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Peters

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[54] **CONTAINER FOR PERISHABLE FOODS**

[76] Inventor: **Leo Peters,** 750 Plymouth Rd., S.E., Grand Rapids, Mich. 49506

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[52] **U.S. Cl.** ..... **206/44.12,** 206/459, 211/49 D, 426/87, 426/108, 426/115

[51] **Int. Cl.** **B65d 75/58,** A47f 10/00

[58] **Field of Search** ..... 206/44 R, 44.12, 45.15, 206/45.16, DIG. 26, DIG. 32, 56 R, 74; 426/115; 229/9; 211/49 D

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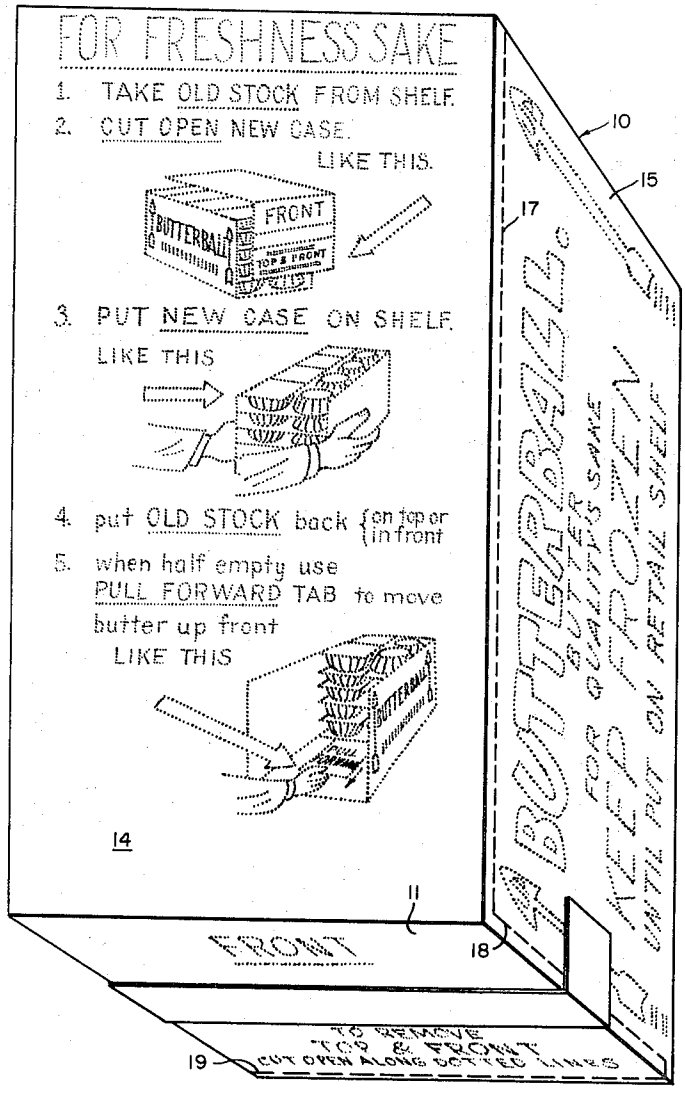
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Primary Examiner—Leonard Summer

[57] **ABSTRACT**

Maintaining retail-store shelf freshness of perishable foods by means of a sliding sleeve structure within the container in which said foods are shipped.

10 Claims, 5 Drawing Figures



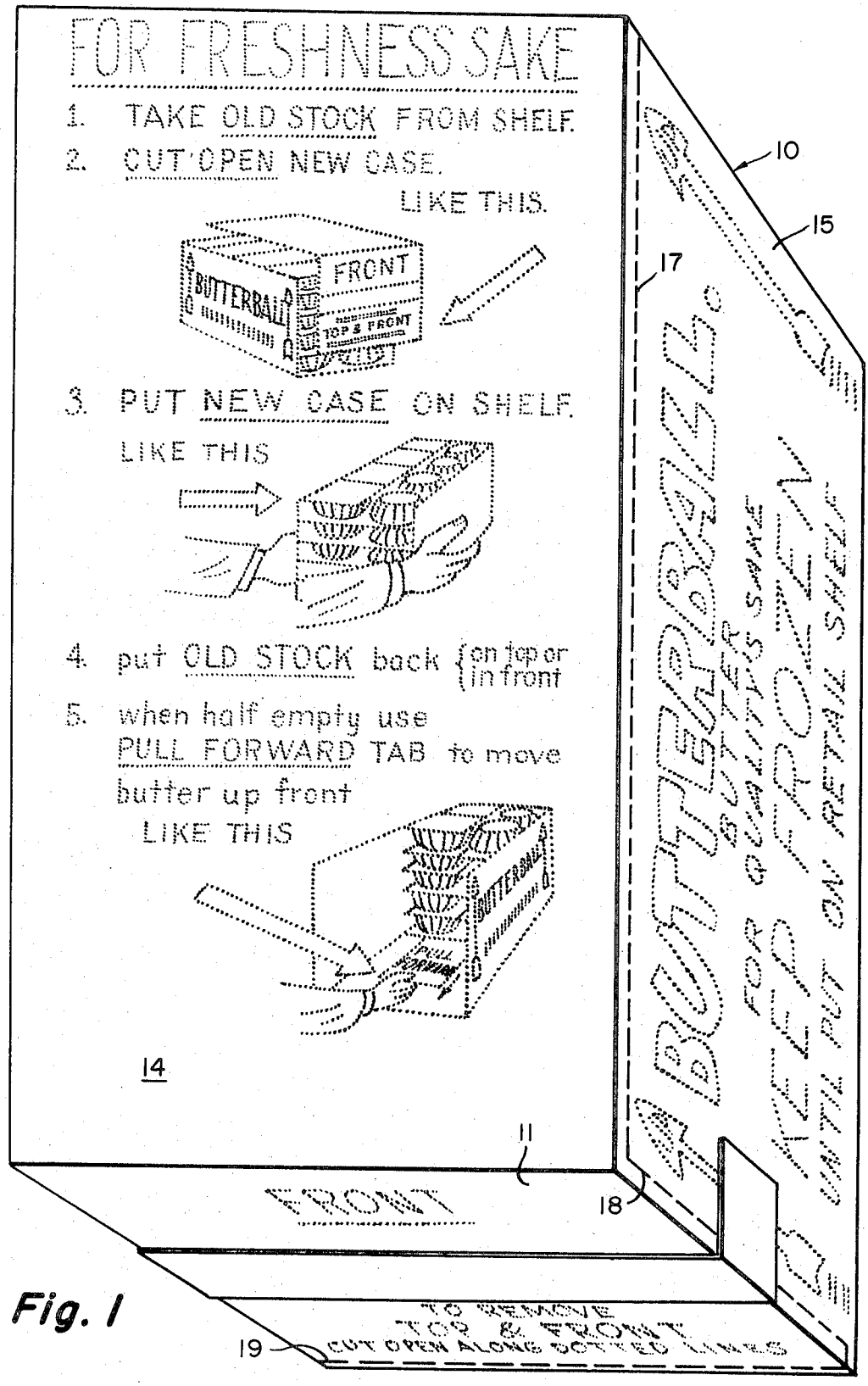
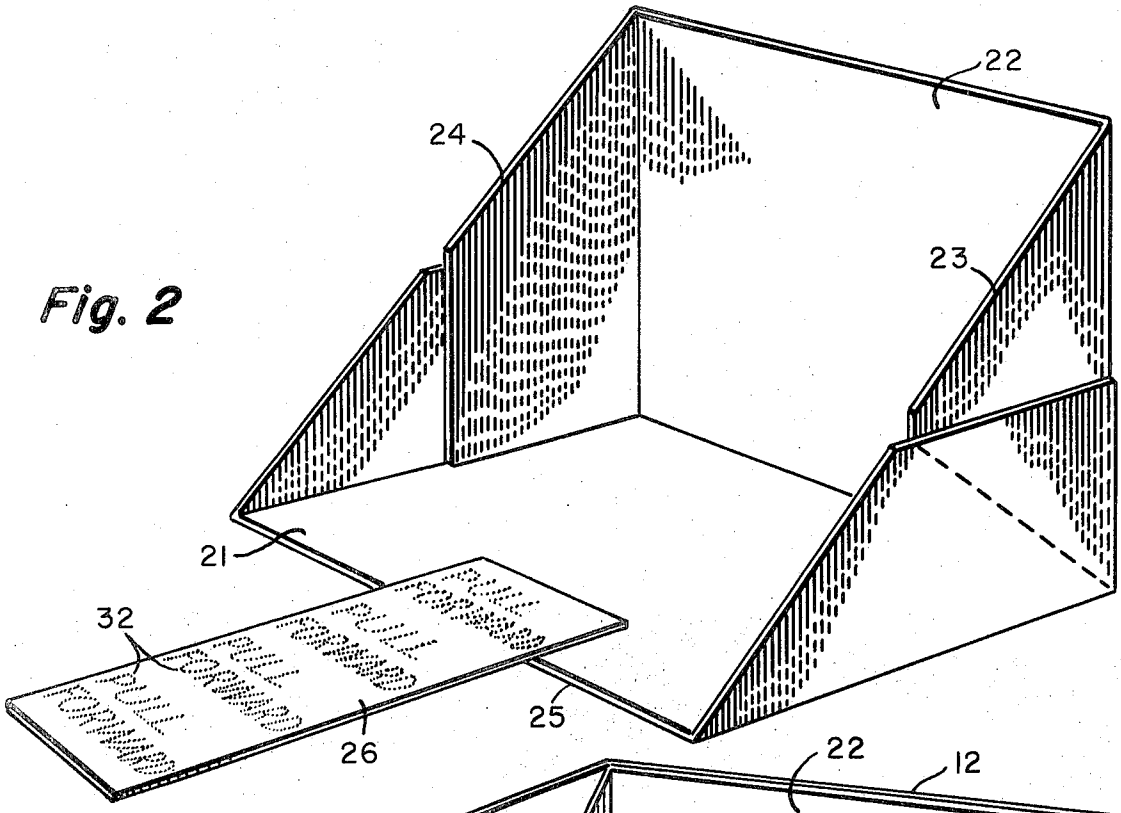

FOR FRESHNESS SAKE
1. TAKE OLD STOCK FROM SHELF.
2. CUT OPEN NEW CASE.
LIKE THIS.
FRONT
BUTTERBALL
TOP & FRONT
3. PUT NEW CASE ON SHELF.
LIKE THIS
4. put OLD STOCK back { on top or in front
5. when half empty use PULL FORWARD TAB to move butter up front
LIKE THIS
14
11
FRONT
18
19
10
15
17
BUTTERBALL
TO REMOVE TOP & FRONT CUT OPEN ALONG DOTTED LINES

Fig. 1

Fig. 2



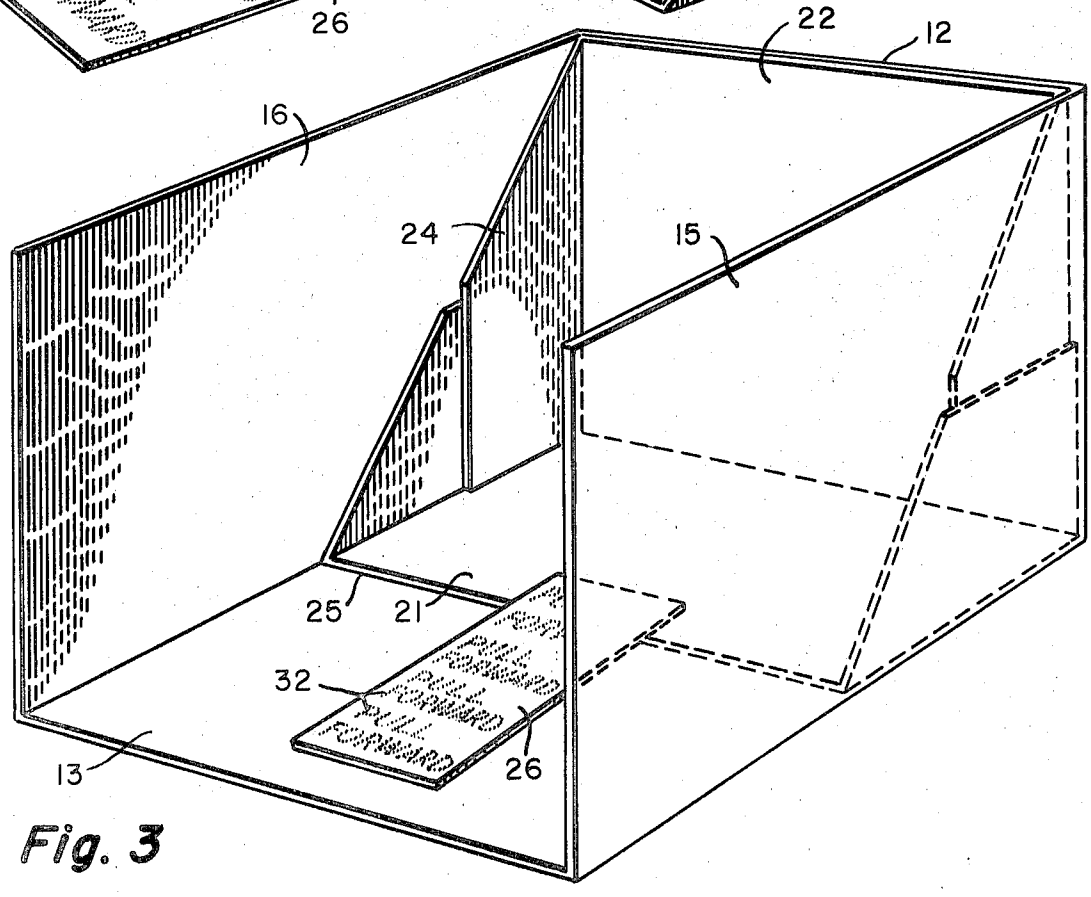
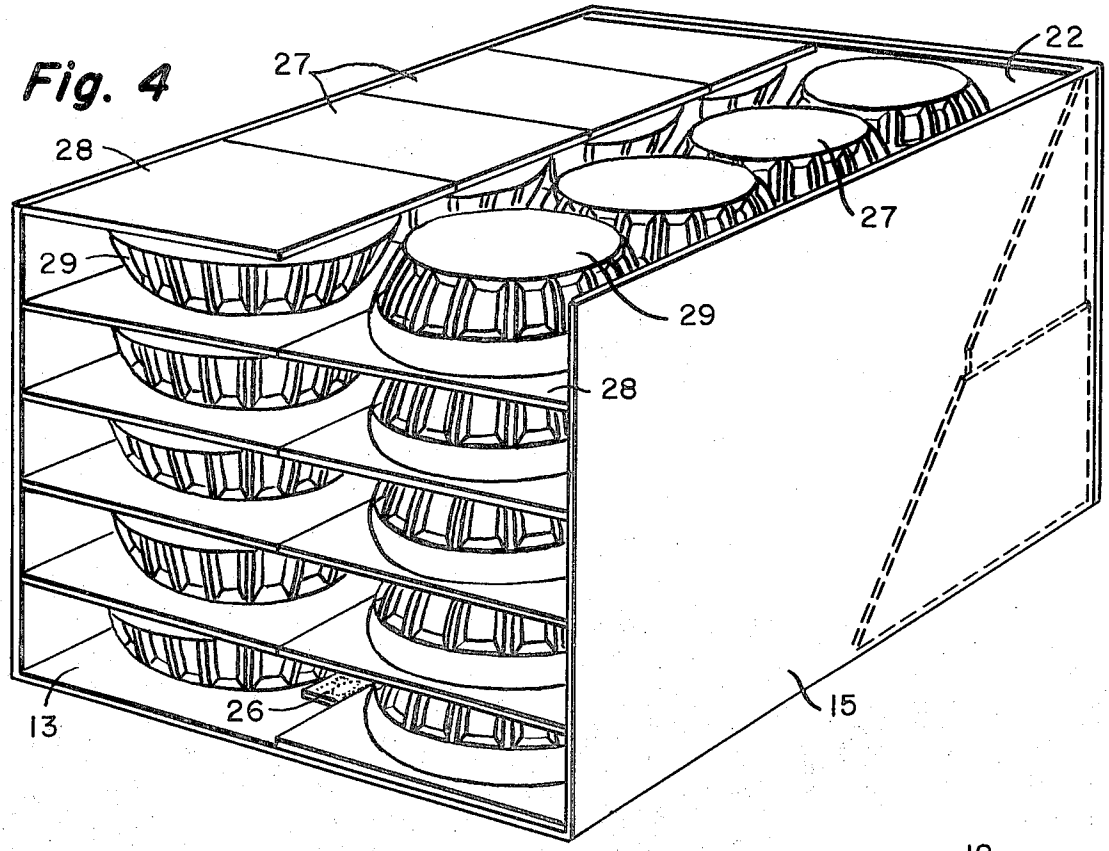


Fig. 3

Fig. 4



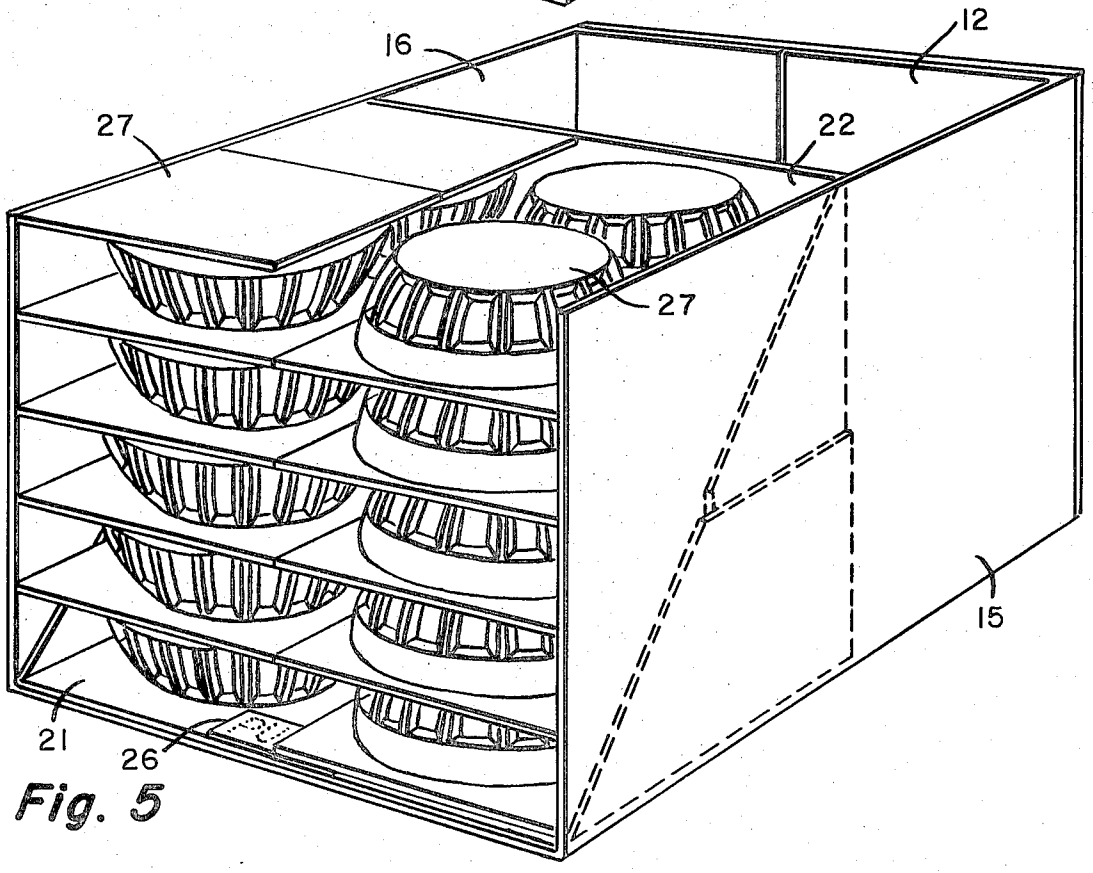


Fig. 5

CONTAINER FOR PERISHABLE FOODS

BACKGROUND OF INVENTION

Maintaining freshness of perishable foods on retail shelves has always been a problem. Stated another way: guaranteeing that a consumer never purchases a perishable item that is no longer "fresh" is a problem that constantly plagues retail store management. It is a problem that is of concern in such areas as baked goods, fresh fruits and vegetables, and dairy products.

For purposes of illustration, this invention will use butter as the exemplary item to describe the problem and its solution. Butter is packaged for retail-store sale in ¼-lb. sizes and multiples thereof, in wrappers, cartons, and tubs. It is usually shipped to retail stores, and held on store shelves under refrigerated temperatures slightly above freezing; in the 38° to 45° F. range. At these temperatures butter will have a maximum good freshness shelf life of about one week. Butter held on retail shelves at higher temperatures and/or longer time periods will have its deterioration rate rapidly accelerated and its "freshness" rapidly dissipated.

The most critical problem confronting retailers is to watch the time period that butter remains on their shelves. Specific instructions and continuing measures (including hired auditors to check on freshness dates) are taken to safeguard against any over-extended time periods on their shelves. The manufacturers of butter stamp code dates on every package to indicate the age of package of butter. The dairy clerk has adamant instructions to watch these dates and make sure that the oldest dates are kept in the front part of the shelf so consumers will purchase these first. It is at this point that butter frequently loses its freshness because store management simply cannot get their dairy clerks to be as careful as they should be in guarding the freshness dates of butter.

The freshness of butter on retail store shelves is constantly victimized by the fallibilities of human nature: laziness, carelessness, negligence, irresponsibility and the burden of performing a frequently all-too-time-consuming task. To keep butter fresh, its position on the retail shelf must be such that the oldest stock is always kept in front position. To do this properly: at the time new stock is added to the shelf all old stock should be removed from the shelf and the new stock placed in the background, and then the old stock re-shelved in the foreground. However, this procedure is all-too-frequently neglected and/or carelessly performed because of the time and labor involved and/or the inability to do so because of crowded shelf and/or aisle-way space.

The net continuing result is that consumers frequently purchase stale, over-aged, rancid butter. Practically all retail grocery stores in this country are plagued with this condition.

It is the general objective of this invention to cure this condition and solve this problem.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE INVENTION

Practically all grocery store shelves are so constructed, and located in the store, that it is impossible to load goods on them from the back. Merchandise must be loaded from the front. Furthermore, merchandise that is stacked on these shelves is tightly packed in side-to-side relationship so that it is a practical impossibility to move it to one side in order to load new stock in front of it. Therefore, when stocks on such shelves are partially depleted and new supplies are to be placed on the shelf the following procedure must be followed with perishable merchandise: (1) the old stock must be completely removed from the shelf; (2) the new stock placed on the emptied shelf toward the back; (3) the old stock then replaced on the shelf in front of the new stock.

With a perishable such as butter this un-stacking, stacking, and re-stacking chore should be performed at least every other day. But because of the tight side-to-side and back-to-back shelf space limitations within which butter is usually confined it it always a difficult task to keep the old stock up in front. Many times hard-pressed and/or negligent dairy clerks do not remove the old product before placing the new product on the shelf. Management issues firm orders to its dairy clerks (1) to keep shelves well-stocked, and also (2) to keep the old stock in front. But, because store management doesn't have the time to easily check the coded freshness dates on butter packages but can easily notice depleted shelf stocks, a dairy clerk that is hard pressed for time will obey the order (the failure of which is most easily noticed) to keep the shelves well stocked, but will disobey the order (failure of which is not easily noticed) to keep old-dated stock in front.

The result has been that consumers frequently purchase old, stale, butter that has been on a grocery shelf much longer than its freshness permits.

It is therefore a general objective of this invention to provide a method and means whereby grocery-store dairy clerks will have their work of positioning old and new butter on their shelves made easier, and the butter itself provided with a better guarantee that it will be sold before its freshness-date limit has expired.

In achieving this general objective, the following specific objectives were developed:

1. A shipping case that can also serve as a shelf-display case. To ease the burden of a busy dairy clerk, I discovered that if the case in which butter is shipped to the retail store could also serve as a shelf-display case, then the clerk could place the whole case on the shelf without handling every individual package of butter within the case. Since butter shipping cases usually contain from 24 to 40 individual packages of butter, the amount of hand labor and time can be reduced 24 to 40 times if an entire case could be placed on a retail shelf rather than one individual package at a time. Easing this burden of a dairy clerk would also promote a better attitude toward watching his freshness dates. But to produce this labor saving, and then the more important objective of maintaining butter freshness, this case had to be designed to function as a pre-condition for the functioning of my next objectives.

2. A shipping case that will universally fit the width and depth requirements of grocery-store shelves. The refrigerated shelves in most present-day grocery stores generally have a depth (front to back) measurement range of 15 inches to 24 inches. For a shipping case to be universally adaptable to shelf display use, it should therefore have at least a length or width dimension no greater than about 15 inches.

The side-to-side dimension on a retail shelf is, of course, practically limitless insofar as a case dimension is concerned. No case could possibly have a dimension that would extend over the entire length (side to side)

of a retail shelf. Therefore, either the length or width of my shipping case can be whatever dimension is practical for the weight and quantity of butter within it.

3. A shipping case that (after it has been placed for display on a retail shelf) will facilitate in-case movement of contents from back to front, and allow the contents to be easily accessible for purchasers to pick up without disturbing adjacent product.

To achieve this objective, the case should be (a) easily adaptable and/or convertible from a shipping case to a display case, (b) with some of its sides left intact to confine its contents and separate them from adjacent displayed products, while (c) some of its sides should be removable without disturbing and/or mutilating its contents while at the same time (d) making such contents easily accessible for purchasing.

4. A shipping case that will remain stationary in its shelf position while the back half of its contents are moved en masse forward. This is the important objective of this invention; the one for which all the preceding specific objectives are preparatory pre-conditions.

In order to achieve this objective, I developed the following methods and means:

1. Fitting a slidable sleeve into the back half of my shipping container so that it would at least partially enclose the back half of my container's contents; the back half being the position to be moved forward when the front half has been sold.

2. Having this sleeve structured, in its preferred embodiment, as follows:

a. Made from paper, paperboard, or plastic film of a thickness and/or strength to withstand without breaking the pressures from content-weight and sliding friction when it, and its contents, are moved forward.

b. Completely closed at its bottom and back, and partially closed at its sides, to confine at least the back half of its contents for a confined movement forward of the entire sleeve contents.

c. Completely open at its top and front, and partially open at its sides to permit its contents to be completely and easily accessible for a store customer to pick up after the sleeve and contents have been moved forward.

d. A front to back bottom dimension equal to about one-half of the container's contents.

e. A paper or plastic pull-tab to pull the sleeve and contents forward when the front of the cases contents is sold: (1) of sufficient strength to withstand without breaking the pull-pressure required to move the sleeve and its contents forward; (2) of sufficient length to make it visible when about half of the front half of the containers' contents is sold; and (3) frangible so it can be torn off after it has served its pull-forward function.

All of the preceding specific objectives in the order in which they are listed cooperate to produce the final, simple, economical, and effective functional result. The surprising elements in this novel discovery are its simplicity and economy. It is simple to incorporate as part of the container on the butter packaging-assembly line; and it functions with simplicity and ease on the store shelf. It uses an economically small amount of material; it adds practically no cost to the assembly of the container prior to filling in the contents. Withal it functions with "foolproof" effectiveness.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWING

The invention will be explained in conjunction with an illustrative embodiment shown in the accompanying drawing in which

FIG. **1** is a perspective view of a container formed in accordance with the invention;

FIG. **2** is a perspective view of the sleeve which is slidably positioned within the container;

FIG. **3** is a perspective view of the container and the sleeve with the top and front of the container removed;

FIG. **4** is a perspective view of the container and the sleeve showing the container filled with a plurality of stacked items; and

FIG. **5** is a view similar to FIG. **4** showing half of the contents of the container removed and the sleeve in a forward position within the container.

DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC EMBODIMENT

Referring now to FIGS. **1** and **3** the numeral **10** designates generally a combination shipping and display container. The container is provided in the form of a box having a front wall **11**, a rear wall **12**, a bottom wall **13**, a top wall **14**, and opposite side walls **15** and **16**. The top wall is advantageously provided with instructions for using the container as a display carton as illustrated in FIG. **1** and indicated by the numbers **1** through **5**.

The front wall **11** and the top wall **14** are adapted to be removed from the remainder of the container, as by cutting, when the container is to be used as a display carton, and for this purpose the side wall **15** is provided with a dotted line or other indicia indicated at **17** adjacent the upper edge of the side wall and a dotted line **18** extending downwardly adjacent the front edge of the side wall. The front wall **11** is provided with a dotted line **19** extending adjacent the bottom edge thereof. The other side wall **16** is provided with indicia similar to the indicia **17** and **18** of the side wall **15**, and similar indicia can be provided adjacent the upper edge of the rear wall **12**. Grocery store clerks are accustomed to cutting open containers with knives, razor blades, or similar tools, and the front and top walls of the container can be easily removed by cutting along the indicia of the walls of the container. The top and front walls can thereafter be removed to expose the interior of the container and the contents thereof as illustrated in FIG. **4**.

Referring now to FIGS. **2** and **3**, sleeve **20** is slidably positioned at the rear of the container and includes a bottom wall **21** supported by the bottom wall of the container, a rear wall **22** which extends upwardly alongside the rear wall **12** of the container, and generally triangularly shaped side walls **23** and **24** which extend adjacent the side walls **15** and **16**, respectively. The sleeve is advantageously sized so that the side walls thereof extend closely adjacent to the side walls of the container, and the height of the rear wall **22** is substantially the same as the height of the rear wall **12** after the top wall has been cut away. The bottom wall **21** extends over only a portion of the bottom wall **13**, and in the particular embodiment illustrated the front edge **25** thereof extends approximately midway between the front and rear of the container when the back wall **22** is positioned against the back wall **12**.

A pull tab **26** is secured to the bottom wall **21** and extends forwardly over the bottom wall **13**. When the

sleeve is positioned against the rear wall of the container, the forward end of the pull tab advantageously terminates at or slightly behind the front edge of the bottom wall **13**.

The container and the sleeve are particularly suitable for use with shipping and displaying a plurality of columns of stacked items **27** shown in FIG. **4** which may be arranged in longitudinal rows extending from front to rear and in transverse rows extending from side to side. The particular units **27** illustrated in FIG. **4** are ¼ pound packages of butter, and the invention finds particular utility with butter. Each of the packages **27** illustrated include a flat base **28** and a somewhat dome-shaped blister or cover **29** which encloses the contents of the package. The packages in the right hand row of FIG. **4** are stacked in an upright position, and the packages of the left hand row are stacked in an inverted position. However, the items can all be stacked in the same way, or the stacking position can be varied in other ways, as, for example, by alternating the position of the packages in alternate vertically extending columns or stacks.

When the container is filled as in FIG. **4**, the packages **27** are supported by the bottom wall **13** of the container, and some of the packages are also supported by the bottom wall **21** of the sleeve. The pull tab **26** is substantially or completely covered by the packages. The packages are exposed by the cut away front and top of the container, and the consumer can examine and remove the packages from the container without difficulty.

When one or more transversely extending rows of packages have been removed from the container, the forward end of the pull tab **26** is exposed, depending upon the length of the tab. The clerk can then grasp the pull tab and pull the sleeve forwardly until the forwardmost remaining transversely extending row of packages is positioned adjacent the front of the container. Since the rear wall of the sleeve extends upwardly for the full height of the stacked packages, the packages will be moved forwardly without relative shifting between the columns even if some of the packages are positioned forwardly of the sleeve and are not supported by the bottom wall thereof. The stacks are prevented from tumbling as they are pulled forwardly by the side walls of the container and the rear wall of the sleeve.

As each succeeding transverse row of packages is removed, the sleeve can be incrementally moved forwardly until the front edge thereof is positioned adjacent the front edge of the bottom wall of the container as shown in FIG. **5**. As portions of the pull tab are pulled beyond the front edge of the bottom wall **13**, these portions can be cut or torn off, or the forward portion of the pull tab can be folded below the bottom of the container. In order to facilitate the tearing off of portions of the pull tab as the sleeve is advanced incrementally to position the packages at the front of the container, the pull tab can be provided with score lines or lines of weakness indicated at **32** which, in the embodiment illustrated, also form the instructional words "Pull Forward."

In the particular embodiment illustrated, four transversely extending rows of packages were carried by the container, and the bottom wall of the sleeve supported the two rearward rows. The sleeve could then be pulled forwardly after one of both of the two forward rows of packages had been removed. However, it will be understood that more or less of the transverse rows of packages can be supported by the bottom wall of the sleeve.

The sleeve can be made of paper, paperboard, plastic or other material which has sufficient strength to permit the packages to be pulled forwardly. The tab can be formed of paper, plastic, or other material having sufficient strength to pull the sleeve without breaking, and material which can be easily torn or cut after the tab has pulled the container forwardly is particularly suitable. The weight of the packages **27** hold the bottom wall of the sleeve flat, and the side walls tie the rear wall to the bottom wall and prevent the rear wall from folding or bending rearwardly as the tab is pulled forwardly.

For example, another preferred embodiment is to provide a sleeve that is a complete thin-paper wrap-around of the top, bottom, front and back sides of the back half of said case's contents while leaving the two opposite sides **23** and **24** completely missing. Being made of thin-paper, such a sleeve can be easily torn apart and slipped off its enclosed contents after said contents have been slid forward.

While in the foregoing specification, a detailed description of a specific embodiment of the invention was set forth for the purpose of illustration, it is to be understood that many of the details herein given may be varied considerably by those skilled in the art without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention.

I claim:

1. A container adaptable for displaying its contents on a retail store shelf comprising a shipping case dimensioned to fit onto the display shelf of grocery stores and having a bottom wall, a sleeve slidably supported on the bottom wall of the case whereby the contents of the case are moved as the sleeve is moved over the bottom wall, and a pull tab attached to the sleeve and lying flat along the bottom wall of the case and extending from the sleeve a sufficient distance so that it is covered by the contents of the case when the case is full but is visible when about one-quarter of the case's contents have been removed.

2. The container of claim **1** in which said sleeve is structured completely closed at its bottom and back, partially closed at its sides, completely open at its top and front, the front being the end at which the pull tab is fastened to the sleeve, and partially open at its sides.

3. The container of claim **2** in which the pull tab is provided with means for permitting successive portions of the pull tab to be removed as the sleeve is pulled forward incrementally.

4. A method of marketing individual packages of perishable food products comprising the steps of:

placing a carton containing a plurality of the food packages on a store shelf, the carton having a bottom wall and a sleeve slidably supported by the bottom wall, the sleeve being equipped with a pull tab extending over the bottom wall of the carton toward the front of the carton, and

after some of the packages have been removed from the carton moving the remaining packages forward by pulling the pull tab.

5. The method of claim **4** in which the remaining packages are pulled forward after about half of the packages have been removed.

6. The method of claim **4** in which the portion of the pull tab extending forwardly beyond the front of the

carton is removed after said remaining packages are pulled forward.

7. The method of claim **4** in which the remaining packages are pulled forward until the forwardmost remaining package is positioned at the front of the carton.

8. A combination shipping and display container for a plurality of stacked units arranged in rows, the container having top, bottom, front, rear, and opposite side walls, the top and front walls adapted to be removed when the container is used as a display container, a sleeve slidably supported by the bottom wall of the container, the sleeve having a bottom wall supported by the bottom wall of the container, a rear wall extending adjacent the rear wall of the container, and opposite side walls extending adjacent the side walls of the container, the bottom wall of the sleeve extending from the back wall of the container for only a portion of the length of the bottom wall of the container, and a pull tab secured to the bottom wall of the sleeve and extending over the bottom wall of the container toward the front wall.

9. The structure of claim **7** in which the pull tab is provided with means for permitting successive portions of the pull tab to be removed as the sleeve is pulled forward incrementally.

10. The structure of claim **8** in which the means for permitting portions of the pull tab to be torn off includes spaced-apart lines of weakness.

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