

Drive-through Farm Gates

Get a drive-through gate for your farm and make winter or any type of weather more bearable.

By John & Sue Weaver

About the Authors

John & Sue Weaver are long-time hobby farmers based in Arkansas. Don't get out of your toasty-warm truck to open that gate! Get a drive-through gate and make winter a bit more bearable.

In our family, John drives our vehicles and I man the passenger seat. As such, it's my duty to hop out and open every gate we encounter.

GTO/PRO's Mighty Mule 500 Single Gate Opener

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[Hydraulic Gate Openers](#) It's wearing, especially in foul weather, be it torrential rain, swirling snow or steamy, Southern heat. I think we need drive-through gates on our farm. Maybe you do, too.

Cattle Guards

The simplest drive-through gate and the most traditional is the cattle guard, an in- or close-to-the-ground device crafted of parallel rows of sturdy pipe spaced four inches apart and set to the width of an open gateway. Cattle guards are built wide enough to totally span the gateway in question (sometimes with the addition of wings) and are generally 8- to 14-foot long.

Cattle guards are built primarily to contain cattle. Deer often leap across them; horses sometimes try to ford them (injuring themselves in the process); and at least one group of clever British sheep learned to roll across them commando-style ("Crafty Sheep Conquer Cattle Grids").

There are several types of cattle guards to choose from. Portable cattle guards are supported by springs so they lower to the ground when a vehicle passes over them, then spring back into position six inches above the ground.

Permanent units come in boxed and flat styles. Boxed guards sit directly on the ground; flat guards are placed atop shallow trenches.

Powder River H-15

Most cattle guards are built locally to order (ask your county extension agent for plans or download them free), but several major manufacturers market ready-made cattle guards as well.

Powder River builds the H-15, a flat-style cattle guard rated at 12 tons per axle, fitted with or without a built-in, three-rail, hinged cleanout section. Powder River also sells end-wing sets and locks for their cattle guards.

BarnWorld, the Farm and Ranch Superstore, markets a neat, portable ATV Cattle Guard crafted of 1 1/2-inch, 11-gauge tubing designed to lie directly on the ground, with no special installation needed. The company also offers flat- and box-style standard cattle guards built with or without removable boxes designed for easy cleaning.

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[Bump Gates](#)

Inexpensive, farmyard bump gates are the essence of simplicity: an electrified polyethylene or fiberglass arm (or two, depending on the width of the opening) extends across an open gateway, bisecting two stretches of electric fencing; to open the gate from the cab of the truck or tractor, the operator gently bumps the arm, it swings open on pivot posts and the operator drives through; the gate closes smoothly behind him.

Koehn Marketing's Drive-Thru Electric Gate

Ecklund Gates' bump gates adjust to fit openings from 10- to 16-foot wide. While they're designed for permanent installation, they can also be mounted on portable posts and moved from location to location. The body of an Ecklund Drive Through Gate is covered with rubber, so it's soft to bump, and its patented Wind Gust Damper locks the gate shut quickly once the vehicle passes through.

Koehn Marketing's Drive-Thru Electric Gate ships in adjustable 13- to 19-foot standard models and an ultra-wide 18- to 24-foot gate. Koehn bump gates' flexible, polyethylene arms are designed to break away should they become snagged on a tractor or truck. Electrical yellow streamers dangling from the arms shock animals that attempt to pass through the closed gate.

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Automatic Gate Openers

When most folks think of drive-through gates, they think of massive estate gates swinging wide at the press of a button. While most automatic gate-opener manufacturers build posh models, some design gates for everyday residential applications, too.

Turnstyle Gate Remote Power Actuation System

There are lots of good reasons for installing automatic security gates on your farm. In addition to saving immeasurable time and effort in opening manual gates, an automatic gate moves your first line of defense away from your home and out to the perimeter of your property. Your possessions will be safer, you'll entertain fewer uninvited guests and unwelcome salespeople, and a stylish road gate adds flair (and value) to your farm.

Automatic gate openers come in two basic styles: swing gate and sliding gate openers. Swing gate openers are the classic choice. They come in one- and two-wing models; each wing hinges to an outside pivot point and is usually set to swing away, rather than toward the roadway. Single-wing gates are less costly than dual-wing models; they're less expensive to install than sliding gates and most authorities think they're safer (and easier to open), but they don't work well on driveways with an upward incline.

Sliding gates are better when there's limited room for swing gates to swing in a 90-degree arc. They're also ideal for installation across driveways built on a sharp incline. Security experts say that locked sliding gates are more secure than swing gates because their weak points are generally less accessible and they hold up better if driven into.

Sliding gates come in track and cantilever models. Track gates slide along a metal rail embedded in the ground, whereas cantilever gates are suspended over the driveway on a post assembly. Whichever style you prefer, keep these points in mind when choosing an automatic gate opener: Shop for a gate with sensors (photobeams) that halt or reverse the gate if an object or person gets in the way. Look for a gate equipped with a backup battery pack or a manual, "fail-safe" system so the gate can be opened during a power failure. For added safety and security, make certain its control panel cabinet is lockable. A plus: A gate with warning lights alerts anyone near the gate of impending movement. Opt for access control features that suit your needs: keypads, card readers, radio receivers and telephone access are a few of the usual options. Choose a model that has been safety-tested by Underwriters Laboratories (UL) and/or Electrical Testing Laboratories (ETL). Keep in mind that the location and climate where the gate is installed and the material and structure of each gate combine to create a unique situation particular to each automatic gate opener application. It's always best to discuss your needs with a qualified dealer before selecting a make or model.

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Electric Gate Openers

There are hundreds of electric gate openers on the market; some of the best are manufactured by GTO/PRO and sold under their GTO/PRO and Mighty Mule labels.

FAAC USA Model 402 Hydraulic Swing Gate Operator

The difference: a licensed electrician or skilled do-it-yourselfer should install some (though not all) GTO/PRO gate openers, while Mighty Mule installations are specifically designed with the typical home handyman in mind. GTO/PRO manufactures a wide range of commercial and residential gate openers in both swing- and sliding-gate styles, most of which are solar-compatible.

GTO/PRO's PRO-SW1500 and Mighty Mule 350 gate openers, for example, are specifically designed for rural applications; both handle swing-style farm gates weighing up to 350 pounds with ease. These gates work on easy-to-install, one-piece, low-voltage systems and are ideal for solar applications. They provide up to 175 open-close cycles per day and up to 1,500 backup cycles on a fully charged battery.

GTO/PRO's Mighty Mule 500 Single Gate Opener is America's No. 1 do-it-yourself gate opener. It neatly manages swing gates weighing up to 850 pounds and up to 18 feet in length. The Mighty Mule 500 incorporates such high-end features as commercial-grade Soft Start/Soft Stop and an extra-large control box pre-wired for an optional second battery. Like all of the Mighty Mules, it comes with a detailed manual and video that makes installation a breeze.

Turnstyle Enterprises, on the other hand, manufactures a new type of automatic gate opener based on the company's patented Turnstyle Gate Remote Power Actuation System.

GTO/PRO's PRO-SW1500

This revolutionary system utilizes an integrated mounting post and power activator that delivers rotational movement of the mounting post itself. Due to this arrangement, the force required to open or close the gate is minimal, so the Turnstyle power actuator is smaller and consumes less energy than most conventional gate openers.

The company builds powered and manual units in both pillar-mount and ground-mount configurations.

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Hydraulic Gate Openers

While most hydraulic gate openers are engineered for heavy-duty commercial applications, some manufacturers build residential units as well. One of the beauties of easy-maintenance, hydraulic gate openers is that they have no external moving parts; since these openers are self-contained, they require less maintenance than most other types.

FAAC USA manufactures an array of brawny gate openers for both commercial and residential use. The FAAC USA Model 402 Hydraulic Swing Gate Operator is tailored for average single-family use; the Model 422 is designed for more demanding single-family use.

Either model can move a 900-pound gate leaf 90 degrees in a mere 12 seconds, they're easily lockable in open or closed positions, and they're fitted with a convenient manual mechanism. Battery backup units are available for both models and they can be packaged to be UL-325 compliant right out of the box, meaning no additional peripherals are needed.

Byan Systems also builds a line of almost totally maintenance-free, hydraulic, residential gate openers designed for easy installation. Its 500 Series Operator is designed for gates up to 12 feet long that weigh no more than 1,500 pounds. Whereas most gate openers must be mounted on the side the gate will swing toward, Byan units are always mounted inside the property, yet the gate itself can be installed to swing inward or outward.

Drive-through gates have a place on every hobby farm. They make farm living just a little bit easier and nicer. Install one (or two or six)—you'll enjoy the convenience!

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