Orchard Tech
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Irrigation repairs and maintenance on an almond farm

What to expect before you start

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This sheet describes typical irrigation repairs and maintenance 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 repair equipment, drive a farm vehicle, operate machinery or handle chemicals.

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

Checking and reporting. You may walk assigned rows looking for leaks, very wet or dry patches, blocked drippers, and drip line that is cut, chewed, kinked or disconnected. Report what you saw, where (block and row) and when, including anything not fixed by the end of your shift.

Repairs, as your host trains you. You may repair drip lines, fittings and leaks. For example, you may join damaged drip line, fit an end plug or replace a dripper. Your host will show you which fittings you may repair. Do only the repairs your host has trained and authorised you to do. Your host will tell you how completed repairs are checked.

Maintenance. You may also help clean irrigation equipment, do seasonal maintenance and keep irrigation areas clear of weeds and rubbish, as your host shows you.

Specialist work is a separate task. This includes work on pumps, filters, valves and controllers, and any repair beyond basic drip lines and fittings. It also includes fertiliser or chemicals in the water. Do this work only if it is part of your confirmed job and your host has trained and authorised you. Only a qualified electrician may do electrical work. Never work on electrical equipment.

This sheet covers repairs and maintenance with hand tools only. Driving, operating machinery (including digging machines), using power tools, chemical work, working at heights, and entering dams, tanks, channels or confined spaces are separate tasks. They need their own instructions, training and authorisation.

Tools and materials

For checking: a radio or phone, a farm map or block list, and a notebook or approved app.

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For authorised repairs: a tubing cutter or irrigation shears, joiners, connectors, end plugs and spare drip line; on some systems, a hole punch, insertion tool and replacement drippers.

On many farms the drippers are built inside the drip line, so a damaged section is cut out and joined with new line. On other systems, drippers pushed into the pipe can be replaced or the hole plugged. Parts do not always fit together: use only the parts and cutting tool your host provides, as you were shown.

- **Sharp tools:** cutters and shears are sharp. Keep your hands away from the cutting edges. Check your tools before you use them. Do not use a damaged tool: report it to your supervisor.

Water under pressure

The water in irrigation pipes is under pressure. When a pipe or fitting is damaged or opened, water and dirt can spray out with force. The water may also contain fertiliser or chemicals.

- **Never cut or disconnect a pipe while water is running or the line is under pressure.** An authorised person must first make the system safe using the host's procedure. Start only when your supervisor says it is safe.
- **Before you start,** ask your supervisor whether fertiliser or chemicals are in the water. If this is unclear, do not start. Wear the eye protection and gloves your host provides.
- **Keep yourself and others out of the path of the water.** Keep your face away from leaks and open pipes. If water splashes into your eyes or onto your skin, stop and get first aid straight away. Tell your supervisor. Wash your hands before you eat or drink.
- **Stop and tell your supervisor** if a pipe bursts, a fitting comes off, water sprays where it should not, or a repair still leaks when the water is back on. Do not force a fitting.

Digging, cables and power lines

Some repairs may need digging to reach a buried pipe. Underground pipes and electrical cables can be hard to find. Hitting a cable can cause an electric shock.

- **Ask your host before you dig.** Start only after your host confirms that underground pipes and cables have been located and shows you where it is safe to dig. Dig only in the way your host shows you, and use only the tools your host provides.
- **If you find a cable, or a pipe you were not told about,** stop digging. Do not touch it. Keep clear and tell your supervisor.
- **Open holes** can make people trip or fall. Ask your supervisor what to do before you leave a hole open. Entering a trench is a separate task. It needs its own safe work instructions, training and authorisation.
- **Electrical equipment:** if you see a damaged cable or exposed wiring, do not touch it. Keep clear and tell your supervisor.
- **Power lines:** a long pipe or pole can touch an overhead power line. Electricity can also jump to it when it comes close to a line, even if it does not touch. Before you start, ask your host where the power lines are and where you must not use or carry long items. Never lift a long item towards a power line. If you are not sure, stop and ask your supervisor.

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Working near machines

Tractors 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.
- **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.
- **Look before you reach.** Snakes and spiders can hide in long grass, near pipes and in holes. Look carefully before you put your hand near a pipe or into a hole.

Movement and lifting

You may walk for long periods on uneven ground. You may need to bend, kneel or dig, and to grip and cut again and again. Leaks can leave the ground wet or muddy. Watch your footing. Pipe coils and tool bags can be heavy or awkward: if a lift feels unsafe, ask for help or use the equipment provided. Report pain or discomfort early.

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.

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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.

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 irrigation repairs and maintenance 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.**