Orchard Tech
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Harvest poling on an almond farm

What to expect before you start

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This sheet describes typical harvest poling 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 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

Harvest poling. After the tree shakers have been through a block, some nuts can stay on the trees. You knock these nuts down with a long hand-held pole, so they fall to the ground and can be harvested. Poling can be part of the main harvest or a re-harvest, when the crew goes back through a block. Your host will give you the pole and show you how to use it, where to stand and which trees and rows to do.

This sheet covers hand poling from the ground only. It does not cover climbing trees or ladders, cutting branches, driving, operating machinery, using power tools, handling chemicals, repairs, electrical work or entering dams, tanks, channels or confined spaces. These are separate tasks. They need their own instructions, training and authorisation.

Working near harvest machines

Shakers, sweepers, 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. 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).

Working with a pole

A pole is long, and most of the work is above your head. Look up and around you before you lift or swing it.

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- **Power lines:** a long pole can touch an overhead power line. Electricity can also jump to a pole that 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 a pole. Never lift a pole towards a power line. If you are not sure, stop and ask your supervisor.
- **Falling nuts, twigs and dust:** these can fall while you work and hurt your eyes. Wear the eye protection your host provides. Watch for loose or broken branches above you. If a branch looks loose or broken, keep clear and tell your supervisor.
- **Co-workers:** before you lift or swing the pole, check that nobody is close to you or to the end of the pole.
- **Check the pole:** your host will show you how to check it before use. Do not use a damaged pole. Report damage to your supervisor.

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.

Movement and lifting

Expect long walks on uneven ground while you carry a pole between trees and rows. Poling means looking up and holding your arms up for a long time. This can strain your neck, shoulders, arms and back. Nuts and sticks on the ground can make you slip or trip. Wear the gloves your host provides. Use your breaks. Tell your supervisor early if you feel pain, discomfort or unusual tiredness.

- **Dust:** follow your host's instructions for dust. If dust makes it hard to breathe or to see clearly, stop work, move to a safe place and tell your supervisor.

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 harvest poling 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.**