



US 20090134168A1

(19) **United States**

(12) **Patent Application Publication**
MORRISSETTE

(10) **Pub. No.: US 2009/0134168 A1**

(43) **Pub. Date: May 28, 2009**

(54) **MULTI-FUNCTIONAL CONTAINER
APPARATUS AND METHOD**

Publication Classification

(75) **Inventor: ROGER J. MORRISSETTE,
SIOUX CITY, IA (US)**

(51) **Int. Cl.**
B65D 25/04 (2006.01)
(52) **U.S. Cl.** **220/501**

Correspondence Address:
MCKEE, VOORHEES & SEASE, P.L.C.
801 GRAND AVENUE, SUITE 3200
DES MOINES, IA 50309-2721 (US)

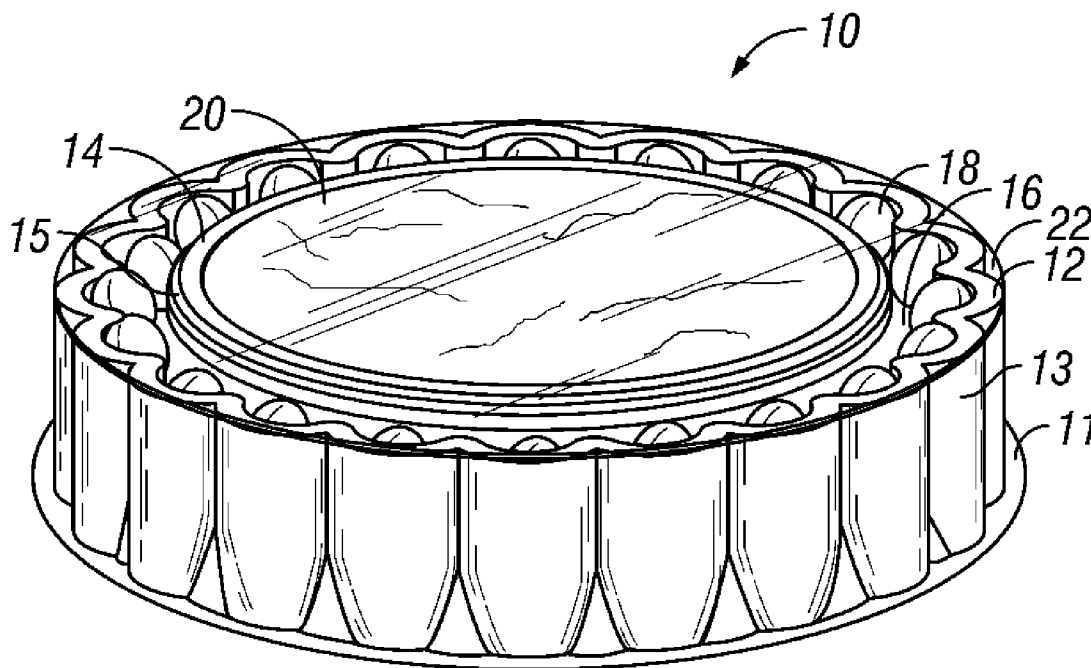
(57) **ABSTRACT**

The present invention provides a multi-functional container. The container is adapted to keep contents separated until combined. The container has an outer rim and an inner rim, a pocket between the outer and inner rims, and the inner rim is adapted to translate downward below the outer rim to dispense one content on top of other contents in the container. A method for storing contents separate from each other until combined is also provided. The method includes supporting the container by the base and pressing the bottom of the container downward toward the base to combine the contents.

(73) **Assignee: WELLS' DAIRY, INC., LeMARS,
IA (US)**

(21) **Appl. No.: 11/945,042**

(22) **Filed: Nov. 26, 2007**



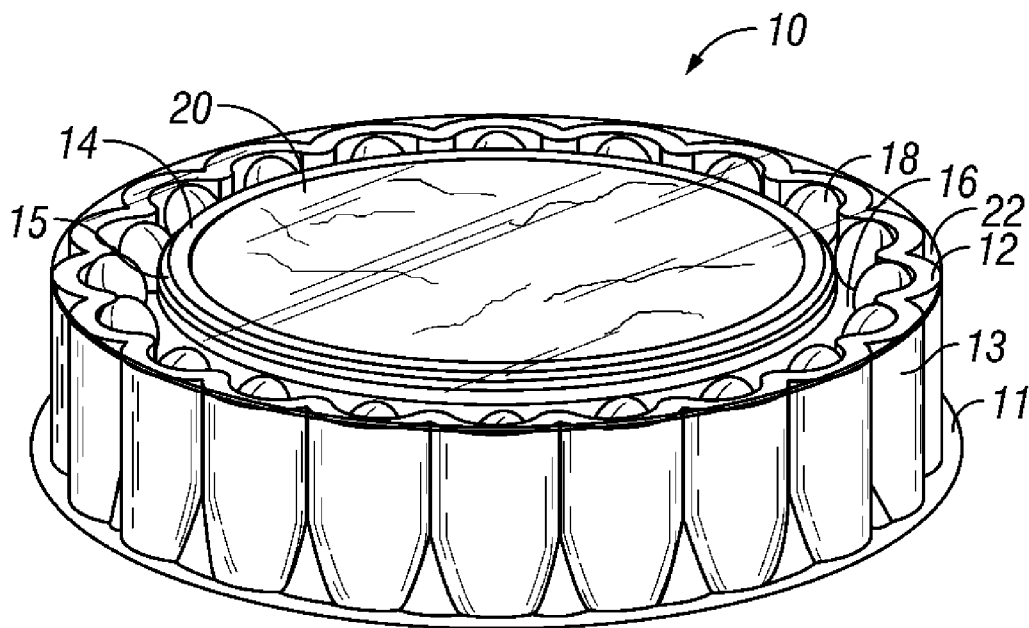


FIG. 1

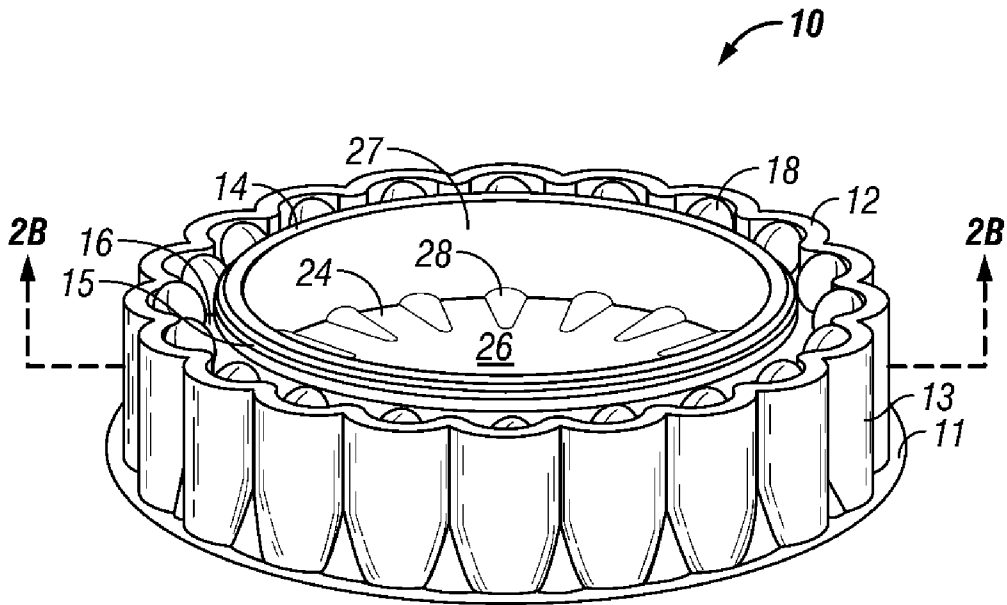


FIG. 2A

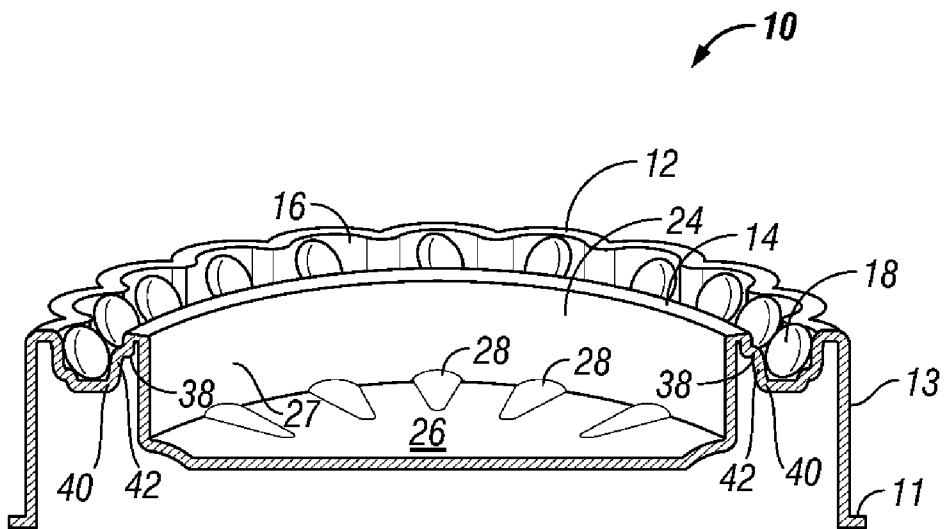


FIG. 2B

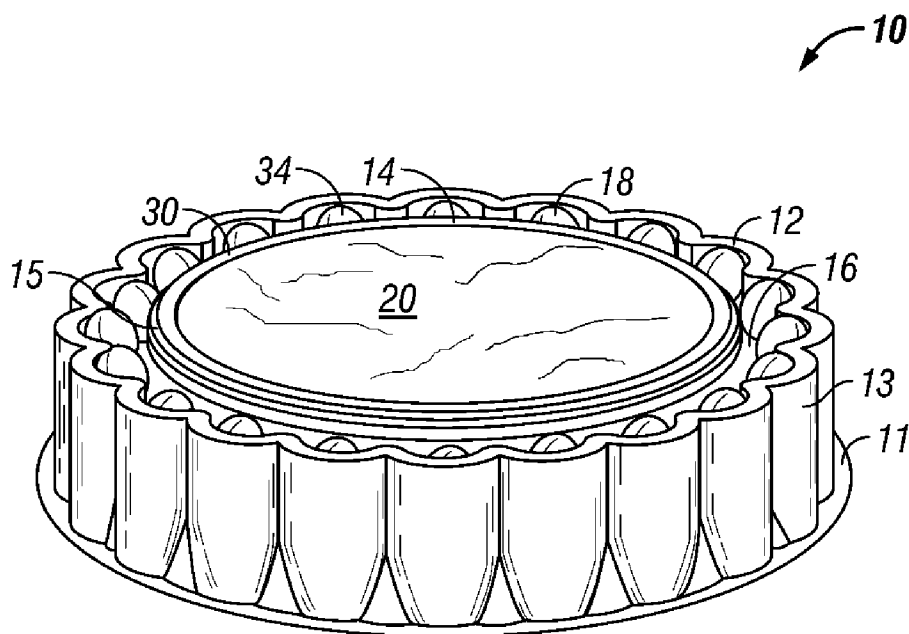


FIG. 3A

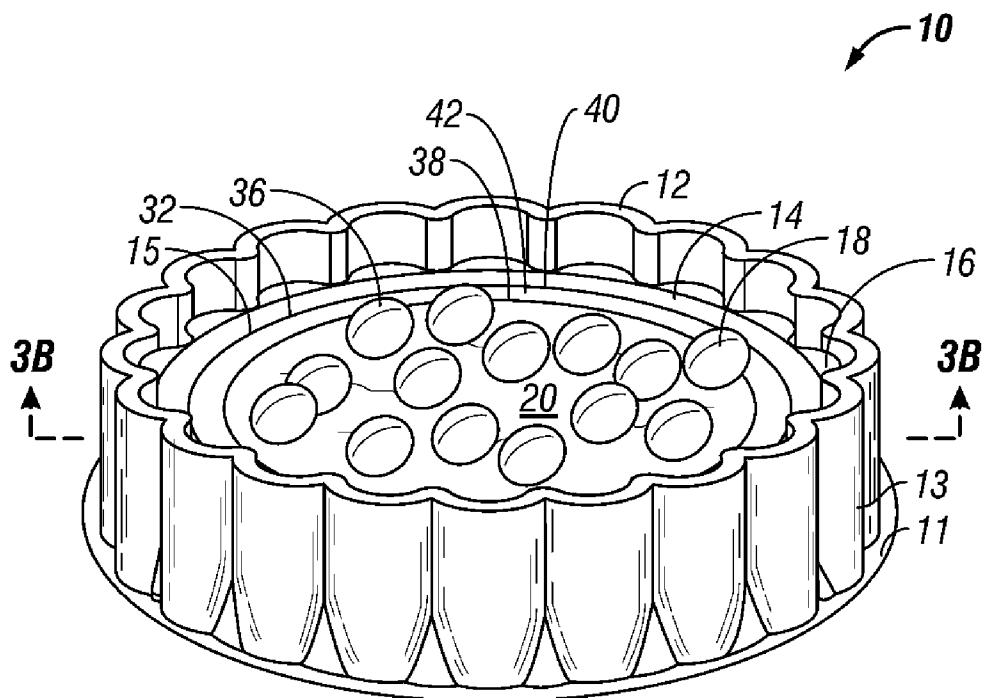


FIG. 3B

10

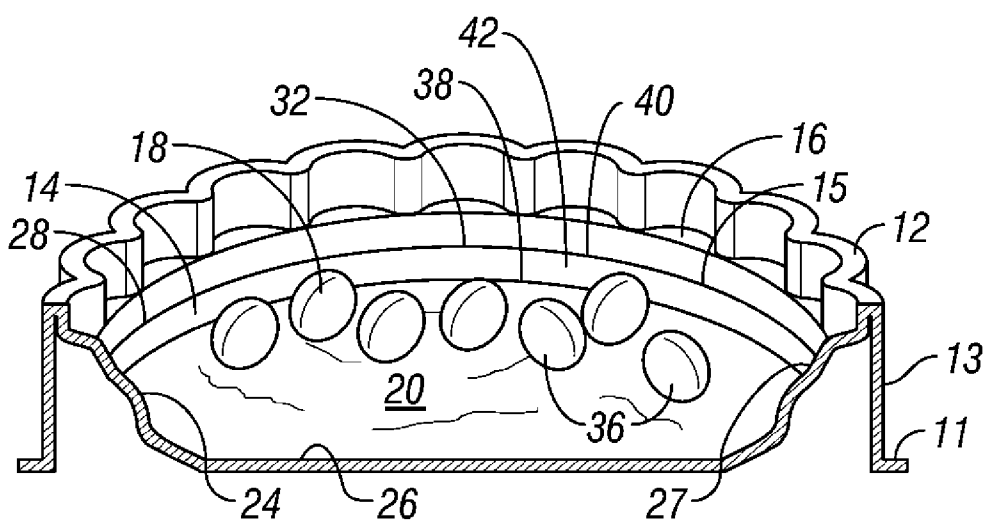


FIG. 3C

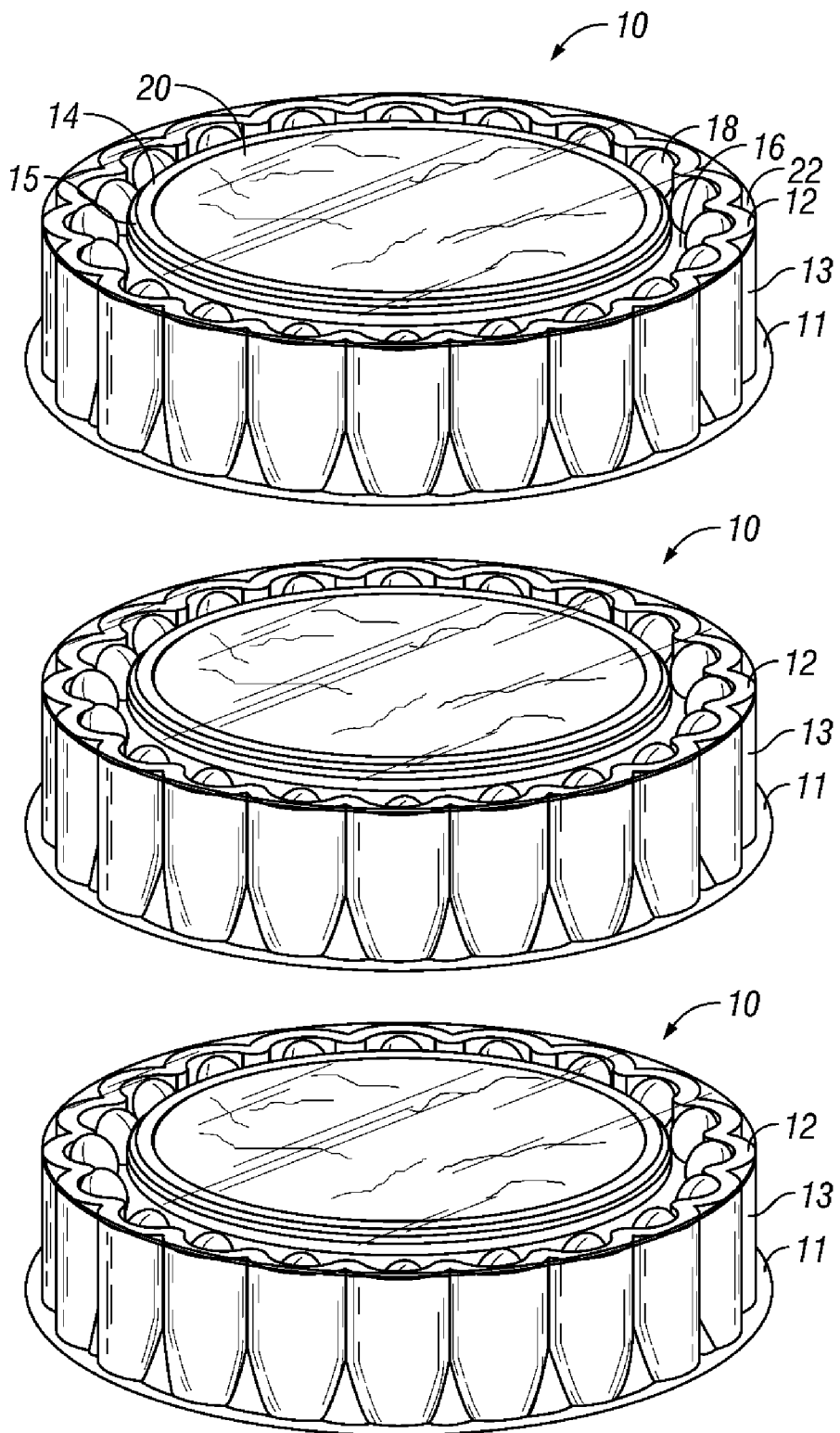


FIG. 4A

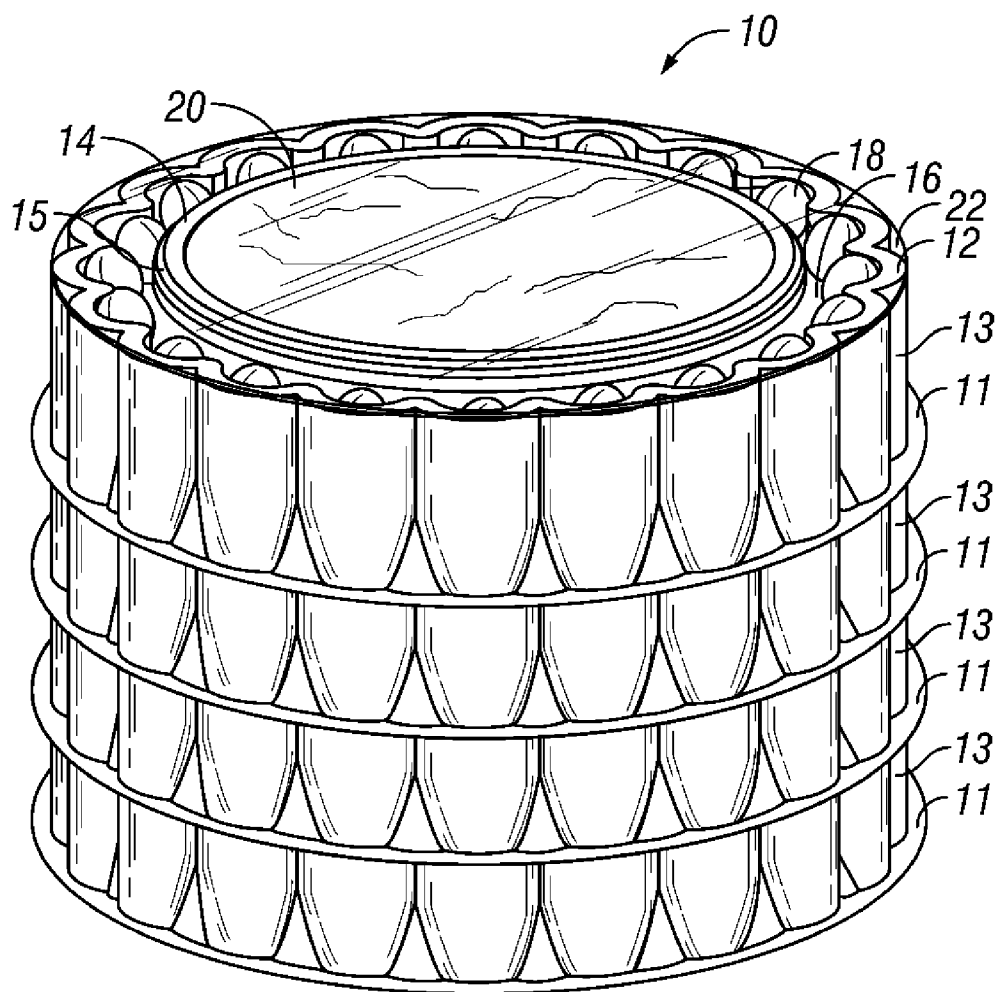


FIG. 4B

MULTI-FUNCTIONAL CONTAINER APPARATUS AND METHOD

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

[0001] The present invention relates to a multi-functional container, and in particular, relates to a multi-functional container for keeping condiments separate from contents of the container until dispensed.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0002] Condiments for various food items are well known and commonly used. Over time, containers, such as the cup lid, have evolved to include additional compartments, storage points, or receptacles to store one or more condiments. For example, cup lids now have storage compartments adapted to release condiments, such as cream and sugar, into the cup. These types of cups have the added convenience of keeping one or more desirable condiments separated from the contents in the cup until dispensed.

[0003] Therefore, a need has been identified to provide a multi-functional container adapted to keep a condiment separate from contents in the container until desired to combine the condiment with the contents in the container by dispensing the condiments into the container.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0004] Further areas of applicability of the present invention will become apparent from the description provided herein. It should be understood that the description includes specific examples that are intended for purposes of illustration and are not intended to limit the scope of the present teachings.

[0005] In one aspect of the present invention, a container adapted to keep a condiment separate from food in the container until dispensed is disclosed. The container includes an outer rim and an inner rim. The inner rim is aligned co-axially with the outer rim. A pocket is positioned between the outer and inner rims. The pocket is adapted to hold the condiment. The inner rim is adapted to translate downward below the outer rim to dispense the condiment on top of food in the container for eating. In a preferred form, the inner rim has an outer sidewall portion adapted to pivot about the inner rim and the pocket to translate the inner rim downward below the pocket, a cup is formed by the inner rim, wherein the cup is adapted to hold the food, the inner rim translates downward from a first position to a second position below the pocket, the inner rim in the first position retains the condiment in a stored position in the pocket, the condiment is unobstructed by the inner rim in the second position to release the condiment from the stored position into the cup, the inner rim in the first position is coplanar with the outer rim, and a cover is adapted to seal against the outer and inner rims to keep the condiment in the pocket separate from the food.

[0006] In another aspect of the present invention, a container adapted to keep a condiment separated from contents in the container until dispensed is disclosed. The container includes an outer rim having a base, an inner rim inner rim concentric with the outer rim wherein the inner rim has a living hinge, a pocket between the rims adapted to store the condiment, and a cup formed by the inner rim. The cup is adapted to store the contents and the inner rim has an outer sidewall portion connected to the living hinge wherein the outer sidewall portion is adapted to pivot about the living

hinge to translate the inner rim downward to release the condiment into the cup. In a preferred form, the outer sidewall portion is connected between a first living hinge and a second living hinge, the outer sidewall portion is adapted to pivot about the first and second living hinges to translate the inner rim downward below the pocket, downward force applied on bottom of the cup induces a torque on the first and second living hinges, and the torque pivots the outer sidewall portion inward to translate the inner rim from a first position, parallel with the outer rim, to a second position below the pocket.

[0007] In still another aspect of the present invention, a method for storing a condiment separate from food in a container until dispensed is disclosed. The method includes the steps of providing the container having a base, concentric outer and inner rims, and a pocket between the rims, supporting the container by the base, and pressing bottom of the container with food downward toward the base to release condiment into the container. In a preferred form, the method also includes the step of removing a cover sealed against the rims to expose the condiment and food in the container and translating the inner rim downward below the outer rim.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0008] The drawings described herein are for illustration purposes only and are not intended to limit the scope of the present disclosure in any way.

[0009] FIG. 1 is an isometric view of the container according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0010] FIG. 2A is an isometric view of the container shown in FIG. 1.

[0011] FIG. 2B is a sectional view of the container shown in FIG. 2A according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0012] FIG. 3A is an isometric view of the container shown holding contents in the container pocket according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0013] FIG. 3B is an isometric view of the container wherein the container has been moved downward to allow the condiments to be released from the pocket into the container according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0014] FIG. 3C is a sectional view of the container shown in FIG. 3B.

[0015] FIG. 4A is a front perspective view of several containers positioned one above the other for stacking the containers together according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

[0016] FIG. 4B is a front perspective view of several containers stacked together according to an exemplary embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

[0017] The following description is merely exemplary in nature and is not intended to limit the present disclosure, application, or uses.

[0018] The present invention generally provides for a multi-functional container, as shown generally in FIGS. 1-4B. One exemplary container of the present invention is shown in FIG. 1. The container 10 in FIG. 1 is two-piece, having a container portion 10 and cover 22. Container 10 has a base 11 and outer walls 13 that extend in a generally vertical direction from base 11 to form outer rim 12. Base 11 forms a

planar resting surface to provide support for container 10 when resting on a surface, such as a table, counter or bench. The outer wall 13 is shown as being ribbed or corrugated, but may be smooth or patterned, for functionality purposes or to complement the aesthetics of the container 10, stackability, handling and/or storing of the container 10 or contents 18 within container 10. Container 10 also includes an inner rim 14. In a preferred form, the inner rim 14 is aligned coaxially or concentric with the outer rim 12. A pocket 16 is formed between the inner rim 14 and the outer rim 12. Pocket 16 may be formed having varying depth and width, as well as design. For example, pocket 16 may be designed to hold a number of different size and shape contents 18, whether singulated or agglomerated, such as a condiment, topping, coating, ingredient or part of a mixture or compound. In one embodiment, pocket 16 may be shaped to hold a disc-shaped candy such as M&M's® or SKITTLES®. In another aspect, pocket 16 may be shaped or use the existing shape to hold sprinkles, clusters, powders and/or liquids. Outer rim 13 may also be shaped, as previously discussed, to accommodate various size and shaped contents 18 as previously described. The depth of pocket 16 may be adjusted to accommodate different size and shaped contents 18 so as to rest within pocket 16 below a plane parallel with the outer and inner rims 12, 14. Inner rim 14 is stepped with stages 15. In the preferred form, the tops of outer rim 12 and inner rim 14 are coplanar with each other. However, the present invention contemplates outer 12 and inner 14 rims being in different planes. Inner rim 14 is formed in part by side wall 27, which surrounds cup 24 having bottom 26, as shown in FIGS. 2A and 2B. Cup 24 has a plurality of ridges 28 on bottom 26 of cup 24 to help stabilize and prevent movement of contents 20 within cup 24. Although, in the preferred form, cup 24 is shown holding contents 20, such as ice cream, it should be appreciated by those skilled in the art that cup 24 could hold any number of contents, not limited to ice cream. For example, cup 24 could hold contents 20, such as a food product, a part of a mixture or compound, a liquid product, or an ingredient. Both contents 18 and contents 20 are sealed in their respective receptacles, cup 24 and pocket 16, to keep contents 18 and contents 20 separate from one another until it is desired to combine the two.

[0019] FIGS. 1-3A illustrate the inner rim 14 in the first position 30 coplanar with the outer rim 12. With the inner rim 14 in the first position 30, contents 18 in pocket 16 are kept in the stored position 34 or otherwise prevented from being combined with the contents 20 in cup 24 of container 10. After cover 22 has been removed from off container 10, with the container 10 resting on a surface, such as a table, counter or bench to provide support to base 11, the inner rim 14 may be moved from the first position 30 to the second position 32. The inner rim 14 is moved by applying a downward force, using a utensil or other force-applying member, on the contents 20 and/or bottom 26 of cup 24 to translate the inner rim 14 downward from the first position 30 to the second position 32 whereby contents 18 are combined with contents 20 in cup 24 by moving from the stored position 34 to the released position 36, as best illustrated in FIG. 3B. Bottom 26 of cup 24 does not descend below base 11 of container 10 for inner rim 14 to move from the first position 30 to the second position 32, as illustrated in FIG. 3C. In other words, bottom 26 of cup 24 does not need to descend below base 11 of container 10 to collapse inner rim 14 so contents 18 in pocket 16 is free to move and combine with contents 20 in cup 24. For example, container 10 need not be held in-hand to permit

bottom 26 of cup 24 to move to the second position 32. As previously noted, inner rim 14 is configured with stages 15, which facilitate the collapse and downward translational movement of the inner rim from the first position 30 to the second position 32 wherein the inner rim 14 drops below the bottom of pocket 16 so that contents 18 are no longer obstructed by inner rim 14. Thus, contents 18 may be kept separate from contents 20 in cup 24 until it is desired to combine contents 18 with contents 20 in cup 24. In one exemplary aspect of the present invention, the stages 15 may include a first living hinge 38, a second living hinge 40 and an outer sidewall portion 42 spaced between the two living hinges 38, 40. Outer sidewall portion 42 pivots about the two living hinges 38, 40 to facilitate downward movement of the inner rim 14 below pocket 16. Thus, downward force applied on bottom 26 of cup 24 induces a torque in both living hinges 38, 40; the torque on both living hinges 38, 40 causes outer sidewall portion 42 to pivot inward toward cup 24 to translate inner rim from first position 30, parallel with outer rim 12, to second position 32 below pocket 16. When bottom 26 of cup 24 is moved downward, commensurate with movement of inner rim 14, container 10 is still supported by base 11 if resting on a surface, such as a table, counter or bench. In a preferred form, bottom 26 of cup 24 does not extend below base 11 to create a smaller support stance or footprint, as best shown in FIG. 3C.

[0020] FIGS. 4A and 4B illustrate the stackability of container 10. Containers 10 are stacked, one on top of the other, by sliding the outer wall 13 of outer rim 12 overtop the outer rim 12 of the next container. In this manner, multiple containers 10, whether empty or holding covered 22 contents 20 and contents 18, can be nested together to maximize shelf space in the manufacturing, storing or retail setting. Nesting containers 10 together also provides stacking stability.

[0021] The present invention contemplates the use of food-grade plastic as the material for constructing container 10. The container has wall thicknesses that are sufficiently thin to allow the inner rim to collapse, yet sufficiently rigid to maintain the integrity of the outer rim 12 and the structure of the container 10 as a whole.

[0022] The embodiments of the present invention have been set forth in the drawings and specification, and although specific terms are employed, these are used in the generically descriptive sense only and are not used for the purposes of limitation. Changes in the form and proportion of parts as well as in substitution of equivalents are contemplated as circumstances may suggest or are rendered expedient without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention as further defined in the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A container adapted to keep a condiment separate from food in the container until dispensed, the container comprising:

- an outer rim and an inner rim, said inner rim aligned coaxially with said outer rim;
- a pocket between said outer and inner rims, said pocket adapted to hold said condiment; and
- said inner rim adapted to translate downward below said outer rim to dispense said condiment on top of food in said container for eating.

2. The container of claim 1 wherein said inner rim further comprises an outer sidewall portion adapted to pivot about said inner rim and said pocket to translate said inner rim downward below said pocket.

3. The container of claim 1 further comprising a cup formed by said inner rim, said cup adapted to hold said food.

4. The container of claim 3 wherein said inner rim translates downward from a first position to a second position below said pocket.

5. The container of claim 4 wherein said inner rim in said first position retains said condiment in a stored position in said pocket.

6. The container of claim 5 wherein said condiment is unobstructed by said inner rim in said second position to release said condiment from said stored position into said cup.

7. The container of claim 4 wherein said inner rim in said first position is coplanar with said outer rim.

8. The container of claim 1 further comprising a cover adapted to seal against said outer and inner rims to keep said condiment in said pocket separate from said food.

9. A container adapted to keep contents separated until combined, the container comprising:

- an inner rim and a concentric outer rim having a base;
- a pocket between said rims adapted to store a first content;
- a cup formed by said inner rim, said cup adapted to store a second content; and

said inner rim having an outer sidewall portion adapted to pivot about said inner rim and said pocket to translate said inner rim downward below said pocket to release said first content into said cup with said second content.

10. The container of claim 9 wherein said inner rim translates downward from a first position to a second position.

11. The container of claim 10 wherein said inner rim in said second position is above said base and below said pocket.

12. The container of claim 11 wherein said cup further comprises a bottom, said bottom is above said base and below said pocket when said inner rim is in said second position.

13. The container of claim 9 wherein said first content comprises:

- a. a condiment;
- b. a topping;
- c. a coating;
- d. an ingredient; or
- e. a part of a mixture or compound.

14. The container of claim 9 wherein said second content comprises:

- a. a food product;
- b. a part of a mixture or compound;
- c. a liquid product;
- d. an ingredient; or
- e. a frozen confection.

15. A container adapted to keep a condiment separated from contents in said container until dispensed, the container comprising:

- an outer rim having a base;
- an inner rim concentric with said outer rim, said inner rim having a living hinge;
- a pocket between said rims adapted to store said condiment;
- a cup formed by said inner rim, said cup adapted to store said contents; and
- said inner rim having an outer sidewall portion connected to said living hinge, said outer sidewall portion adapted

to pivot about said living hinge to translate said inner rim downward to release said condiment into said cup.

16. The container of claim 15 wherein said outer sidewall portion is connected between a first living hinge and a second living hinge, said outer sidewall portion adapted to pivot about said first and second living hinges to translate said inner rim downward below said pocket.

17. The container of claim 16 wherein downward force applied on bottom of said cup induces a torque on said first and second living hinges, said torque pivoting said outer sidewall portion inward to translate said inner rim from a first position, parallel with said outer rim, to a second position below said pocket.

18. A method for storing a condiment separate from food in a container until dispensed, the method comprising:

- providing said container having a base, an inner rim, an outer rim concentric with said inner rim, and a pocket between said rims for holding said condiment;
- supporting said container by said base; and
- pressing bottom of said container with food downward toward said base to release said condiment into said container.

19. The method of claim 18 further comprising the step of removing a cover sealed against said rims to expose said condiment and food in said container.

20. The method of claim 18 further comprising the step of translating said inner rim downward below said outer rim.

21. A method for storing contents separate from each other in a container until combined, the method comprising:

- providing said container having a base, concentric outer and inner rims, a pocket between said rims, and a cup formed by said inner rim;
- pressing bottom of said cup downward;
- pivoting an outer sidewall portion of said inner rim about a living hinge between said inner rim and said pocket to translate said inner rim downward; and
- combining contents of said pocket and cup.

22. The method of claim 21 further comprising the step of removing a cover from off of said container to expose contents in said pocket and cup.

23. The method of claim 21 further comprising the step of translating bottom of said cup downward to a position above said base and below said pocket.

24. The method of claim 21 wherein contents in said pocket comprise:

- a. a condiment;
- b. a topping;
- c. a coating;
- d. an ingredient; or
- e. a part of a mixture or compound.

25. The method of claim 21 wherein contents in said cup comprise:

- a. a food product;
- b. a part of a mixture or compound;
- c. a liquid product;
- d. an ingredient; or
- e. a frozen confection.

* * * * *