Orchard Tech
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Land preparation and soil working on an almond farm

What to expect before you start

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This sheet describes typical land preparation and soil 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 operate a tractor, use an attachment 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. Some land preparation work may be done on night shift.

The work you may do

Land preparation and soil work. You may operate a tractor with an attachment (also called an implement) that works the soil or ground. Job names include disc, grader blade or smudge, X-plane, harrow and stick rake. Your host will tell you which tractor and attachment to use, where to work and what each job is for.

Checks and reporting. Before every shift, do the tractor and attachment pre-start checks your host trains you in. Report faults straight away. At the end of a shift or task, check the tractor and attachment for problems that could affect the next shift, and report them.

Only if you are trained and authorised. Operate a tractor and attachment only after your host has trained you, checked that you can operate them safely and authorised you for them. A licence alone does not show you can operate them safely. Get training for each new tractor model and each new attachment.

This sheet covers land preparation and soil work. Other attachment jobs, such as slashing, mulching or sweeping, need their own instructions, training and authorisation. So do repairs, adjustments, spraying chemicals, electrical work, working at heights and entering confined spaces, dams, tanks or channels.

Before you work the ground

- **Underground services:** pipes, cables, drip lines and other services may be buried in or near the blocks. Before any work that cuts into or moves the soil, ask your host where they are. Do not start until your host has confirmed where it is safe to work.
- **Know your work area:** before the day's work, ask your supervisor about known obstacles. Watch for irrigation pipes and drip lines, washouts (places where soil has washed away), bog holes (soft ground where a machine can get stuck) and uneven ground.

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- **If you hit something:** if the attachment hits or uncovers a pipe, drip line or anything else, stop work. Keep others away, tell your supervisor straight away and do not try to repair it. If it could be a buried electrical cable, or electricity jumps to the tractor or attachment, follow “If electricity reaches your tractor” below.

Driving the tractor safely

- **Public roads:** never drive on or across a public road unless your host has confirmed that the tractor and any attachment, your licence and the route are approved.
- **Before driving:** do the pre-start checks you were taught, such as the roll-over frame, seat belt, brakes, lights, mirrors, guards, windows, steps, controls and radio. Report faults. If a fault could make the tractor unsafe, do not use it. Tag it out as your host shows you and tell your supervisor.
- **Getting on and off:** keep the steps free of mud. Use three points of contact (two hands and one foot, or one hand and two feet). Never get on or off a moving tractor. Start the tractor only from the driver's seat, as your host shows you. Never start it from the ground or bypass a safety switch.
- **Roll-overs:** tractors can roll over, especially on slopes and banks, on rough or wet ground, near dams and channels, and with heavy or raised loads. The roll-over frame (ROPS) protects you only if you wear your seat belt, because the belt keeps you inside the frame. Some frames fold down for work under trees. A folded frame cannot protect you in a roll-over. Your host will show you when it may be folded down. Put it back up as soon as there is enough room, as you were trained.
- **Loads and attachments:** use only attachments that suit the tractor. Check that the attachment is in good condition, correctly fitted and secure, and that its load rating suits the tractor. Allow room for the attachment's width and length when you turn or pass trees, irrigation or other machines.
- **Driver and passengers:** wear your seat belt every time you operate the tractor. Keep the cab doors and windows shut while the tractor moves. Carry a passenger only if your host allows it and the tractor has a passenger seat and seat belt approved by the tractor manufacturer. The passenger must wear the seat belt. Never let anyone ride on an attachment or trailer.
- **Leaving the seat and parking:** your host will teach you the safe-stop procedure for each tractor and attachment. It covers the handbrake, the PTO, turning off the engine and making raised attachments safe. Follow it every time before you leave the seat. Tell nearby workers when you get off. When you finish, park on firm, level ground where your host shows you. Remove the key and return it as your host requires.

Attachments and the PTO

- **Hitching:** hitching means connecting an attachment to the tractor. Your host will show you how to hitch each attachment. Make sure everyone is clear before you reverse to an attachment. Never let anyone stand between the tractor and the attachment unless the tractor is stopped, the handbrake is on and the engine is off.
- **Heavy and sharp parts:** your host will show you any heavy or sharp parts on your attachment. Wear gloves when your hands could be hurt. Check the weight before you lift anything, and ask for help if needed. Keep yourself and others out from under a raised attachment.

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- **PTO shafts:** some attachments are driven by the PTO (power take-off), a shaft at the back of the tractor that turns to power the attachment. A turning PTO shaft can catch clothing, hair or a hand and pull a person in. This can cause very serious injury or death. Before use, check that the PTO guards are in place and in good order. Never use a PTO with a missing or damaged guard: report it. Do not wear loose clothing, cords or jewellery, and tie back long hair. Keep yourself and others clear while the PTO is turning.
- **Blockages and loose guards:** if something blocks an attachment or a guard comes loose, stop and tell your supervisor. Before anyone goes near, the tractor and attachment must be shut down and made safe so they cannot start or move, using your host's procedure. Wait until all moving parts have stopped. Clear a blockage only if you are trained and authorised. Never restart with a loose or missing guard. Adjustments and repairs are separate tasks.

People, other machines and power lines

- **Before you move:** tell nearby workers you are about to move, and wait until they are clear. There are places around a tractor that the driver cannot see, especially with an attachment fitted. These are called blind spots. Look in all directions and use your mirrors. If you cannot see that the way is clear, stop and ask for help.
- **People on foot:** keep people away from the tractor and attachment while they move. If someone comes close, stop and wait until they are clear.
- **Follow the farm traffic plan:** at the pre-start meeting, learn who is working in which blocks. Use set routes, main tracks and headlands (the turning areas at the ends of the rows). Obey signs and speed limits, and slow down for turns, loads, people, dust, poor visibility and rough ground. Keep away from steep slopes, banks and water.
- **Headlands, rows and radio:** take extra care when you enter or leave tree rows and headlands. Watch for other machines, trucks and people. Your host will teach you the radio calls and replies needed before you enter a headland. Do not enter until you get the reply your host's procedure requires.
- **Seeing clearly:** keep the windows clean. Dust, darkness, low sun, dawn and dusk can make it hard to see. Use the tractor's lights as your host shows you. If you cannot see that the way is clear, or you need to use a phone, stop in a safe place.
- **Power lines:** look up for overhead power lines before you raise an attachment, and when you move tall or wide equipment. Electricity can jump to a machine that comes close to a line, even if it does not touch it. Ask your host where the power lines are.
- **If electricity reaches your tractor:** if your tractor or attachment touches an electrical line or cable, or electricity jumps to it, stop work and stay in the tractor. Call 000 or ask someone to call. Warn others to keep away and not to touch the tractor or attachment. Leave only if fire or another danger threatens your life. Then jump clear without touching the machine and the ground at the same time. Land with your feet together. Keep your feet together as you shuffle or hop away. Do not go back until the authorities say it is safe. Tell your supervisor.
- **When you are on foot:** wear the high-visibility clothing your host provides, use walking routes and keep clear of moving machinery. Never approach a working machine until the operator has stopped and clearly signalled you to come closer. Eye contact alone is not enough.

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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.

Noise, dust and long hours in the seat

You may sit for long periods and climb on and off the tractor many times. Use your breaks and report pain or discomfort early. If you feel too tired or unwell to operate the tractor safely, stop in a safe place and tell your supervisor.

- **Noise:** tractors and attachments can be loud. Wear the hearing protection your host provides, as you are instructed.
- **Dust:** working the soil can raise dust. Follow your host's instructions for dust. If dust makes it hard to breathe or to see clearly, stop the tractor in a safe place and tell your supervisor.

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 dust mask. 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 land preparation and soil 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.**