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(54) Title: PELLET AND PRECURSOR WITH RECYCLED CONTENT

(57) Abstract: A precursor for use in forming a multi-attribute pellet that includes virgin and recycled content is disclosed. The precursor may comprise a micro-pellet including recycled content. In embodiments, the micro-pellet may be in the range of about 300 pieces per gram to about 1200 pieces per gram. Embodiments of methods for forming precursors and methods for forming multi-attribute pellets are also disclosed.



PELLET AND PRECURSOR WITH RECYCLED CONTENT

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

[0001] This application claims priority from United States Provisional Application No. 61/982,508, filed April 22, 2014, which is hereby incorporated by reference as though fully set forth herein.

TECHNICAL FIELD

[0002] The present invention relates to pellets, such as single or individual pellets, having a virgin and a recycled content, and systems and manufacturing methods associated with such pellets.

BACKGROUND

[0003] Polymer or plastic resins, such as polyethylene terephthalate (PET), which may be comprised of petrochemical-derived raw materials or petroleum-based PET, are commonly used to manufacture a number of commercial articles. It is often desirable to produce resins, such as PET resins, with post-consumer recycled (PCR) content. Extrusion is one of the processes that may be used in connection with the manufacture of various articles.

[0004] Among other things, it can be desirable to provide pellets that can be formed, in part, from micro-pellets, such that the formed pellets include both virgin and recycled content.

SUMMARY

[0005] Among other things, embodiments of a precursor is disclosed. The precursor may be used to form embodiments of a multi-attribute pellet that includes both virgin and recycled content. The precursor may comprise a micro-pellet with recycled content. In embodiments, the micro-pellet may be in the range of about 300 pieces per gram to about 1200 pieces per gram.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0006] Embodiments of the disclosure will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings, wherein:

[0007] FIG. 1 is an illustration of micro-pellet precursors; and

[0008] FIG. 2 is an illustration of conventional pellets with recycled content taken, for comparison, from essentially the same perspective and vantage point as the photograph of FIG. 1.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0009] Reference will now be made in detail to embodiments of the present disclosure, examples of which are described herein and illustrated in the accompanying drawings. While the invention will be described in conjunction with embodiments, it will be understood that they are not intended to limit the invention to these embodiments. On the contrary, the invention is intended to cover alternatives, modifications and equivalents, which may be included within the spirit and scope of the invention as defined by appended claims.

[00010] Among other things, the inventive concept involves a multiple-attribute pellet, which may be referred to as a “single pellet.” With embodiments, the multi-attribute (or single pellet) may be comprised of both virgin content and recycled content.

[00011] A precursor – which may be comprised of recycled material or content – may be used to make or produce a multi-attribute or single pellet. A precursor may be added in or with what otherwise may be a conventional or standard process for producing virgin resin. With embodiments, a precursor may be in the form of a flake or pellet. For embodiments, a precursor can be sufficiently small (in size or volume) to suspend and dissolve in a solution (e.g., a pre-melt phase solution) that may be part of early resin manufacturing stages. For example, and without limitation, precursor formats may be in micro-pellet format (e.g., strand cut) or particle format (e.g., milled). By way of example, and without limitation, a disclosure of certain PET

articles and manufacturing processes are disclosed in U.S. Patent 8,207,289, which is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

[00012] While conventional PCR resins may be commonly comprised of flake, for some applications flake may not be the more reliable option with respect to suspension and dissolution. Consequently, for a number of applications, pellets (which may be in the form of micro-pellets) may be a preferable option.

[00013] Very small or tiny PCR pellets (which may also be referred to as “micro-pellets”) may be used as a precursor for making a multi-attribute pellet.

[00014] An embodiment of micro-pellets are generally illustrated in FIG. 1. The relative size of the illustrated micro-pellets, which may be over 800 pieces (or particles) per gram, can be visually contrasted with conventional pellets having recycled content, which are generally illustrated in FIG. 2, and may be about 50 pieces (or particles) per gram. It is noted that some recycled content can come from post-consumer recycled (PCR) or post-industrial recycled (PIR) sources. For the purposes of this disclosure, “PCR” will be used to generally refer to recycled plastics, regardless of the source. Some micro-pellets may be in the range of about 300 pieces (or particles) per gram to about 1200 pieces (or particles) per gram, other micro-pellets may range from about 550 pieces (or particles) to about 1000 pieces (or particles) per gram (i.e., ppg), with more particles per gram commonly preferred for a number of embodiments and applications. For example, and without limitation, embodiments of micro-pellets may have an average weight from about 0.001 grams to about 0.0018 grams.

[00015] To create the multi-attribute pellets (such as those including both virgin and PCR content), a PCR precursor – which may comprise micro-pellets comprised of recycled material or content – may be run through an extruder. An extruder may, for example and without limitation, comprise a twin screw and may include a vacuum to help remove volatiles. For some embodiments, the extruded material may be extruded without drying and may produce an amorphous pellet.

[00016] With embodiments, a precursor may be cut (or otherwise severed or separated) to form pellets. Cutting may be accomplished, for example, using a strand cut or under-water cut. Further, the pellet may be formed flatter or more round, as may be preferred for suspension. In embodiments, cut or severed precursor pellets may be subsequently introduced in or run through an extruder along with virgin-content material to form a multi-attribute pellet.

[00017] Further, with embodiments, the precursor process may include a modified version of a PET process involving strand cutting of PCR pellets (e.g., pellets of 50 pieces per gram size) and additional techniques. In an embodiment, clean PCR flake can be extruded – e.g., undried (as opposed to a typical process which may require drying), and then the extruded/melt-filtered amorphous pellet (e.g., at 50 pieces per gram) can be milled to a much smaller size (e.g., about 300 pieces per gram to about 1200 pieces per gram) to form a micro-pellet. The micro-pellet may then be added to or introduced into a virgin manufacturing process essentially as a raw material. Notably, the properties of the precursor can be particularly conducive for such addition or introduction into a manufacturing process. The properties of a precursor taught in connection with teachings of the present disclosure may be contrasted with conventional PCR. Among other things, conventional PCR will commonly sink in a PTA/MEG slurry tank, so conventionally parties do not add standard PCR or flake.

[00018] In an embodiment, without limitation, a micro-pellet may be configured for suspension – such as in a pre-melt phase solution tank. With some embodiments, a precursor may be added to a virgin-content manufacturing process without any further processing. With some embodiments, a precursor may be added to a virgin-content manufacturing process as a direct feedstock replacement. That is, for some applications, a precursor may serve as a direct feedstock replacement.

[00019] Micro-pellets may, for example, range from 300 to 1200 pieces/particles per gram, although other/smaller sizes may be contemplated. In some embodiments, the micro-pellet may, for example and without limitation, weigh less than 1.9 milligrams, have a density of about 1.33 g/cc, and/or may have an intrinsic viscosity (IV) range of 0.50 dL/g to 0.60 dL/g. With some embodiments, a micro-pellet may, for example and without limitation, have a radius of 0.05 cm,

a volume of 0.0016 cc, and/or an area of 0.08 cm² or 32.2 cm²/g (in which an initial flake was 63.4 cm²/g).

[00020] In an embodiment, the micro-pellet may range from 300-1200 pieces/particles per gram, may have an intrinsic viscosity (IV) ranging from about 0.50 dL/g to about 0.70 dL/g, and/or may have a bulk density ranging from 35 pounds/ft³ to 45 pounds/ft³. It is noted that for some embodiments or applications, a more practical micro-pellet range may be in the range of about 700 pieces/particles per gram to about 1200 pieces/particles per gram. Additionally, for some embodiments:

(a) the contaminant limits may be:

- PVC < 50 ppm
- Aluminum < 25 ppm
- Other colored flake < 100 ppm

(b) the acetaldehyde (AA) limit may be < 2ppm;

(c) the moisture limit may be < 0.5% by weight; and/or

(d) there may be a defined color range for amorphous pellets.

[00021] With respect to a color range associated with an amorphous pellet, the color may, for example, be measured in a step prior to milling into a final form of a precursor. Various color scales may be employed, including without limitation, the Hunter LAB color scale and the CIE LAB color scale. Those particular color tests are both based on the Opponent-Color Theory, which assumes that the receptors in the human eye perceive color as the following pairs of opposites:

- **L scale** – lightness versus darkness, where a low number (0-50) indicates dark, and a high number (51-100) indicates light;
- **a scale** – redness versus greenness, where a positive number indicates red, and a negative number indicates green; and
- **b scale** – yellowness versus blueness, where a positive number is indicative of yellow, and a negative number is indicative of blue.

All three values (L, a, and b) are typically necessary to completely describe the color of an object. A distinction between the Hunter and CIELAB color coordinates is that CIE coordinates are based on a cube root transformation of the color data, and the Hunter coordinates are based on a square root transformation.

[00022] In an embodiment, and employing the CIE L*a*b* color scale, a micro-pellet may, for example and without limitation, have the following color values/attributes (when measured at the step prior to final milling into particles): $L^* > 43$ and $b^* < 8$.

[00023] However, it is noted that for embodiments, several parameters other than perhaps particles per gram may not be particularly limiting. That is, for some embodiments and applications, certain parameters disclosed herein with exemplary embodiments, including color scale and IV values, may not be critical, and the disclosed concept need not be limited to various numbers and ranges, including the exemplary numbers and ranges mentioned and described herein.

[00024] The foregoing descriptions of specific embodiments of the present invention have been presented for purposes of illustration and description. They are not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed, and various modifications and variations are possible in light of the above teaching. The embodiments were chosen and described in order to explain the principles of the invention and its practical application, to thereby enable others skilled in the art to utilize the invention and various embodiments with various modifications as are suited to the particular use contemplated. It is intended that the scope of the invention be defined by the claims and their equivalents.

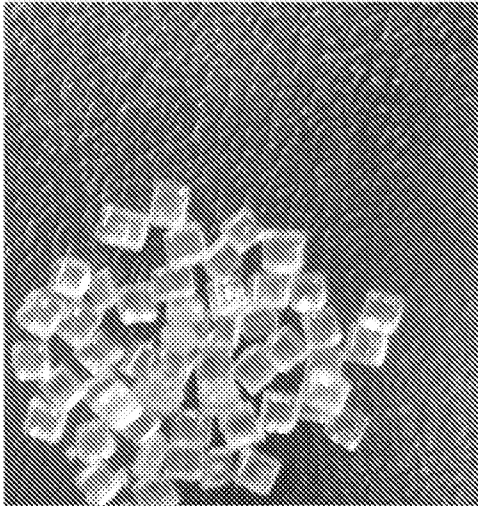
CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A precursor for a multi-attribute pellet that include virgin and recycled content and is configured for molding, the precursor comprising a micro-pellet comprising recycled content, and the micro-pellet is in a range of about 300 pieces per gram to about 1200 pieces per gram.
2. The precursor of claim 1, wherein the micro-pellet is in the range of about 550 pieces per gram to about 1000 pieces per gram.
3. The precursor of claim 1, wherein the micro-pellet has an average weight of about 0.001 grams to about 0.0018 grams.
4. A method of making a multi-attribute pellet comprising virgin and recycled content, the method comprising:
 - providing a precursor comprising recycled material or content, the precursor being in a range of about 300 pieces per gram to about 1200 pieces per gram;
 - including the precursor with a processing of a virgin resin; and
 - forming a multi-attribute pellet.
5. The method of claim 4, wherein the precursor is in the form of a flake or pellet.
6. The method of claim 4, wherein the precursor is suspended or dissolved in a pre-melt-phase solution.
7. The method of claim 4, wherein the precursor is in a form of a micro-pellet or a particle.
8. The method of claim 4, wherein the precursor is strand cut or milled.
9. The method of claim 4, wherein the precursor is run through an extruder, and provides an extruded material.
10. The method of claim 9, wherein the extruded material is extruded without drying and provides an amorphous pellet.

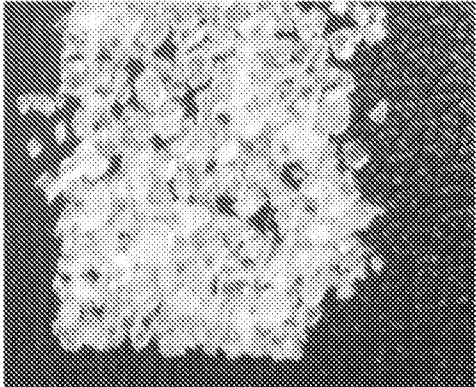
11. The method of claim 4, wherein the precursor is cut or severed to a plurality of pellets.
12. The method of claim 11, wherein the plurality of pellets are formed to have a flat shape.
13. The method of claim 11, wherein the plurality of pellets are formed to have a round shape.
14. The method of claim 11, wherein the precursor is added to a virgin-content manufacturing process as a direct feedstock replacement.
15. A method for making a precursor, the method comprising:
extruding PCR flake to form an extruded pellet having a first number of pieces per gram;
and
milling the extruded pellet to a smaller size having a second number of pieces per gram;
wherein the second number of pieces per gram is at least six times the first number of pieces per gram.
16. The method of claim 15, wherein the first number of pieces per gram is about 50.
17. The method of claim 15, wherein the second number of pieces per gram is between about 300 and about 1200.
18. The method of claim 15, wherein the second number of pieces per gram is in the range of about 550 pieces per gram to about 1000 pieces per gram.
19. The method of claim 15, wherein the PCR flake is extruded undried.
20. The method of claim 15, wherein the extruded pellet is a melt-filtered amorphous pellet.

FIG. 2



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FIG. 1



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