabad,
Azad Jammu & Kashmir
muqeemz@gmail.com , 03435090648

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پیش لفظ

آزاد جموں و کشمیر ایک غیر معمولی قدرتی ماحول سے مالا مال خطہ ہے، مگر اس کے پہاڑوں اور وادیوں میں موجود سب سے قیمتی مگر نظر انداز شدہ زرعی سرمایہ — جنگلی املوک کے کروڑوں درخت — ابھی تک اپنی حقیقی معاشی قدر نہیں پا سکے۔ یہ درخت اپنی جینیاتی مضبوطی، موسمی مطابقت اور ماحولیاتی استحکام کے باعث انتہائی (Diospyros lotus) اور کم مارکیٹ ویلیو رکھتا ہے، جس کے باعث یہ بیش قیمت متاع اب تک استعمال میں نہیں لائی گئی۔ (astringent) قیمتی ہیں، مگر ان کا پھل چھوٹا، قابض

یہ پبلک پالیسی نوٹ اور تکنیکی تجویز ایک سائنسی، معاشی لحاظ سے مضبوط، اور نہایت عملی حکمتِ عملی پیش کرتی ہے، جس کے ذریعے اس نظر انداز شدہ قدرتی اثاثے کو آزاد کشمیر کی سب کی (Diospyros kaki) سے منافع بخش باغبانی صنعت میں تبدیل کیا جا سکتا ہے۔ اس تبدیلی کی بنیاد ایک سادہ مگر آزمودہ طریقہ ہے: جنگلی املوک پر اعلیٰ قدر کے ہائبرڈ پرسیمن اقسام کی قلم کاری۔ یہ طریقہ زرعی جدیدیت اور دیہی خوشحالی کی طرف ایک تیز رفتار، پائیدار اور منافع بخش راستہ فراہم کرتا ہے۔

ہمارے مقامی املوک کے درخت دنیا بھر میں اعلیٰ معیار کے نان-اسٹرنجنٹ پرسیمنز کے لیے بہترین روٹ اسٹاک کے طور پر مشہور ہیں۔ دنیا کے دیگر ممالک کو نرسریوں میں یہ روٹ اسٹاک کے پاس یہ خزانہ پہلے ہی موجود ہے — قدآور، گہری جڑوں والے، خشک سالی اور سردی کے خلاف مزاحمت رکھنے والے، اور پورے خطے AJK تیار کرنے میں کئی سال لگتے ہیں، جبکہ میں بے مثال کثرت کے ساتھ پھیلے ہوئے۔ ان درختوں پر فُوئیو، جیرو، سرگا، ہاناَفُوئیو، اور روجو بریانتے جیسی اقسام کی قلم لگا کر آج کے کم قدر جنگلی باغات کو کل کے اعلیٰ پیداوار والے باغات میں بدلا جا سکتا ہے۔

قلم کاری کے تین سے چار سال بعد ہر درخت بڑے، میٹھے، بغیر بیج کے پھل پیدا کرتا ہے جس کی ملکی و بین الاقوامی منڈیوں میں بے حد مانگ ہے۔ اس تبدیلی کے لیے نہ نئی زمین درکار ہے، میں قلم کاری کامیاب ہو چکی ہے۔ اور عالمی سطح پر اعلیٰ درجے کے AJK نہ بڑے آبپاشی منصوبے، اور نہ ہی دہائیوں پر محیط سرمایہ کاری۔ درخت موجود ہیں۔ موسم موزوں ہے۔
پرسیمن کی طلب تیزی سے بڑھ رہی ہے۔

ایک نئی جہت: پرسیمن کو خشک کر کے برآمدی قدر میں اضافہ

تازہ پھلوں کی مارکیٹ کے ساتھ ساتھ، یہ تجویز ایک اہم مارکیٹنگ جدت پیش کرتی ہے: ہائبرڈ پرسیمن کو خشک کر کے طویل المدتی ذخیرہ اور برآمدات۔

تازہ پھل کی فروخت میں متعدد خطرات ہوتے ہیں — قیمت میں اتار چڑھاؤ، ٹرانسپورٹ کے نقصانات، تاخیر سے ادائیگی، جلد خراب ہونے کا خدشہ، اور غیر یقینی موسم۔ اس کے برعکس، :خشک پرسیمن فراہم کرتا ہے

- تا 18 ماہ شیلف لائف 12
- کم ٹرانسپورٹ رسک
- خلیج، وسطی ایشیا، اور پاکستان میں پرکشش مارکیٹ
- تازہ پھل کے مقابلے میں زیادہ منافع
- کے اندر AJK پروسیسنگ کی تمام ویلیو ایڈیشن

دنیا بھر میں خشک پرسیمن جاپان (ہوشیگاکی)، کوریا (گوٹگام)، چین (شیبنگ)، اور اسپین (کاکی سیکو) میں ایک لگژری آئٹم سمجھا جاتا ہے، جو تازہ پھل کی قیمت سے 8 تا 20 گنا زیادہ فروخت اس مارکیٹ میں مقابلہ کر سکتا ہے۔ AJK ہوتا ہے۔

کے پاس ایک منفرد فائدہ موجود ہے: انتہائی سستی بجلی۔ مقامی ہائیڈرو پاور تقریباً 3 روپے فی یونٹ کی قیمت پر دستیاب ہے۔ یہ بجلی گھریلو، کمیونٹی اور صنعتی سطح AJK سب سے بڑھ کر، کے الیکٹرک ڈرائیرز قائم کرنے کے لیے بہترین ماحول فراہم کرتی ہے، جن کے آپریشنل اخراجات نہایت کم ہوتے ہیں۔

AJK: قلم کاری اور ویلیو ایڈیڈ ڈرائینگ کو ملا کر

- کاشتکاروں کی آمدن مستحکم کر سکتا ہے
- بعد از برداشت نقصانات کم کر سکتا ہے
- نئے دیہی کاروبار قائم کر سکتا ہے
- خواتین کو گھریلو پروسیسنگ کے ذریعے معاشی طور پر بااختیار بنا سکتا ہے
- خشک پرسیمن کا ایک بڑا سپلائر بن سکتا ہے

یہ دوہری حکمت عملی — قلم کاری + خشک کرنا — پیداواری اور منافع دونوں کو یقینی بناتی ہے۔

AJK کے لیے تبدیلی کا نقطۂ آغاز

یہ اقدام ہمارے لوگوں کے لیے ایک انقلابی تبدیلی لائے گا۔ جنگلی پھل سے بہت کم آمدن حاصل کرنے والے دیہاتوں کی آمدن کئی گنا بڑھ جائے گی۔ خواتین قلم کار، کانٹ چھانٹ کرنے والی، پیکر اور ڈرائینگ یونٹس کی آپریٹرز بن کر معاشی خود مختاری حاصل کر سکتی ہیں۔ نوجوانوں کے لیے باغات، پروسیسنگ، اور ڈرائینگ سنٹرز میں روزگار کے مواقع پیدا ہوں گے، جس سے بیرونِ ریاست ہجرت کم ہو گی۔ پورے اضلاع معمولی پیداوار سے ہائی ویلیو کمرشل زراعت کی طرف منتقل ہو جائیں گے۔

یہ وہ زرعی انقلاب ہے جو بغیر کسی نقل مکانی یا جنگلات کی کٹائی کے خوشحالی لاتا ہے۔ جو درخت صدیوں سے کھڑے ہیں، وہی کمیونٹیز کے لیے قیمتی اثاثہ بن جاتے ہیں۔

پالیسی وژن: املوک انقلاب

AJK یہ تجویز زرعی وژن 2035 کے تحت "املوک انقلاب" کے نام سے ایک فلیگ شپ پروگرام شروع کرنے کی سفارش کرتی ہے، جس میں شامل ہے:

املوک ڈیولپمنٹ یونٹ کا قیام

- تمام اضلاع میں دس سالہ مرحلہ وار قلم کاری پروگرام
- خواتین اور نوجوانوں کو ماسٹر گرافٹر اور ڈرائینگ ٹیکنیشن کے طور پر تربیت
- سستی بجلی سے چلنے والے ڈرائینگ سنٹرز کا قیام
- پیکنگ ہاؤسز، کولڈ اسٹوریج اور ایکسپورٹ چینلز کی تشکیل
- جغرافیائی لیبل "کشمیر ہمالین پرسیمن" کا حصول
- بین الاقوامی ماہرین سے قلمی میٹریل، ٹریننگ اور برآمدی شراکت داری

دعوتِ عمل

ہم بہت عرصے سے قیمتی پھل کو زمین پر گرتے دیکھتے رہے ہیں۔ سائنس واضح ہے۔ موقع حقیقی ہے۔ مارکیٹ کھلی ہے۔ صرف ایک چیز کی کمی ہے — پختہ پالیسی فیصلہ۔

یہ دستاویز پالیسی سازوں، محققین، ماہرین، کمیونٹیز، اور ترقیاتی اداروں کے نام ایک بیداری پیغام اور مشترکہ عمل کی دعوت ہے۔ عوامی اداروں کو چاہیے کہ وہ نئی ابھرتی ہوئی معاشی مواقع کو بروئے کار لائیں۔ جنگلی املوک کی قلم کاری اور خشک پرسیمن کی ویلیو ایڈیشن ایسا ہی موقع ہے—سائنسی طور پر مضبوط، معاشی طور پر تبدیلی لانے والا، اور سماجی طور پر شامل کرنے والا۔

کی زرعی خوشحالی کا مستقبل جرات مندانہ اور ثبوت پر مبنی فیصلوں کا تقاضا کرتا ہے۔ AJK اللہ کرے یہ تجویز پالیسی میں توجہ حاصل کرے اور مربوط عمل درآمد کی طرف بڑھے۔

آیئے! جنگلی املوک کو کل کی دولت، عزت، اور فخر کا نشان بنائیں۔
پاکستان ہی نہیں، دنیا کی رہنمائی کرے کہ بھولی بسری جنگلات کو کس طرح خوشحالی کے انجن میں بدلا جاتا ہے۔ AJK !آیئے

ڈاکٹر مقیم الاسلام
(پی ایچ ڈی (پبلک پالیسی اینڈ گورننس
ایم فل اکنامک ڈویلپمنٹ

ڈائریکٹر جنرل
کشمیر انسٹی ٹیوٹ آف مینجمنٹ
مظفر آباد، آزاد جموں و کشمیر

Proposal for Persimmon (Amlok) Improvement in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK)

Technical Report on Grafting of Wild Amlok (Diospyros lotus) with Hybrid Persimmon (Diospyros kaki) in AJK

Project Title: Enhancing Wild Amlok Production through Hybrid Grafting

1. Executive Summary

This proposal outlines a plan to dramatically improve the quality and market value of locally grown persimmons (Amlok) in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. Currently, AJK is rich in resilient **wild Amlok trees** (the native rootstock). It has estimated more than 3 to 5 million wild trees . While these trees are strong and perfectly suited to the local climate, their fruit is often small, astringent (bitter), and low-yielding.

Our solution is simple yet highly effective: **Hybrid Grafting**. We propose taking cuttings (scions) from superior **hybrid Amlok varieties** (which produce large, sweet, marketable fruit) and physically joining them onto the strong, established stems of the local wild trees. This process, known as grafting

, immediately converts a low-value wild tree into a high-value hybrid producer without having to replant and wait years for a new tree to establish its roots. This is a fast track to better fruit quality and higher farmer income.

The Current Challenge and the Opportunity

The Challenge: Low-Value Wild Fruit

Current estimatedly more that 3 to 5 million wild amlok trees are there. The native Amlok trees thrive in AJK's harsh terrain and fluctuating weather, making them ideal **rootstocks** (the foundation). However, the fruit they produce is often the traditional, highly astringent variety that requires complex ripening before it is palatable. This limits its commercial appeal, transportability, and potential for export. AJK's diverse agro-climatic zones, ranging from subtropical valleys to temperate highlands, create ideal conditions for horticultural development. The region's wild Amlok (persimmon) trees, locally known as "Jangli Amlok" or "Amlok Banri," grow abundantly across districts including:

1. Neelum Valley
2. Leepa Valley
3. Bagh District
4. Haveli District
5. Dhirkot Region
6. Sudhanoti District
7. Hattian Bala District
8. Rawalakot and surrounding areas
9. Muzaffarabad District

The Opportunity: Superior Hybrid Varieties

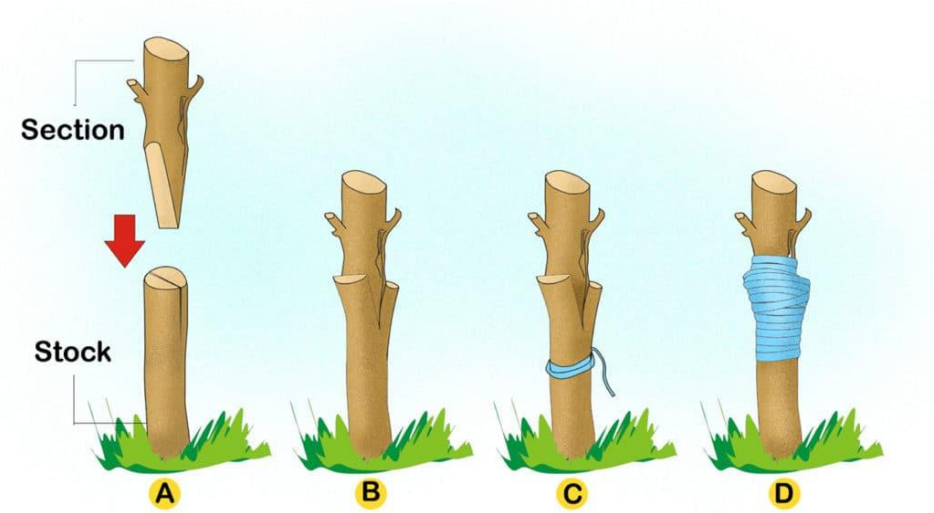
Modern horticulture has developed several hybrid and non-astringent (sweet) persimmon varieties that are large, colorful, and ready to eat quickly. By introducing these hybrid characteristics to our robust wild trees, we can capture a significant premium in the market.

THE SOLUTION: THE GRAFTING PROCESS (NON-TECHNICAL)

Grafting is an ancient, natural process, similar to a skilled surgeon joining two tissues.

The Strategy:

1. **Identify the Foundation (Rootstock):** We use the existing, strong, and highly adapted **wild Amlok trees** as the base. Their root system is already massive, providing stability and nutrient uptake in AJK's soil.
2. **Select the Upgrade (Scion):** We source healthy, dormant cuttings (scions) from certified nurseries that produce the desired **hybrid, high-quality, non-astringent fruit**.
3. **The Union (Grafting):** A small, strategic incision is made in the wild tree (the rootstock), and the cutting (the scion) is inserted and secured tightly with specialized tape or wax.
4. **The Result:** The two plants heal and fuse into one. The strong roots of the wild tree feed the upper portion, which now produces the highly sought-after, sweet hybrid Amlok fruit.





In essence, we are using the strength of the wild tree to instantly support a commercially valuable fruit variety.

TECHNICAL JUSTIFICATION: WHY GRAFTING IS THE BEST APPROACH

Technical Aspect	Detail	Justification
Rootstock Vigor & Adaptability	The native *Diospyros lotus* (wild Amlok) is proven to be hardy, drought-resistant, and tolerant of local soil conditions.	**Problem Solved:** We bypass the need to select and establish new root systems that might fail in the local environment.
Early Fruiting	Grafting causes the scion to mature much faster than a seedling.	**Advantage:** New hybrid fruit production begins in 2–3 years, compared to 5–7 years for a tree grown from seed. This significantly accelerates the return on investment.
Propagation of Desired Traits	Grafting ensures genetic uniformity; the resulting fruit is an exact clone of the superior hybrid variety.	**Advantage:** Eliminates the uncertainty of growing from seed (which often reverts to wild, inferior characteristics). Every grafted branch produces guaranteed high-quality fruit.
Disease Resistance	Hybrid scions are often grafted high above the soil line, protecting the fruit-bearing part from soil-borne diseases.	**Advantage:** Maintains the disease resistance of the wild rootstock while improving the overall health and yield of the hybrid scion.

5. ECONOMIC JUSTIFICATION: THE RETURN ON INVESTMENT (ROI)

The economic benefits of this project are immediate and substantial, transitioning Amlok farming from subsistence to a profitable commercial activity.

A. Increased Market Price and Value

- **Current (Wild Amlok):** Low commercial value due to astringency, small size, and short shelf life. Price is typically low and limited to local consumption.

- **Proposed (Hybrid Amlok):** High commercial value. Non-astringent varieties are sought after for direct consumption, processing (jams, dried fruit), and high-end markets.
    - **Price Premium:** Hybrid varieties typically command a **6x to 10x price premium** over wild varieties.

B. Accelerated Production Timeline

- **Cost of Waiting:** Planting a new hybrid tree from scratch takes 5-7 years to reach commercial bearing.
- **Grafting Efficiency:** Grafting onto an established wild rootstock cuts this waiting period to just **2-3 years**. This means farmers start earning revenue years earlier, rapidly improving cash flow.

C. Higher Yield and Reduced Wastage

- Hybrid varieties are often bred for heavier cropping and larger fruit size, dramatically increasing the total marketable yield per tree.
- The non-astringent fruit can be harvested earlier and stored/transported more easily, leading to **less post-harvest loss** and maximizing the quantity sold.

D. Job Creation and Value Chain Development

- **Skilled Labor:** The project requires training local technicians in the art of grafting, creating specialized, high-demand, and better-paying agricultural jobs.
- **Processing Sector:** Increased production of high-quality hybrid fruit will spur the growth of local processing units (drying, canning, juicing), adding further value and employment opportunities in the region.

Conclusion: The grafting project offers a low-risk, high-reward strategy that leverages AJK's existing natural capital (the wild Amlok trees) to produce a commercially superior, high-demand crop, ensuring long-term profitability and sustainable agricultural growth.

Persimmon (locally known as *Amlok* or *Japani Phal*) is an economically valuable fruit crop in the northern areas of Pakistan. AJK has favorable agro-climatic conditions, particularly in **Neelum, Leepa, Bagh, Haveli, Dhirkot, Sudhanoti, Hattian Bala, and Rawalakot**, where wild *Amlok (Diospyros lotus)* trees naturally occur.

Grafting **hybrid persimmon (D. kaki)** scions onto **wild Amlok (D. lotus) rootstock** is a globally recognized practice due to its superior adaptability, improved fruit size, and disease resistance. This report evaluates the feasibility and technical protocols for AJK.

Climatic Suitability of AJK

AJK's temperate–subtropical climate supports persimmon grafting due to:

- **Cold winters** for chilling requirements of rootstock
- **Warm summers** for vegetative growth
- Deep, well-drained loamy soils with moderate pH (6.0–7.2)
- Rainfall 1200–1800 mm annually, ideal for persimmon root development
- Natural distribution of *Diospyros lotus* providing abundant grafting material

Scientific Rationale for Using Wild Amlok as Rootstock

Wild *Diospyros lotus* provides:
✔ **High tolerance** to cold (-20°C), drought, and soil variations
✔ Strong root system
✔ Resistance to many fungal diseases and nematodes
✔ Better graft compatibility with most *D. kaki* cultivars
✔ Improved fruit size, shelf life, and yield in grafted trees

Hybrid persimmon **D. kaki** offers:
✔ Large, sweet fruit
✔ High market demand
✔ Long shelf life and premium price

The combination results in **superior orchard performance**.

Grafting Methods Recommended for AJK

Suitable Grafting Time

- **Best window:** *Mid-February to Mid-March* (before bud break)
- Secondary window: *Late August to Early September* (greenwood grafting)

Recommended Techniques

1. Cleft Grafting (Most effective for AJK)

- Used when rootstock is 1–3 years old
- Provides strong union
- High survival rate (80–95%)

2. Whip & Tongue Grafting

- For uniform diameter scion and rootstock
- Best for nurseries

3. Bark Grafting

- For mature wild trees already established
- Scion inserted between bark and wood
- Useful for converting old wild Amlok trees into hybrid orchards

4. T-Budding (Summer)

- Works best for younger stocks
- Applied in August–September

Technical Steps of the Grafting Process

6.1 Selection of Rootstock (Wild Amlok)

- Seedlings of *D. lotus* grown for 1–2 years
- Stem diameter 0.8–1.5 cm
- Healthy, disease-free roots
- Height 1–2 feet preferred

6.2 Collection of Scion (Hybrid Persimmon)

- One-year-old healthy shoots
- Diameter 0.5–1 cm
- Dormant buds
- Scion length: 10–15 cm

6.3 Sterilization

- Tools cleaned with 70% alcohol
- Prevents fungal infection

Economic and Market Superiority of Dried Persimmon (Amlok)

Economic and Market Comparison

The decision to focus on value-added processing, specifically drying, is critical for transitioning Amlok farming in AJK from a low-profit subsistence activity to a high-value commercial enterprise. An objective comparison of fresh versus dried persimmon demonstrates that processing fruit into its dried form offers overwhelming economic and market advantages.

1. The Market Limitations of Fresh Persimmon

The trade of fresh Amlok is inherently constrained by time, volume, and quality, severely limiting profitability:

- **Extreme Seasonality and Saturation:** Fresh Amlok is only available for a very short window in late autumn. This leads to market flooding, which drives prices down sharply at the peak of the harvest season, minimizing farmer profit margins.
- **Perishability and Post-Harvest Loss:** Fresh fruit has a very limited shelf life (often less than two weeks before softening and degradation). This creates immense pressure on logistics, increases the risk of spoilage during transport, and necessitates quick sales, often at discount prices. For astringent varieties, the required ripening process further complicates timely market entry.
- **High Transportation Costs by Volume:** Fresh persimmons are approximately 80% water. This means that 80% of the cost of transporting the fresh fruit is spent moving water, not marketable product. This inefficiency significantly eats into the final price.
- **Quality Inconsistency:** While hybrid varieties are improving, much of the Amlok harvested, especially from existing wild rootstocks, is astringent and requires specialized treatment or delayed consumption, reducing its appeal to immediate consumers.






2. The Superiority of Dried Persimmon: Value Addition and Global Access

Drying is the most effective and simplest method for adding value to Amlok, transforming it into a premium product with a global reach.

A. Enhanced Economic Value and Price Premium

Dried persimmon is not a commodity; it is a specialized, high-demand product known globally (e.g., Japanese *Hoshigaki*).

- **Significant Price Uplift:** High-quality dried persimmon (in slice form or as whole, processed fruit) commands a market price premium typically **2 to 3 times higher** than the fresh equivalent. Global wholesale prices for quality dried persimmon often start at US$3.95 per kilogram, reaching over US$12 per kilogram for premium, specialty products.
- **Non-Seasonal Income Stream:** Drying extends the shelf life of the fruit from two weeks to over eight months (when packaged correctly). This allows farmers and processors to store the product and sell it year-round, generating stable income outside the harvest season and strategically avoiding market saturation.

B. Logistics and Shelf Stability

- **Massive Reduction in Transport Cost:** Drying removes over three-quarters of the fruit's weight and volume. This drastic reduction means processors can ship three to four times more marketable product for the same logistics cost compared to fresh fruit, leading to enormous savings.
- **Reduced Wastage:** By removing moisture, the risk of microbial contamination and spoilage is eliminated, guaranteeing a safer, higher-quality product with minimal post-harvest losses.

Metric	Fresh Amlok	Dried Amlok (Value-Added)	Economic Impact
Shelf Life	<2 weeks	>8 months	Year-round revenue stream.
Water Content	$\approx 80\%$	$\approx 20-30\%$	Transportation cost reduction.
Market Access	Local/Regional	National and International (Premium)	Significant price premium.
Revenue Cycle	Single seasonal burst	Consistent, managed flow	Improved cash flow stability.

Drying Techniques and Economic Justification for Electric Drying in AJK

3. Comparison of Persimmon Drying Techniques

There are two primary methods for drying persimmons, each presenting a distinct trade-off between initial investment and final product quality.

A. Sun Drying (Open Air or Solar Collector)

Sun drying utilizes the natural heat of the sun to evaporate moisture. This is the traditional method used in many regions.

- **Process:** Persimmons are peeled, tied, and hung in the open air, often under plastic tunnels or in flat solar collectors. This process can take $3-4$ weeks for whole fruit or around 27 hours for slices in direct sun.

- **Advantages:** Zero operating energy cost (except for optional fans). Low initial investment.
- **Disadvantages (Critical for Quality):**
    - **Inconsistent Quality:** Heavily dependent on continuous clear weather. Humidity and temperature fluctuations lead to non-uniform drying, which compromises texture and color.
    - **Contamination Risk:** The open-air process exposes the fruit to dust, insects, and potential microbial contamination, making the product unsuitable for high-standard markets.
    - **Product Browning:** High temperatures and slow drying can accelerate enzymatic browning, resulting in an undesirable dark color.

B. Electric Drying (Hot Air Convection or Heat Pump Dehydrator)

Electric drying uses controlled heat and airflow within a sealed chamber to achieve rapid, uniform dehydration. Modern heat pump dehydrators are the gold standard for high-quality food drying.

- **Process:** Peeled and prepared fruit (often sliced for speed) is placed in trays within a sealed chamber. Hot air (typically 45°C to 65°C) is continuously circulated and moisture is extracted. Drying time for slices can be reduced to under 20 hours.
- **Advantages:**
    - **Superior Quality:** Precise temperature and humidity control ensure even drying, excellent color retention, and the desired chewy texture, crucial for accessing premium markets.
    - **Hygiene and Safety:** The sealed environment guarantees a clean, contamination-free product compliant with national and international food safety standards.
    - **Weather Independence:** Production continues 24/7, regardless of rain, clouds, or humidity, guaranteeing timely output.

4. Economic Justification: Why Electric Drying is Superior in AJK

The cost-benefit analysis decisively proves that, given the specific electricity tariffs in AJK, electric drying is the most profitable and sustainable approach.

The Critical Advantage: Rs. 3 per Unit

The operational cost of a commercial electric dryer is determined by its Specific Energy Consumption (SEC) and the local electricity rate.

- **Specific Energy Consumption (SEC):** Studies show that processing 1 kg of dried persimmon using hot air methods requires approximately 2.5 kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity. Modern, high-efficiency heat pump dryers reduce this significantly, often requiring less than 1 kWh/kg of dried product, by efficiently recycling heat.
- **Calculation (Using a Conservative Hot Air Estimate):**

  $$\text{Electricity Cost} / \text{kg Dried Fruit} = \text{SEC} \times \text{Unit Price}$$$$\text{Electricity Cost} / \text{kg Dried Fruit} = 2.5 \text{ kWh}/\text{kg} \times 3 \text{ Rs}/\text{kWh} = \mathbf{7.5 \text{ Rs/kg}}$$

The Verdict

At a cost of only **Rs. 7.5 per kilogram** of *finished* product for electricity, the running cost of drying is functionally negligible compared to the value added:

1. **Negligible Cost vs. Premium Price:** A high-quality kilogram of dried Amlok sells for potentially thousands of rupees in the market (given global prices ranging from US$4 to US$12/kg). The cost of 7.5 Rs is a tiny fraction of the sale price, making the profit margin extremely high.

2. **Mitigation of Risk:** Electric drying eliminates the high risk of batch spoilage and contamination associated with sun drying, which can easily wipe out all profit. The reliability and quality assurance of electric drying protect the investment.
3. **Efficiency of Modern Technology:** Investing in energy-efficient heat pump dryers will push the operational cost even lower, maximizing profit while ensuring a premium, consistent product suitable for export and high-end national consumption.

Conclusion: Leveraging the low electricity unit price in AJK for high-quality electric dehydration equipment is the optimal strategy. It converts low-value fresh fruit into a premium, shelf-stable export product with minimal operational energy expenditure, securing long-term economic gains for the region's farmers.