Orchard Tech
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Mulching and slashing on an almond farm

What to expect before you start

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This sheet describes typical mulching and slashing 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 a mulcher or slasher, 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

Mulching and slashing. You may operate a tractor with a mulcher or slasher attachment (also called an implement). A mulcher breaks up material on the ground, such as prunings (branches cut off the trees). A slasher cuts grass and weeds. Your host will tell you which tractor and attachment to use and where to work.

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

This sheet covers mulching and slashing with a tractor. Pruning, other attachment jobs, repairs, adjustments, work on blades, spraying chemicals, electrical work, working at heights and entering confined spaces, dams, tanks or channels are separate tasks. They need their own instructions, training and authorisation.

Thrown objects: keep people away

Mulchers and slashers can throw stones, sticks, metal and other objects out with great force. A thrown object can seriously injure or kill a person.

- **Keep people well away.** Before you start, check that no one is near your work area. Your host will tell you how far away people must stay. Keep watching for people while you work, including in nearby rows and on the headlands (the turning areas at the ends of the rows).
- **If anyone comes near, stop.** Stop the mulcher or slasher and the tractor straight away. Wait until the person is well clear before you start again.
- **Guards:** check that the guards on the attachment, such as covers, flaps or chains, are in place and in good order. They reduce the risk from thrown objects. Never use the attachment with a missing or damaged guard: report it.

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- **Check the path:** watch for stumps, rocks, stakes, wire, rubbish and drip lines (the irrigation pipes along the tree rows). The machine can hit or throw them. If something is in the way, stop and follow your host's instructions. Report any damage, such as a cut drip line, and say where it is (block and row).

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.
- **Attachments:** use only a mulcher or slasher that suits the tractor and is in good condition, correctly fitted and secure. Heavy or raised attachments can make a tractor less stable.
- **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. Check the tractor and attachment for problems that could affect the next shift, and report them.

Hitching, the PTO and blockages

Mulchers and slashers may be driven by the PTO (power take-off). This is a shaft at the back of the tractor that turns to power the attachment.

- **Hitching:** your host will show you how to connect (hitch) each attachment to the tractor. 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 parts:** wear gloves when your hands could be hurt. Check the weight before you lift anything, and ask for help if needed.
- **PTO shafts:** 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.

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- **Blockages and loose guards:** if something blocks or wraps around the mulcher or slasher, 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: they can keep turning after the power is off. Clear a blockage only if you are trained and authorised. Never restart with a loose or missing guard.

Other machines, people 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.
- **Follow the farm traffic plan:** at the pre-start meeting, learn who is working in which blocks. Use set routes, main tracks and headlands. Obey signs and speed limits, and slow down for turns, 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, low sun, dawn and dusk can make it hard to see. 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 your tractor or attachment touches a power line, or electricity jumps to it, stay in the tractor. Call 000 or ask someone to call, and warn others to keep away. Get out only if fire or another life-threatening danger forces you to. Your host will show you how to get out safely in an emergency.
- **When you are on foot:** wear the high-visibility clothing your host provides. Use walking routes and keep clear of moving machinery. Keep well away from any working mulcher or slasher. If another 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.

Fire in hot, dry weather

Tractors, mulchers and slashers can start fires: heat or sparks can set dry grass alight.

- **Fire rules:** your host will explain the fire rules, including during the Fire Danger Period and on Total Fire Ban days. Do not start until your host confirms that the work is allowed and the fire safety steps it requires are in place. Stop and tell your supervisor if conditions become unsafe.
- **Be ready:** know where the fire extinguisher is. Report smoke or fire straight away. In a fire, follow the farm emergency plan and go to the meeting point (muster point).

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

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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. Use your breaks and report pain or discomfort early. If you feel too tired or unwell to operate safely, stop in a safe place and tell your supervisor.

- **Noise and dust:** wear the hearing protection your host provides and follow your host's instructions for dust. If dust makes it hard to breathe or see, stop 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 mulching and slashing 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.**