

Mule utility vehicle operation on an almond farm

What to expect before you start

Version 1.1 | Date of review: 18 October 2026 | Date of next review: 18 October 2028

This sheet describes typical Mule utility vehicle operation 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 Mule or any other farm vehicle, operate other 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

Driving a Mule. A Mule is a side-by-side utility vehicle (a small farm vehicle with seats side by side and a tray at the back), such as a Kawasaki MULE. You may drive it around the farm to carry workers, tools and materials where your supervisor tells you.

Only after training and authorisation. Drive a Mule only after your host has trained you, assessed you and authorised you to drive that vehicle. Similar vehicles have other names: get training for the exact vehicle you will drive. A licence alone does not show you can drive it safely.

Separate tasks. This sheet covers driving a Mule only. Spraying, chemicals, towing, jump-starting, maintenance, repairs, power tools, pressure washers, compressed air, electrical work, working at heights, and entering confined spaces, dams, tanks or channels are separate tasks. Each needs its own instructions, training and authorisation.

Before you drive

- **Signing out:** your host may use a key board or sign-out system to show who has each vehicle. Follow it every time. Before you leave, tell your supervisor where you are going and when you expect to return. Follow the check-in arrangements and use the phone or radio your host provides.
- **Before driving:** do the pre-start checks you were taught, such as tyres, brakes, steering, lights, seat belts, doors or nets and the roll-over frame. Report faults. Never use an unsafe vehicle.
- **Every shift:** also check the controls, any two-way radio and your personal protective equipment (PPE). If a fault could make the Mule unsafe, tag it out as your host shows you and tell your supervisor.
- **Fit to drive:** never drive under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Tell your supervisor if you feel unwell or very tired, or a medicine makes you sleepy.
- **Public roads:** never drive on or across a public road unless your host has confirmed that the vehicle, your licence and the route are approved.

Driving 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.
- **Passengers:** never carry passengers unless the Mule has a proper seat for them and your host allows it. Never carry more passengers than your host's limit for that vehicle. Check that every passenger has their seat belt on before you move off.
- **Loads and roll-overs:** stay within the load limits and tie loads down. Side-by-sides can roll over even at low speed, especially on slopes, banks, sharp turns or with heavy loads. Ask your supervisor if you do not know the load limit.
- **Slopes and wet ground:** take extra care on slopes, in wet weather and on rough ground. Go straight up or down a slope, not across it, as you were trained. Brake gently, so you keep control and the load does not move.

Farm traffic rules

- **Follow the farm traffic plan:** use set routes, 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. Check behind you before reversing; if you cannot see that the way is clear, stop and ask for help.
- **Headlands and crossings:** headlands are the turning areas at the ends of the rows. Slow down, look both ways and give way as instructed. Watch for tractors, harvesters, trucks, people and vehicles coming out of rows.
- **Tracks and horn:** use the main tracks and headlands your host shows you. Use the horn as your host shows you: before you move off, and when you come near people or other vehicles.
- **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.
- **On foot:** when you get out, use walking routes and keep clear of moving machinery. Stop in a safe place before using a phone.

When you finish

- **Parking:** park in a safe place away from moving vehicles. Put the park brake on, turn the Mule off and look after the key as your supervisor tells you. Return the key the way your host shows you, so the farm knows you are back safely.
- **Washing down** is a separate task. If you are trained and authorised to do it, turn the engine off first.
- **Faults and breakdowns:** if the Mule will not start, breaks down or has a fault, tell your supervisor. Only trained maintenance staff repair vehicles. After any roll-over or crash, do not drive the Mule again until it has been checked by a professional and your host tells you it is safe to use.

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

Movement and lifting

You may need to get in and out of the Mule often, and to lift tools and materials into and out of the tray. If a lift feels unsafe, ask for help or use the equipment provided. Report pain or discomfort early.

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.

For Mule work, wear clothing that covers your arms and legs.

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 Mule utility vehicle operation 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.**