Orchard Tech
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Irrigation line flushing and cleaning on an almond farm

What to expect before you start

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This sheet describes typical irrigation line flushing and cleaning 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 drive a farm vehicle, operate machinery, repair equipment 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

Flushing lines. Dirt can collect inside irrigation pipes. Flushing uses the water in the system to push it out. You may flush drip lines or sub-mains (the pipes that carry water to the drip lines). Your host will show you which line ends or flush points to open. Use only the method your host has shown you. Open them to let the dirty water out, then close each one properly. Do not open, remove or disconnect anything else. Your host will tell you when to flush and when to close them.

Open and close only what you are shown. Use only the line ends or flush points your host has shown you. Do not change pumps, filters, controllers or other valves unless that is part of your job and you are trained and authorised.

Checking and reporting. While you flush, look for leaks, and for pipe that is cut, damaged or disconnected. Also look for missing or broken end plugs or caps. Report what you saw, where (block and row) and when, including any line end or flush point that would not close, or anything not fixed by the end of your shift.

Cleaning lines with chemicals is a separate task. Some farms add chemicals to the water to clean the lines. This is specialist work. Do it only if it is part of your confirmed job. You need your host's chemical training and authorisation, and any licence or qualification the work requires. Follow the safety data sheets and labels. Wear the protective equipment your host tells you to wear. Do not touch chemical injection equipment unless you are trained and authorised.

This sheet covers flushing by hand only. Repairs, driving, operating machinery, work on pumps, filters or controllers, work on valves other than the flush points shown to you, chemical work and electrical work are 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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Water under pressure

The water in irrigation pipes is under pressure. When you open a line end or flush point, water and dirt can spray out with force. Flushing water may also contain fertiliser or chemicals.

- **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 the opening. 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.
- **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.
- **Stop and tell your supervisor** if a pipe bursts, a fitting comes off, water sprays where it should not, or a line end or flush point will not open or close. Do not force it.

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 and near pipes. Look carefully before you put your hand near a line end or flush point.

Movement and lifting

Expect long walks on uneven ground, a lot of bending and kneeling, and repeated gripping to open and close line ends. Flushing can leave the ground wet or muddy. Watch your footing. Wear the gloves your host provides. If a lift feels unsafe, ask for help or use the equipment provided. Report pain or discomfort early.

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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.

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 line flushing and cleaning 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.**