Orchard Tech
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Soil moisture observations on an almond farm

What to expect before you start

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This sheet describes typical soil moisture observation work and conditions. Your actual duties depend on the farm and what you are trained and authorised to do. Reading this sheet does not authorise you to change irrigation, drive a farm vehicle, operate machinery or repair equipment.

Who you work for

Orchard Tech is your employer. Your host farm (your host) directs your daily work. Both are responsible for your health and safety. Raise questions or safety concerns with your supervisor or Orchard Tech: Hari Yellina, 0439 32 32 32, or Soana Fanua, 0400 174 471.

Your working hours

Your confirmed roster sets your days, hours and breaks. Ask your supervisor if you are unsure.

The work you may do

Soil moisture observations are checks of how wet or dry the soil is. You record and report what you find. Your host makes the decisions about irrigation.

Checking the soil. Your host will show you where to check, when to check and the method to use. Check only at those places and only in that way. If you cannot reach a check point or cannot make a check, do not guess. Tell your supervisor.

Probes and sensors. Some farms have soil moisture probes or sensors. These devices help check how wet or dry the soil is. Read or check them only if your host has shown you how. Do not move, open or adjust a probe, a sensor or its cables. If a probe, sensor or cable looks damaged, loose or disturbed, do not touch it. Keep clear and tell your supervisor.

What else to look for. As you walk the rows, look for very wet or dry patches, pooling water, leaks, blocked drippers and drip line that is cut, kinked or disconnected. Report what you saw and where (block and row). Fixing it is not part of this work.

Recording and reporting. Record your checks in the way your host shows you. Your host will explain what to record, when to report, who to report to and which results to report straight away. Record only what you actually saw or read. If you do not understand a reading, ask your supervisor. Do not guess.

This sheet covers observing, recording and reporting only. Changing irrigation is a separate task. This includes turning water on or off, opening or closing valves, and changing a controller or watering schedule. Repairs, driving, operating machinery, and fertiliser or chemicals in the water are also separate tasks. They need their own instructions, training and authorisation. Never work on electrical equipment or enter dams, channels or tanks.

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Tools and materials

Your host will give you what you need, such as a radio or phone, a farm map or block list, and a form, notebook or approved app. To check the soil, use only the tool or device your host gives you, as you were shown. Report anything that is damaged or not working.

Working near machines

Tractors, sprayers, harvest machines and other vehicles may be working in or near your block.

- **Keep separate from machines.** Before you start, ask your host to show you where to work and how workers are kept away from machinery. If a machine comes into your work area, stop work, keep clear and tell your supervisor. Keep well away from trees being shaken: branches and nuts can fall.
- **Never approach a working machine** until the operator has stopped and clearly signalled you to come closer. Eye contact alone is not enough.
- **Be seen:** wear the high-visibility clothing your host provides, and watch for vehicles coming out of rows and turning at the headlands (the turning areas at the ends of the rows).

Weather and the outdoors

Most work is outdoors in heat, cold, wind, rain and dust. Watch for holes, pipes, slippery ground and snakes. Work may change or stop in heat, storms or smoke: follow your host's instructions. Use sun protection all year (broad-brim hat, long sleeves, sunglasses, sunscreen), drink water often, take shade breaks and dress for the weather. Tell your supervisor straight away if you or a co-worker feel sick, dizzy or very hot.

- **Do not enter a block that is being sprayed or has a no-entry sign. Do not drink irrigation water:** it may contain fertiliser or chemicals.
- **Wet ground:** ground near drippers, leaks and pooling water can be muddy and slippery. Walk carefully and watch where you put your feet.
- **Snakes** may shelter in long grass, near water pipes and in shaded areas. Look before you kneel, reach or put your hand down.

Movement and lifting

You may need to walk on uneven ground. Depending on the checking method, you may need to bend or kneel. If lifting or carrying feels unsafe, ask for help or use the equipment provided. Wear the gloves your host provides. Wash your hands before you eat or drink, especially after touching soil or irrigation water. Report pain or discomfort early.

Working on your own

If you check blocks on your own or in remote parts of the farm, make sure your supervisor knows which blocks you will check. Do not work alone in a remote area unless your supervisor has approved it. Carry the radio or phone your host provides and check in as agreed.

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Moving around the farm safely

Mule or similar farm vehicle

Some farms use a side-by-side vehicle, such as a Kawasaki MULE, to carry workers and materials.

- **Driving is not covered by this sheet.** If driving is part of your confirmed job, get the safe work instructions, training and authorisation for that vehicle first. A licence alone does not show you can drive it safely.
- **Driver and passengers:** wear your seat belt every time, and the helmet and eye protection your host provides (your host will tell you what to wear). Keep doors or nets closed and arms and legs inside. Sit only in a seat with a seat belt. Never ride in the tray or bypass a safety device.

Farm traffic rules

- **Follow the farm traffic plan:** use set routes, obey signs and speed limits, and keep away from steep slopes, banks and water.
- **On foot:** use walking routes and keep clear of moving machinery. Stop in a safe place before using a phone or writing records.

PPE and help on the farm

Your host will provide the personal protective equipment (PPE) for your tasks and show you how to wear, check and look after it. This may include safety boots, high-visibility clothing, gloves, eye or hearing protection, sun protection and a vehicle helmet. Report missing, damaged or poorly fitting PPE before you start. PPE does not replace training, instructions or other safety controls.

At induction, learn who your supervisor is, where water, toilets and first aid are, the emergency plan, how to get help where there is no phone coverage, and the check-in arrangements when you work alone.

- In a life-threatening emergency, call Triple Zero (000), then tell your supervisor. If you see a snake, keep clear and never try to catch or kill it. If a snake bites you, or you think you have been bitten, keep as still as possible and call 000 or ask someone to call.
- Report every injury, near miss or unsafe situation to your supervisor and Orchard Tech as soon as possible, even if it seems small.
- Ask for a demonstration, an explanation or language help whenever you do not understand.

Important note before starting any job

This sheet describes typical soil moisture observation work. Before you start, your host will give you the job description and safe work instructions for your actual duties, the PPE you need, a farm induction and training for your tasks. Follow those instructions. Do not do any work without the required PPE, training and authorisation. Complete the induction at every new farm, and get the instructions and training for every new task. **If anything is missing, unsafe or unclear, stop and ask your supervisor. You can also contact Orchard Tech.**