

**Countryside Alliance Ireland
&
The Northern Ireland Masters of Hounds Association
&
The Ulster Farmers' Union**

Memorandum of Understanding and Co-operation

Purpose

Originally signed in 2013 and updated in 2026, this Memorandum of Understanding and Co-operation has been developed jointly by Countryside Alliance Ireland, the Northern Ireland Masters of Hounds Association and the Ulster Farmers' Union.

Its purpose is to inform and advise on best practice and protocol for those engaged in hunting with hounds on agricultural land for the purposes of wildlife management and pest control and to encourage compliance with those standards.

This Memorandum sets out the basis upon which Countryside Alliance Ireland, the Northern Ireland Masters of Hounds Association and the Ulster Farmers' Union will co-operate in respect of wildlife management, pest control, country pursuits and the rural way of life in Northern Ireland.

The parties believe that such co-operation is essential in light of the many challenges currently facing Northern Ireland's countryside, which must be addressed constructively and collaboratively by all like-minded people and organisations.

This Memorandum reaffirms Countryside Alliance Ireland's endeavours for the benefit of the wider countryside, combines them with the Northern Ireland Masters of Hounds Association's responsibilities for hunting, and recognises the Ulster Farmers' Union's role in representing and protecting the interests of landowners.

1. Insurance and Indemnification

Hunts must be covered by third-party insurance for their recognised activities.

Public liability insurance shall provide cover for damages, claimant's costs and expenses, and defence costs and expenses incurred with the written consent of the insurer in respect of personal injury and property damage arising from participation in a lawful and recognised activity of the policyholder.

Policy extensions include indemnity to principals and others, including landowners over whose land a Hunt has passed. A summary of cover is attached.

A full list of paid-up members of the Hunt shall be made available to the Ulster Farmers' Union only upon request.

Evidence of current public liability insurance, including the level of cover, shall be provided annually to participating landowners upon request.

2. Permission and Pre-Season Arrangements

Hunts must obtain annual written permission from the landowner before any activity takes place.

Landowners shall be provided with proposed details of the Hunt, including locations, for their review and consent, and contact details will be provided.

The use of any motorised vehicles must be agreed with the landowner before use, and all safety measures must be followed by participants.

Consent may be withdrawn at any time, including during a hunt, and such withdrawal must be respected immediately.

3. Planning a Hunt on Farmland

When planning a Meet, a reasonable margin should be allowed beyond the intended area, recognising that it is not possible to define precisely the likely course of a Hunt.

Prior to each hunt, the Hunt Master, a Hunt representative or a member of the Hunt staff shall communicate with the landowner to assess local conditions and farming activities.

Planned routes shall be amended where necessary to avoid disturbing livestock or interfering with farming operations. Particular care shall be taken to avoid fields containing heavily in-lamb sheep. If the pack comes within one field of livestock, the Hunt shall immediately take all reasonable and practicable steps to move away and prevent further encroachment or disturbance.

Where weather or ground conditions change materially, the planned route shall be reviewed in consultation with the landowner. Consent from the landowner should be deemed as being field-specific. It is recognised that hunt arrangements may occasionally require alteration at short notice.

Landowners are requested to notify the Hunt of any disease outbreaks affecting their land or neighbouring land so that such areas may be avoided. Hunts shall comply with appropriate biosecurity standards and with any specific biosecurity measures notified by the landowner.

It is expressly recognised that the landowner retains ultimate authority over access to and activity on their land, and any instruction given by the landowner or their authorised representative must be complied with immediately, including any instruction to alter a route, cease an activity, or leave the land.

4. Conduct During a Hunt

Care shall be taken regarding ground conditions during a hunt. Where conditions are unsuitable, or where land is under crop or newly established grass, mounted riders should not take diagonal lines across fields and should instead follow headlands where permission has been granted.

Only tattooed or microchipped hounds belonging to packs registered with the relevant hunting association, namely the Irish Masters of Hounds Association, Northern Ireland Masters of Hounds Association, Irish Masters of Beagles, Irish Masters of Harriers Association or the Foxhound Kennel Stud Book, shall be used.

The Hunt shall remain responsible for the conduct of all active participating members, whether mounted or otherwise.

If, during a hunt, the pack comes within one field of livestock, the Hunt shall take all practicable steps to move away to prevent disturbance.

The parties recognise that hunting activity must at all times be conducted in a manner that protects agricultural production, animal welfare, and the continuity of farming operations.

5. Responsibilities Following a Hunt

The Hunt Master and Hunt staff shall ensure that all hounds are accounted for immediately following a hunt.

Any damage shall be reported by either the Hunt or the landowner and shall be repaired to a standard equivalent to that existing prior to the hunt within two weeks. Where a landowner reasonably considers that hunting activity has caused material agricultural business loss, the matter shall be promptly notified to the Hunt and considered by both parties, having regard to available veterinary, agronomic and other supporting evidence.

Certain repairs, including ground damage, may need to be undertaken during the growing season or in a timeframe set by the landowner. Such work shall be agreed between the Hunt Master and the landowner following the hunt.

Repairs shall be carried out by suitably experienced individuals or, where agreed, by the landowner, who shall be reimbursed for reasonable costs incurred.

6. Dispute Resolution

Where disputes arise that cannot be resolved locally between the landowner and the Hunt, the Ulster Farmers' Union, Countryside Alliance Ireland and the Northern Ireland Masters of Hounds Association shall, where appropriate, work constructively with the parties to facilitate resolution.

7. Effect and Review

This Memorandum shall apply from the 2027 hunting season onwards.

The nominated representatives of the respective organisations in Northern Ireland shall be responsible for implementing and maintaining the arrangements contained herein under the authority vested in them.

The signatory organisations shall meet preferably annually or when required to review compliance, address recurring issues and consider any amendments that may be required.

Signed:

Date: 19/08/2026

Gary McCartney

Director, Countryside Alliance Ireland

William Montgomery

Chairman, Northern Ireland Masters of Hounds Association

John McLenaghan

President, Ulster Farmers' Union