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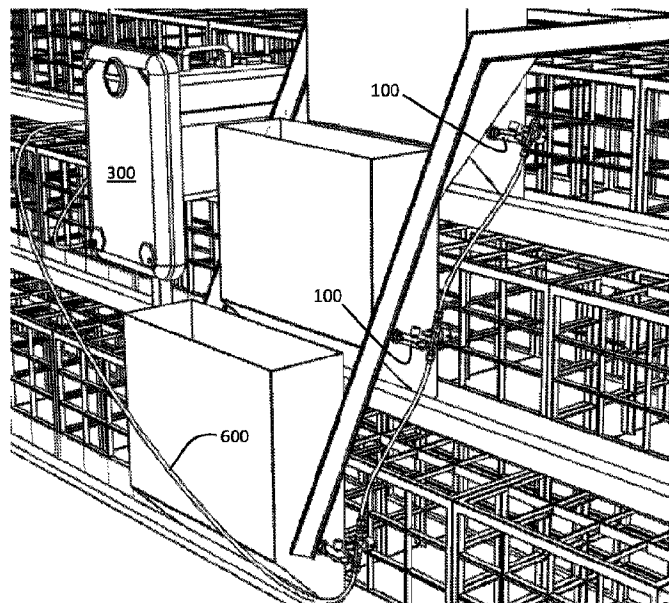
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(54) Title: AUTOMATED CAGED BIRD SPRAY APPLICATOR SYSTEM



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

The disclosure relates to a spray applicator system for accurately and precisely dosing liquid formulations, including vaccines and probiotic formulations, to caged avian animals. In particular, the disclosure relates to spray applicators, having improved acceptance by the avian animals, relative to more disruptive prior spray applicators. The disclosed automated caged spray applicator system is designed to attach to and function with automated poultry feeding systems, routinely used in poultry house settings.

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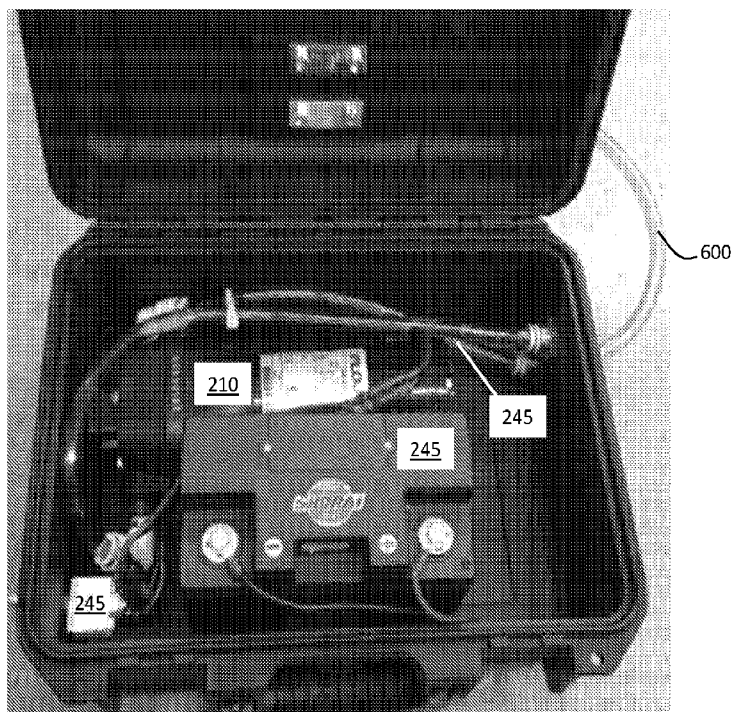


FIG. 8

(57) Abstract: The disclosure relates to a spray applicator system for accurately and precisely dosing liquid formulations, including vaccines and probiotic formulations, to caged avian animals. In particular, the disclosure relates to spray applicators, having improved acceptance by the avian animals, relative to more disruptive prior spray applicators. The disclosed automated caged spray applicator system is designed to attach to and function with automated poultry feeding systems, routinely used in poultry house settings.

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Automated Caged Bird Spray Applicator System

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The disclosure generally relates to spray applicators for dosing vaccines and/or administering probiotics to caged avian animals. In particular, the disclosure relates to spray applicators having improved acceptance by the avian animals, relative to more disruptive prior spray applicators. The disclosed automated caged spray applicator system is designed to attach to and function with automated poultry feeding systems.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Current spray application for caged birds requires the operator to either push a cart with an attached tank, or, carry a backpack tank filled with compositions, including vaccine compositions, and walk at a controlled speed to evenly distribute the compositions to the caged birds. Both methods rely on a “mast and nozzle system,” which distributes the nozzles in such a way that they are roughly aligned with each cage tier, to optimize the application of vaccine to each bird in the cage. These methods are not without significant drawbacks. For example, the operator must push the cart (or walk with the pack) at an optimum and consistent speed, both to ensure that the birds receive a full dose, and to minimize waste. As such, distribution, efficacy, and cost-effectiveness largely depend upon how quickly and consistently each person passes through a given poultry house, leading to significant and costly farm to farm variation.

Another drawback to current spray systems stems from the variation in poultry cage design. For example, some cages are not completely vertical, but are instead more pyramidal in shape. In this case, the vertical mast of the current sprayer systems is not optimally compatible, leading to waste and reduced vaccine efficacy. As a consequence of this incompatible geometry, the cages closer to the bottom are much closer to the spray nozzles, such that the cages on higher rows receive less vaccine than the cages on lower rows. Some of the cages at the highest levels

do not even receive vaccine, which becomes particularly problematic at new facilities having more than eight levels of cages. In addition, the birds often become frightened by the current systems, and move the rear of the cages, thus increasing waste and reducing effective vaccination. And while the cart system is workable, it is bulky and can become cumbersome and difficult to move between houses and farms that have stairs, doorways, rough surfaces, and the like. Finally, the space between cages where the cart must be pushed differs among houses/farms, and there are some farms where the path is not level.

Accordingly, there is a real need in the poultry industry for improved spray vaccinators, which do not suffer from the drawbacks mentioned above. The field requires a spray vaccinator for caged birds having improved efficacy and reduced waste.

ADVANTAGES

The automated caged bird spray applicator would be provided as a versatile kit, which can be attached to an automated caged bird feeding apparatus, and easily transported to and from the poultry houses. Such an automated system eliminates the variability inherent in the current “human-powered” caged bird spray vaccinators.

Further, since the birds are already accustomed to the automated feeder, and in fact, welcome its presence, the automated caged bird spray applicator will be far less likely to cause the birds to retreat to the back of the cages.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

An object of the current invention is to provide an automated caged bird spray applicator system for delivering compositions, including vaccine compositions, to caged avian animals. In particular, the disclosure relates to spray applicators having improved acceptance by the avian animals, relative to more disruptive prior art spray vaccinators. The disclosed automated caged spray applicator system is designed to attach to and function with automated feeding systems.

In an embodiment, the spray applicator system is provided as a compact portable system comprising nozzles, which mount directly onto an automated feeder system via industrial grade magnets and adjustable nozzle retaining means, including holders, for optimum spray coverage. The movement of the feeder system along the rows of cages provides consistent spray application and dosage by controlled speed of travel.

In an embodiment, nozzles may be positioned in optimal proximity and direction, with respect to the birds, irrespective of the placement, orientation, or arrangement of the cages.

In a particular embodiment, birds that have moved to front of the cage to feed will now be vaccinated at the same time, thereby increasing the likelihood that a given bird will receive an effective dose of vaccine.

In one embodiment of the spray applicator system, the system comprises a composition-containing bag or reservoir, a pump, a battery, a pressure regulator, a pressure gauge, a battery meter, nozzles, means for securing / attaching nozzles to an automated feeder system, and all necessary tubing for carrying fluid from the composition-containing bag to the pump and from the pump to the spray nozzle. The system may include a portable case, which may house, contain or store all the above-recited system components. The nozzle securing means may comprise a pivot arm, to provide a full range of motion to accommodate various mounting angles. The nozzle securing means may comprise a strong magnet, operably connected to the nozzle.

In another embodiment, the composition bag may be reversibly attached and/or suspended from the automated feeder. The nozzles may be placed at appropriate positions along the feeder such that vaccine is optimally directed toward the birds.

In still another embodiment, there is provided an automated caged bird spray applicator system, configured to deliver to an avian animal in need thereof a safe and effective amount of a liquid formulation selected from an immunological formulation, a vaccine formulation, an antibiotic formulation, an antifungal formulation, an anticoccidial formulation, a probiotic or prebiotic formulation, a feed additive formulation and combinations thereof; wherein the automated caged bird spray applicator system comprises: a. a plurality of nozzle assemblies, fluidly connected to one another; each nozzle assembly comprises: a first pivot ball connected to a pivot arm clamp to allow a nozzle to be positioned in a plurality of directions; a second pivot ball connected to the pivot arm clamp and to a nozzle assembly base, the nozzle assembly base comprises a permanent magnet which is detachable from a metal surface of an automatic poultry feeder system; b. a portable pump system comprising a pump, which is fluidly connected to the nozzle assemblies and to a supply of the liquid formulation; and c. a portable backpack system, which comprises a tank for holding the supply of the liquid formulation, which tank is fluidly connected to the portable pump system; wherein system components a, b, and c are configured to be detachable from the automatic poultry feeder system, the automatic poultry feeder system

comprises a food trolley that moves along a track, the food trolley comprises the metal surface for coupling with each permanent magnet of a nozzle assembly.

In yet another embodiment, there is provided a method of vaccinating caged avian animals against respiratory pathogens, comprising the steps of: a. providing the spray applicator system as described herein; b. attaching the spray applicator system to the automatic poultry feeder system comprising the food trolley; c. directing the nozzles of the spray applicator system in a direction that will effectively deliver the liquid formulation to the caged avians, wherein the liquid formulation is delivered in the form of a spray of sub-micron-sized droplets and wherein the liquid formulation comprises a vaccine; d. starting the spray applicator system while the food trolley moves along the track; and e. adjusting a pressure of the spray applicator system to accurately deliver to the avian animal an effective amount of vaccine while the food trolley moves along the track, thereby vaccinating the avian animal.

In a further embodiment, there is provided an automated caged bird spray applicator system, configured to deliver to an avian animal in need thereof a safe and effective amount of a liquid formulation, wherein the automated caged bird spray applicator system comprises: an automatic poultry feeder system, the automatic poultry feeder system comprising a food trolley that moves along a track, the food trolley comprises a metal portion; (i) a plurality of nozzle assemblies, fluidly connected to one another; each nozzle assembly comprises: a first pivot ball connected to a pivot arm clamp to allow a nozzle coupled to the pivot arm clamp to be positioned in a plurality of directions; a second pivot ball connected to the pivot arm clamp and to a nozzle assembly base, the nozzle assembly base comprises a permanent magnet which is detachable from the metal portion of the food trolley of the automatic poultry feeder system; (ii) a portable pump system comprising a pump, which is fluidly connected to the nozzle assemblies and to a supply of the liquid formulation; and wherein system components (i) & (ii) are configured to be detachable from the automatic poultry feeder system.

In still a further embodiment, there is provided a method of vaccinating caged avian animals against respiratory pathogens, comprising the steps of: providing an automatic poultry feeder system, the automatic poultry feeder system comprising a food trolley that moves along a track, the food trolley comprises a metal portion; providing a plurality of nozzle assemblies, fluidly connected to one another; for each nozzle assembly, providing a first pivot ball connected to a pivot arm clamp to allow a nozzle coupled to the pivot arm clamp to be positioned in a plurality of directions; for each nozzle assembly, providing a second pivot ball connected to the

pivot arm clamp and to a nozzle assembly base; for each nozzle assembly base, providing a permanent magnet which is detachable from the metal portion of the food trolley of the automatic poultry feeder system; providing a portable pump system comprising a pump, which is fluidly connected to the nozzle assemblies and to a supply of a liquid formulation; directing each
5 nozzle assembly in a direction that will effectively deliver the liquid formulation to the caged avian animals, wherein the liquid formulation is delivered in the form of a spray of sub-micron-sized droplets; starting the spray applicator system while the food trolley moves along the track; and adjusting a pressure of the nozzle assemblies to accurately deliver to the caged avian animals an effective amount of the liquid formulation while the food trolley moves along the track.

10 **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS**

A full and enabling disclosure of the present invention, including the best mode thereof, to one of ordinary skill in the art, is set forth more particularly in the remainder of the specification, including reference to the accompanying figures, wherein:

FIG. 1 shows components of an automated caged bird spray applicator system 1 in
15 accordance with this disclosure, comprising: a plurality of nozzle assemblies 100, a portable pump system 200, and a portable backpack system 300.

FIG. 2 shows multiple views of a nozzle assembly 100: side (A); top (B); bottom (C); side/front, showing the portion of the nozzle assembly comprising the nozzle (D); and side/back, showing the portion of the nozzle assembly comprising a magnet (E).

20 FIG. 3 shows multiple views of the portable pump system: front (A); back (B); front/side (C); and side/front (D).

FIG. 4 shows multiple views of the portable backpack system **300**: side facing away from wearer (A); side/angled viewing emphasizing the means for connecting conduits that transfer fluid from the pump system (B).

FIG. 5 shows a spray applicator system **1** of the disclosure reversibly attached to an automated poultry feeding apparatus **400**.

FIG. 6 shows another view of the spray applicator system.

FIG. 7 shows another view of the spray applicator system.

FIG. 8 shows the portable pump system in an open position, showing a pump **210**, a battery **240**, an on/off switch **245**, and internal conduits **610**.

FIG. 9 shows the portable pump system **200** in an open position, and loaded with a plurality of nozzle assemblies **100** and external conduits **600**.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to an automated caged bird spray applicator system, which is adapted to work with automated poultry house feeding systems, also known as feed trolleys.

In an embodiment, the disclosure provides an automated caged bird spray applicator system comprising a composition reservoir in the form of a back pack, along with a hand-held case which houses a pump, a regulator, a pressure gauge, a battery, a battery level indicator, an on/off switch and necessary plumbing. The case may also serve as a storage and transportation unit for the nozzles and associated plumbing/tubing.

In a second aspect, the disclosure provides a method for using the spray applicator system. In an embodiment, a system operator places the backpack directly on a preexisting automated poultry feeder system. The backpack reservoir may be filled with vaccine or other compositions, including probiotic compositions, prior to being carried to the house or filled after the bag is reversibly affixed to the feeder system.

In another embodiment, the operator opens the hand-held case, removes the nozzle assemblies and magnetically mounts said nozzle assemblies in appropriate locations of the feeder system, such that the direction of the nozzles may be adjusted to optimally deliver vaccine to the birds. Adjustment of the nozzles may be accomplished by moving the multi-positioning arm of

said nozzle assembly and locking it into a position. The skilled person using the disclosed spray applicator will understand how to position and direct the nozzle to maximize the amount of vaccine, or other composition, including a probiotic formulations, that is delivered to the birds.

In one embodiment, the nozzles are positioned such that they spray vaccine directly at each cage as the feeder moves along rows of cages. In this position, the nozzles will optimally deliver vaccine whether the birds are feeding from the feed track, or whether the birds are in the rearmost portion of the cage. Wherever the birds are in their cages, the nozzles effectively deliver composition to the key target areas of the birds: the eyes, nostrils and mouths.

Once the nozzles are positioned on the feeder, optimally directed toward the cages, and locked into position, the operator may engage the feeder system and activate the spray applicator system. In an embodiment, the operator may adjust the pressure according to the speed of the feeder. As the feeder moves along the track, the birds move toward the front of the cage to feed by a learned habit known as memory trace. In in a particular embodiment, the birds are simultaneously sprayed in the target areas by the optimally-positioned nozzles, delivering and optimally amount of vaccine or other composition per unit time.

The Automated Caged Bird Spray Applicator is ideally suited for cage systems that use automatic feeders or trolleys. It provides for optimal spray nozzle placement and for precise dosage regulation. There is currently no other such device on the market.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Referring now in more detail to the drawings, in which like numerals indicate like parts throughout the several views, FIG. 1 illustrates an automated caged bird spray applicator system 1 according to the instant disclosure. The system may comprise: a plurality of nozzle assemblies 100, a portable pump system 200, and a portable backpack system 300. Any suitable conduits 600 may be employed to connect the components of the spray applicator system, including, but not limited to flexible hoses and tubing.

FIG. 2 provides an expanded view of a nozzle assembly 100 according to the instant disclosure. Views shown include side (A); top (B); bottom (C); side/front, showing the portion of the nozzle assembly comprising the nozzle (D); and side/back, showing the portion of the nozzle assembly 100 comprising a magnet (E). The components of the nozzle assembly 100 are

operably connected to one another as depicted in the several views of FIG. 2, and comprise the following: a nozzle **110**; a nozzle holder **101**; a quick connect tubing connector **102** for receiving a vaccine supply conduit; a stud **103** for mounting the nozzle body **111** to a nozzle mount **115**; two pivot balls **104**, **116**, each pivot ball connected to a stem **107**, **117**, respectively, and, each
5 pivot ball **104**, **116** configured to be reversibly locked into place by a pivot arm clamp **106**; a screw cap **105** and a screw anchor **108**, operatively connected to one another to allow for tightening and loosening of the pivot arm clamp **106** around the two pivot balls **104**, **116**; a nozzle body **111**; and, optionally a wing/ear molded portion the nozzle holder **112**.

As indicated in FIGs. 2A to 2E, the nozzle body **111** is operably connected to the first
10 pivot ball **104** via insertion of stud **103** into an orifice of nozzle body mount **115** and attachment of nozzle body mount **115** to pivot ball mount **109**. On the portion of the nozzle assembly **100** farthest away from the nozzle **120**, the second pivot ball **116** is connected to a nozzle assembly base **119** via stem **117** and support **118**. The base **119** may contain a permanent magnet, for reversible attachment of the nozzle assembly **100** to a suitable metal surface or frame, including
15 to an automatic poultry feeder apparatus **400**. Accordingly, clamp **106** forms a bridge between the first pivot ball **104** and the second pivot ball **116**, such that the reversible tightening or loosening of the clamp **106**, by the combined actuation of the screw cap **105** and the screw anchor **108**, allows the nozzle **120** to be reversibly locked into a plurality of possible positions. This feature advantageously provides a user with the ability to precisely control the direction of
20 the spray, to accommodate variations in automated poultry feeders and poultry cage configurations.

Now that this disclosure has been made, the skilled person will appreciate many routine variations to the nozzle assembly **100**. For example, instead of two pivot balls **104**, **116** reversibly lockable by the action of clamp **106**, screw cap **105** and screw anchor **108**, nozzle
25 body **111** could be attached to nozzle assembly base **119** via reversibly lockable hinges or other suitable reversible locking means. Other functional equivalents are envisioned, provided that their structures allow for the nozzle to be positioned in a plurality of directions, to deliver the spray of liquid formulation to a desired locations.

The spray applicator system also comprises a portable pump system **200**. A
30 representative example of the pump is shown in FIG. 3, and as indicated by the multiple views,

the components are operably connected to one another, and may comprise the following: a pressure gauge **201**; outlet fittings **202** that allow for operable connection to a conduit **600** (see FIGs. 5 to 7), which conduit provides fluid communication between the nozzle assemblies **100** and the pump system **200**; shut-off valves **203**; a pressure regulator **204**; a recirculation outlet **205**; a recirculation inlet **212**; an outlet **206** from pump **210** inside the portable pump system **200**; strapping guide slots **207** for attachment to mounting straps; a carrying handle **208**; and an enclosure clasp means **209** for keeping the pump system closed.

Moreover, the spray applicator system comprises a portable backpack system **300** comprising a tank/reservoir **310**. As illustrated in FIGs. 4A and 4B, the backpack comprises a side configured to face away from a wearer or apparatus upon which the backpack is mounted, which comprises connecting means **303**, **304**, for connecting to conduits that transfer fluid from the tank **310** to the pump system **200**. The tank **310** may be made of any suitable material, including flexible or rigid plastic materials, and may be filled with a wide variety of compositions, including vaccine and probiotic compositions.

In some embodiments, the components of the portable backpack system **300** are operably connected to one another as shown in FIGs. 4A and 4B, and comprise: strapping points **301** for attaching the tank **310** to mounting straps; a wide mouth lid **302** for convenient filling of the tank **310**; a circulation return inlet quick connect **303**; and a quick-connect outlet **304** for providing for fluid communication to the pump **210**. The mounting straps allow the tank system to be reversibly attached to a human wearer or an apparatus, such as an automated poultry food trolley.

In some embodiments, the entire spray applicator system **1** may be reversibly installed on an automated poultry feeder **400** as shown in FIGs. 5 to 7. In particular embodiments, such as the one depicted in FIG. 6 and 7, the spray applicator system is affixed to a three (3) tier cage automated poultry feeding trolley. The portable pump system **200** and backpack system **300** may be suspended from the feeder **400** as depicted in FIGs. 6 and 7, or, from any other suitable location. Moreover, the nozzle assemblies **100** may be positioned as shown or at any other suitable locations. Routinely, an operator of the spray applicator system **1** will position the nozzle assemblies **100** to optimize the delivery of vaccine and/or probiotic formulations to the poultry, which are housed within cages **500**. Suitable conduits **600** provide for fluid

communication between the backpack **300** and pump **210**; and, between the pump **210** and nozzle assemblies **100**.

In some embodiments, the spray applicator system may be used according to the following steps:

5 1) filling the tank **310** via tank opening **315** with liquid formulations, including vaccine and probiotic formulations;

 2) fluidly connecting the tank **310** to the portable pump system **200** by connecting a conduit from connecting means **304** to pump inlet **206**;

10 3) fluidly connecting the pump system **200** to the nozzle assemblies **100** by connecting a conduit **600** from pump outlet **206** to nozzle assemblies **100**;

 4) mounting the portable pump system **200**, the backpack assembly **300** and the nozzle assemblies **100** to an automated poultry feeding apparatus **400**;

 5) adjusting the pump **210** pressure to provide a formulation flow rate that is appropriate for the speed of the feeding apparatus;

15 6) allowing the feeding apparatus to move along the tiers of caged birds; and

 7) switching the pump system **200** from a recirculation mode to a dispense mode, wherein when the pump system **200** is in the dispense mode, the formulation flows from the pump system **200**, through the outlet **206**, through conduit **600**, and finally out of the nozzle assemblies **100**. The foregoing steps may be completed in any reasonable order.

20 In some embodiments, the invention provides an automated caged bird spray applicator system **1**, configured to deliver to an avian animal in need thereof a safe and effective amount of a liquid formulation. The liquid formulation may include any formulation required to be delivered to avian animals in the form of a spray of droplets. In particular embodiments, the droplets are less than about 1,000 nanometers (nm) in diameter. In other embodiments, the
25 droplets may be less than about 900 nm, less than about 800 nm, less than about 700 nm, less than about 600 nm, less than about 500 nm, less than about 400 nm, less than about 300 nm, or less than about 200 nm. The skilled person will appreciate that any desired droplet size may be obtained through the routine variation of pressure and/or nozzle type.

In some embodiments, the liquid formulation may be selected from an immunological formulation, a vaccine formulation, an antibiotic formulation, an antifungal formulation, an anticoccidial formulation, a probiotic or prebiotic formulation, a feed additive formulation and combinations thereof.

5 In some embodiments, the spray applicator comprises:

- a. a plurality of nozzle assemblies **100**, fluidly connected to one another and to a pump **210**;
- b. a portable pump system **200** comprising a pump **210**, which is fluidly connected to the nozzle assemblies **100** and to a supply of the liquid formulation; and
- 10 c. a portable backpack system, which comprises a tank for holding the supply of the liquid formulation **320**, which tank **310** is fluidly connected to the pump;
wherein system components a, b, and c are configured to be reversibly attachable to an automated poultry feeder system.

15 In some embodiments of the spray applicator system **1**, each nozzle assembly **100** comprises the following:

- a. a nozzle holder **101** (including a quick-release nozzle holder), for holding a nozzle **120**, and configured to be reversibly attachable to a nozzle body **111**;
- b. a quick connect tubing connector **102** for connecting to a liquid formulation supply line conduit **600**, which connector **102** is either contiguously molded as part of the
20 nozzle body **111**, or, is configured to be reversibly attachable to the nozzle body **111**;
- c. a stud **103** for mounting the nozzle body to a nozzle body mount **115**, wherein the stud **103** is either contiguously molded as part of the nozzle body **111**, or, is configured to reversibly attach to the nozzle body **111**;
- d. two pivot balls **104**, **116**:
 - 25 i. the first pivot ball **104** configured to be operably connected to a pivot ball mount **109**, and, configured to function together with a clamp **106**, to allow the nozzle **120** to be positioned in a plurality of directions;
 - ii. the second pivot ball **116** configured to be operably connected to a support **118**, and, configured to function together with the clamp **106**, to allow the nozzle **120**
30 to be positioned in a plurality of directions; and,

wherein the support **118** is configured to connect to a nozzle assembly base **119**, which base is configured to reversibly attach to an automatic poultry feeder (for example, by the further attachment to the base **119** of a permanent magnet);

- e. a screw cap **105**, configured to reversibly engage with a screw anchor **108**, to loosen or tighten a pivot arm clamp **106** around the first pivot ball **104** and second pivot ball **116**, wherein the reversible loosening or tightening allows a user to lock the nozzle assembly **100** such that the nozzle **120** points in a desired direction;
- f. a pivot arm clamp **106**, configured to clamp around the first and second pivot balls when the screw cap and the screw anchor are sufficiently tightened;
- g. two pivot ball stems **107**, **117**, the first stem **107** configured to connect the first pivot ball **104** to the pivot ball mount **109**; and, the second stem **117** configured to connect the second pivot ball to the support **118**, which support connects the stem **117** to the nozzle assembly base **119**;
- h. a screw anchor **108**, configured to reversibly engage with the screw cap **105**; and
- i. optionally, a wing/ear molded portion **112** of the nozzle holder **101**.

In some embodiments of the spray applicator system **1**, the portable pump system **200** comprises:

- a. a pump **210**;
- b. a pressure gauge **201**, which indicates the pressure of the liquid formulation;
- c. outlet fittings, which allow for operable connection to conduit **600**, which provides for fluid communication between the nozzle assemblies **100** and the pump system **200**;
- d. shut-off valves **203**;
- e. a pressure regulator **204**, for regulating the pressure of the liquid formulation;
- f. a recirculation outlet **205**, which provides for recirculation of the liquid formulation when the system **1** is not delivering liquid formulation to the nozzle assemblies **100**;
- g. an inlet **206** from the pump **210** contained within the portable pump system **200**;
- h. strapping guide slots **207** for attachment to mounting straps; a carrying handle **208**; and an enclosure clasp **209** for keeping the pump system closed;

- i. a power supply, for supplying power to the pump.

In some embodiments, the spray applicator system comprises:

- a. a pump system **200** comprising: a pressure gauge **201**; outlet fittings **202** that allow for operable connection to a conduit **600**, which provides for fluid communication between the nozzle assemblies **100** and the pump system **200**; shut-off valves **203**; a pressure regulator **204**; a recirculation outlet **205**; an inlet **206** from pump **210** inside the pump system; strapping guide slots **207** for attachment to mounting straps; a carrying handle **208**; and an enclosure clasp **209** for keeping the pump system closed; and
- b. a plurality of nozzle assemblies **100**, each assembly comprising: a nozzle holder **101**; a tubing connector **102** (including a quick-release connector); a stud **103** for mounting the nozzle body **111** to a mount **115**; two pivot balls **104**, **116**: the first pivot ball **104** configured to be operably connected to a pivot ball mount **109**, and, configured to function together with a clamp **106**, to allow the nozzle **120** to be positioned in a plurality of directions; the second pivot ball **116** configured to be operably connected to a support **118**, and, configured to function together with the clamp **106**, to allow the nozzle **120** to be positioned in a plurality of directions; wherein the support **118** is configured to connect to a nozzle assembly base **119**, which base is configured to reversibly attach to an automatic poultry feeder; and wherein the nozzle holder **101** optionally comprises a wing/ear molded portion **112**.

In some embodiments, the spray applicator system **1** is installed on an automated poultry feeder **400**.

In all of the embodiments, any connector may be of the “quick-connect” variety. Moreover, any depicted connector may be replaced with any suitable connecting means (e.g. threaded connector, quick-connect, snap-connect, and the like).

In another aspect, the invention provides a nozzle assembly **100** for use with the spray applicator system **1**, comprising:

- a. a nozzle holder **101**, for holding a nozzle **120**, and configured to be reversibly attachable to a nozzle body **111**;

- b. a quick connect tubing connector **102** for receiving a conduit that is fluidly connected to a supply of liquid formulation (for example, via its fluid communication with a pump **210**, which pump **210** is in fluid communication with the liquid formulation supply), wherein the connector **102** is either contiguously molded as part of the nozzle body **111**, or, is configured to reversibly attach to the nozzle body **111**;
- c. a stud (including a threaded stud) **103** for mounting the nozzle body **111** to a nozzle body mount **115**, wherein the stud **103** is either contiguously molded as part of the nozzle body **111**, or, is configured to reversibly attach to the nozzle body **111**;
- d. two pivot balls **104**, **116**:
- i. the first pivot ball **104** configured to be operably connected to a pivot ball mount **109**, and, configured to function together with a clamp **106**, to allow the nozzle **120** to be positioned in a plurality of directions;
- ii. the second pivot ball **116** configured to be operably connected to a support **118**, and, configured to function together with the clamp **106**, to allow the nozzle **120** to be positioned in a plurality of directions; and,
- wherein the support **118** is configured to connect to a nozzle assembly base **119**, which base is configured to reversibly attach to an automatic poultry feeder (for example, by the further attachment to the base **119** of a permanent magnet);
- e. a screw cap **105**, configured to reversibly engage with a screw anchor **108** to loosen or tighten a pivot arm clamp **106** around the first pivot ball **104** and second pivot ball **116**, wherein the reversible loosening or tightening allows a user to lock the nozzle **120** into a desired position/orientation;
- f. a pivot arm clamp **106**, configured to clamp **106** around the first pivot ball **104** and the second pivot ball **116** when the screw cap **106** and the screw anchor **108** are engaged;
- g. two pivot ball stems, the first stem **107** configured to connect the first pivot ball **104** to the nozzle-side pivot ball mount **109**, which mount is configured to connect to the nozzle body mount **115**, and the second stem **117** configured to connect the second pivot ball **116** to a support **118**, which support is configured to connect to the nozzle assembly base **119**;
- h. a screw anchor **108**, configured to reversibly engage with the screw cap **106**; and

- i. optionally, a wing/ear molded portion **112** of the nozzle holder **101**.

In another aspect, the invention provides a portable pump system **200** for use with a spray applicator system **1**, comprising:

- a. a pump **210**, in fluid communication with a liquid formulation supply **320** and at least one nozzle assembly **100**, and operable to pump liquid formulation from the supply **320** to the nozzle assembly **100**;
- b. a pressure gauge **201**, in fluid communication with the pump **210**, and configured to indicate the pressure of the liquid formulation;
- c. outlet fittings **202** that allow for operable connection to a conduit, which provides for fluid communication between the nozzle assembly **100** and the pump system **200**;
- d. shut-off valves **203**, operable to reversibly interrupt the flow of liquid formulation;
- e. a pressure regulator **204**, operable to regulate the pressure of the liquid formulation;
- f. a recirculation outlet **205**, which provides for recirculation of the liquid formulation;
- g. an inlet **206** configured to be in fluid communication with the liquid formulation supply, to allow the formulation to flow into the pump **210**;
- h. strapping guide slots **207** for attachment to mounting straps;
- i. a carrying handle **208**; and
- j. an enclosure clasp **209** for keeping the pump system closed.

In another aspect, the invention provides a portable backpack system **300** for use with a spray applicator system **1**, comprising:

- a. a means for connecting conduits **600** that transfer liquid formulation to the pump system **200**;
- b. strapping points **301** for mounting the backpack system **300** to a poultry feeder **400**;
- c. a wide mouth lid **302** for receiving the liquid formulation;
- d. a circulation return inlet connect **303**; and
- e. an outlet **304** for providing fluid communication to the pump system **200**.

In yet another aspect, the invention provides a method of applying a spray of liquid formulations, including vaccine and probiotic formulations, to caged avian animals, comprising the steps of:

- a. providing the spray applicator system of claim **1**;

- b. attaching the system to an automated poultry feeder **400**;
- c. directing the nozzles **120** in a direction that will effectively deliver liquid formulation to the caged avians, wherein the liquid formulation is delivered in the form of a spray of sub-micron-sized droplets;
- 5 d. starting the spray applicator system **1**; and
- e. adjusting the pressure to precisely and accurately deliver to the avians an effective amount of liquid formulation, thereby applying the liquid formulation to the avians.

10 In some embodiments of the method, the pressure adjustment is made to optimize the accuracy and precision of liquid formulation application or administration, and is based upon the speed of the automated feeder.

In some embodiments, the pressure is increased for relatively faster automated feeders, and decreased for relatively slower automated feeders.

In some embodiments, the pressure automatically adjusts based upon the speed of the automated feeder.

15 In other embodiments, when the poultry feeder comes to a stop, the liquid formulation is automatically switched from delivering to the nozzles (i.e. dispensing/application mode) to recirculating (i.e. recirculation mode).

* * *

The invention will now be recited in the following non-limiting claims.

CLAIMS:

1. An automated caged bird spray applicator system, configured to deliver to an avian animal in need thereof a safe and effective amount of a liquid formulation selected from an immunological
5 formulation, a vaccine formulation, an antibiotic formulation, an antifungal formulation, an anticoccidial formulation, a probiotic or prebiotic formulation, a feed additive formulation and combinations thereof; wherein the automated caged bird spray applicator system comprises:
 - a. a plurality of nozzle assemblies, fluidly connected to one another;
each nozzle assembly comprises:
 - 10 a first pivot ball connected to a pivot arm clamp to allow a nozzle to be positioned in a plurality of directions;
 - a second pivot ball connected to the pivot arm clamp and to a nozzle assembly base, the nozzle assembly base comprises a permanent magnet which is detachable from a metal surface of an automatic poultry feeder system;
 - 15 b. a portable pump system comprising a pump, which is fluidly connected to the nozzle assemblies and to a supply of the liquid formulation; and
 - c. a portable backpack system, which comprises a tank for holding the supply of the liquid formulation, which tank is fluidly connected to the portable pump system;
- wherein system components a, b, and c are configured to be detachable from the automatic
20 poultry feeder system, the automatic poultry feeder system comprises a food trolley that moves along a track, the food trolley comprises the metal surface for coupling with each permanent magnet of a nozzle assembly.
2. The spray applicator system of claim 1, wherein each nozzle assembly comprises:
 - 25 a. a nozzle holder, for holding a nozzle, and configured to be detachable from a nozzle body;
 - b. a quick connect tubing connector for connecting to a liquid formulation supply line conduit, which connector is either contiguously molded as part of the nozzle body, or, is configured to be detachable from the nozzle body;
 - 30 c. a stud for mounting the nozzle body to a nozzle body mount;
 - d. a screw cap, configured to reversibly engage with a screw anchor to loosen or tighten the pivot arm clamp around the first pivot ball and second pivot ball, wherein the reversible

loosening or tightening allows a user to lock the nozzle assembly such that the nozzle points in a desired direction;

e. the pivot arm clamp, configured to clamp around the first and second pivot balls when the screw cap and the screw anchor are sufficiently tightened; and

5 f. two pivot ball stems, the first stem configured to connect the first pivot ball to the pivot ball clamp; and, the second stem configured to connect the second pivot ball to the pivot ball clamp.

3. The spray applicator system of claim 1, wherein the portable pump system comprises:

10 a. a pressure gauge;

b. outlet fittings, which allow for operable connection to a conduit, which provides for fluid communication between the nozzle assemblies and the pump system;

c. shut-off valves; and

d. a pressure regulator.

15

4. The spray applicator system of claim 3, wherein the portable pump system further comprises:

a recirculation outlet;

an inlet from pump inside;

20 strapping guide slots for attachment to mounting straps;

a carrying handle; and

an enclosure clasp for keeping the pump system closed.

5. The spray applicator system of claim 1, wherein the portable backpack system further comprises:

25

a. a means for connecting conduits that transfer fluid to the portable pump system;

b. strapping points for mounting the backpack to the automatic poultry feeder system;

c. a wide mouth lid for receiving a liquid formulation;

d. a circulation return inlet quick connect; and

30 e. an outlet for providing fluid communication to the portable pump system.

6. A method of vaccinating caged avian animals against respiratory pathogens, comprising the steps of:

- a. providing the spray applicator system of claim 1;
 - b. attaching the spray applicator system to the automatic poultry feeder system comprising the food trolley;
 - c. directing the nozzles of the spray applicator system in a direction that will effectively
 - 5 deliver the liquid formulation to the caged avians, wherein the liquid formulation is delivered in the form of a spray of sub-micron-sized droplets and wherein the liquid formulation comprises a vaccine;
 - d. starting the spray applicator system while the food trolley moves along the track; and
 - e. adjusting a pressure of the spray applicator system to accurately deliver to the avian
 - 10 animal an effective amount of vaccine while the food trolley moves along the track, thereby vaccinating the avian animal.
7. The method of claim 6, wherein adjusting the pressure of the spray applicator system is made to optimize the accuracy and precision of vaccine administration, and is based upon the
- 15 speed of movement of the automatic poultry feeder system along the track.
8. The method of claim 6, wherein the pressure is increased for relatively faster automatic poultry feeder systems, and decreased for relatively slower automatic poultry feeder systems.
- 20 9. The method of claim 6, wherein the pressure is automatically adjusted based upon the speed of movement of the automatic poultry feeder system along the track.
10. An automated caged bird spray applicator system, configured to deliver to an avian animal in need thereof a safe and effective amount of a liquid formulation, wherein the automated caged
- 25 bird spray applicator system comprises:
- an automatic poultry feeder system, the automatic poultry feeder system comprising a food trolley that moves along a track, the food trolley comprises a metal portion;
 - (i) a plurality of nozzle assemblies, fluidly connected to one another;
 - each nozzle assembly comprises:
 - 30 a first pivot ball connected to a pivot arm clamp to allow a nozzle coupled to the pivot arm clamp to be positioned in a plurality of directions;

- a second pivot ball connected to the pivot arm clamp and to a nozzle assembly base, the nozzle assembly base comprises a permanent magnet which is detachable from the metal portion of the food trolley of the automatic poultry feeder system;
- (ii) a portable pump system comprising a pump, which is fluidly connected to the nozzle assemblies and to a supply of the liquid formulation; and
- wherein system components (i) & (ii) are configured to be detachable from the automatic poultry feeder system.
11. The spray applicator system of claim 10, further comprising a portable backpack system, which comprises a tank for holding the supply of the liquid formulation, which tank is fluidly connected to the portable pump system.
12. The spray applicator system of claim 10, wherein the liquid formulation is selected from an immunological formulation, a vaccine formulation, an antibiotic formulation, an antifungal formulation, an anticoccidial formulation, a probiotic or prebiotic formulation, a feed additive formulation and combinations thereof.
13. The spray applicator system of claim 1, wherein each nozzle assembly comprises:
a nozzle holder, for holding a nozzle and detachable from a nozzle body;
a quick connect tubing connector for connecting to a liquid formulation supply line conduit, which connector is either contiguously molded as part of the nozzle body, or, is configured to be detachable from the nozzle body; and
a stud for mounting the nozzle body to a nozzle body mount.
14. The spray applicator system of claim 13, wherein the portable pump system comprises:
a pressure gauge;
outlet fittings, which allow for operable connection to a conduit, which provides for fluid communication between the nozzle assemblies and the pump system;
shut-off valves; and
a pressure regulator.
15. A method of vaccinating caged avian animals against respiratory pathogens, comprising the steps of:

providing an automatic poultry feeder system, the automatic poultry feeder system comprising a food trolley that moves along a track, the food trolley comprises a metal portion;

providing a plurality of nozzle assemblies, fluidly connected to one another;

for each nozzle assembly, providing a first pivot ball connected to a pivot arm clamp to
5 allow a nozzle coupled to the pivot arm clamp to be positioned in a plurality of directions;

for each nozzle assembly, providing a second pivot ball connected to the pivot arm clamp and to a nozzle assembly base;

for each nozzle assembly base, providing a permanent magnet which is detachable from the metal portion of the food trolley of the automatic poultry feeder system;

10 providing a portable pump system comprising a pump, which is fluidly connected to the nozzle assemblies and to a supply of a liquid formulation;

directing each nozzle assembly in a direction that will effectively deliver the liquid formulation to the caged avian animals, wherein the liquid formulation is delivered in the form of a spray of sub-micron-sized droplets;

15 starting the spray applicator system while the food trolley moves along the track; and

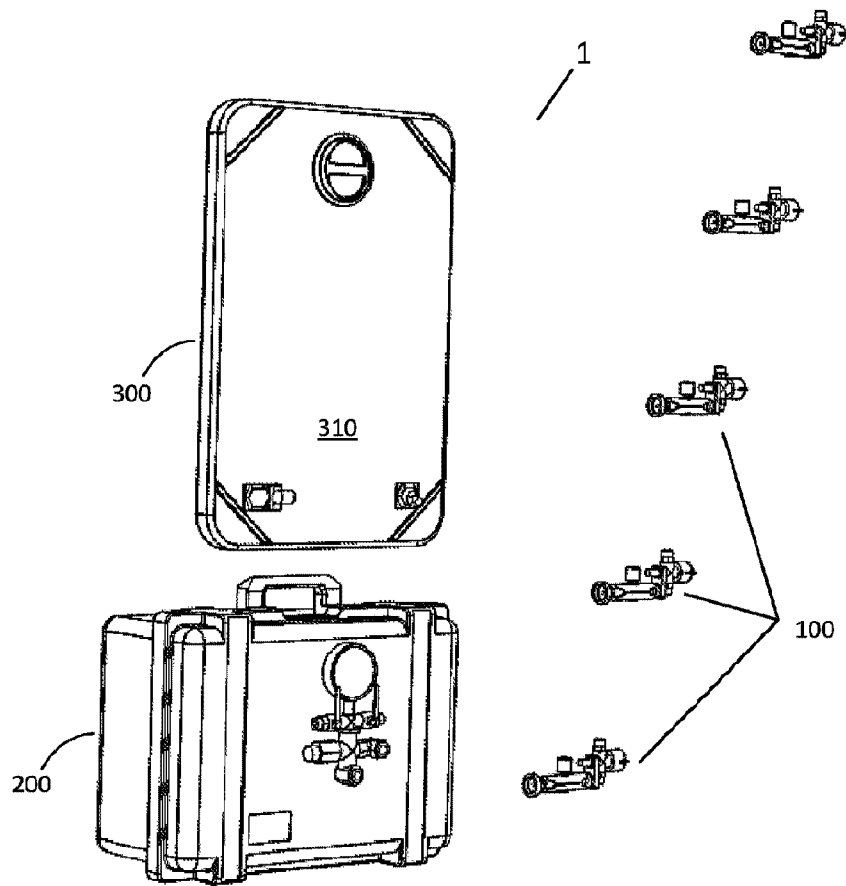
adjusting a pressure of the nozzle assemblies to accurately deliver to the caged avian animals an effective amount of the liquid formulation while the food trolley moves along the track.

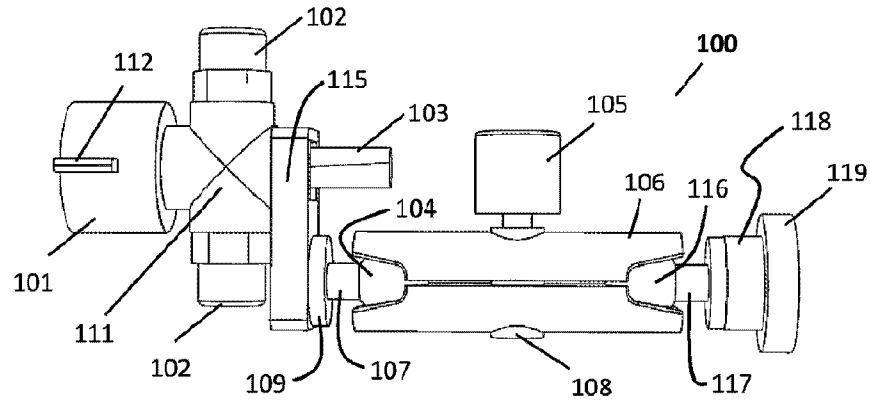
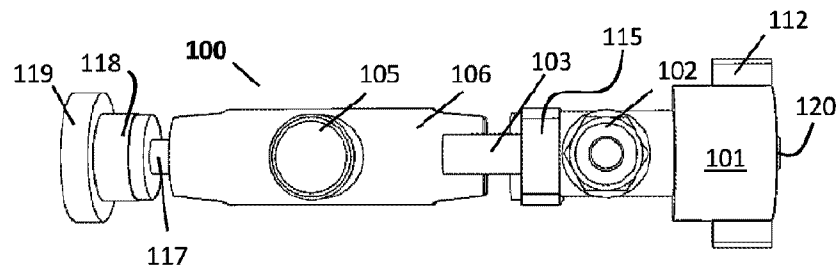
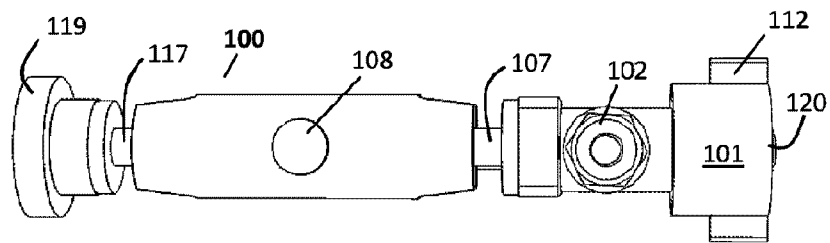
16. The method of claim 15, wherein the liquid formulation comprises a vaccine.
20

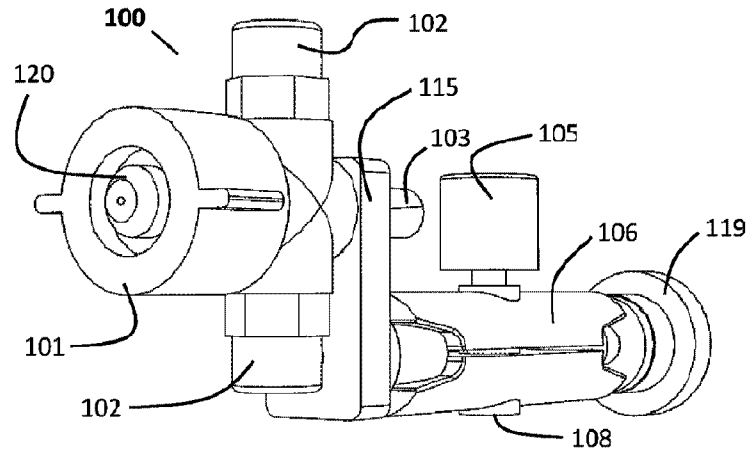
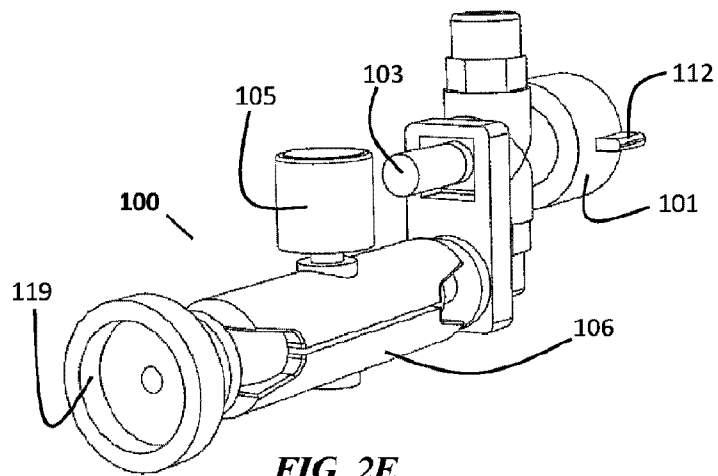
17. The method of claim 16, wherein the liquid formulation further comprises at least one of: an immunological formulation, an antibiotic formulation, an antifungal formulation, an anticoccidial formulation, a probiotic or prebiotic formulation, a feed additive formulation, and any combination thereof.

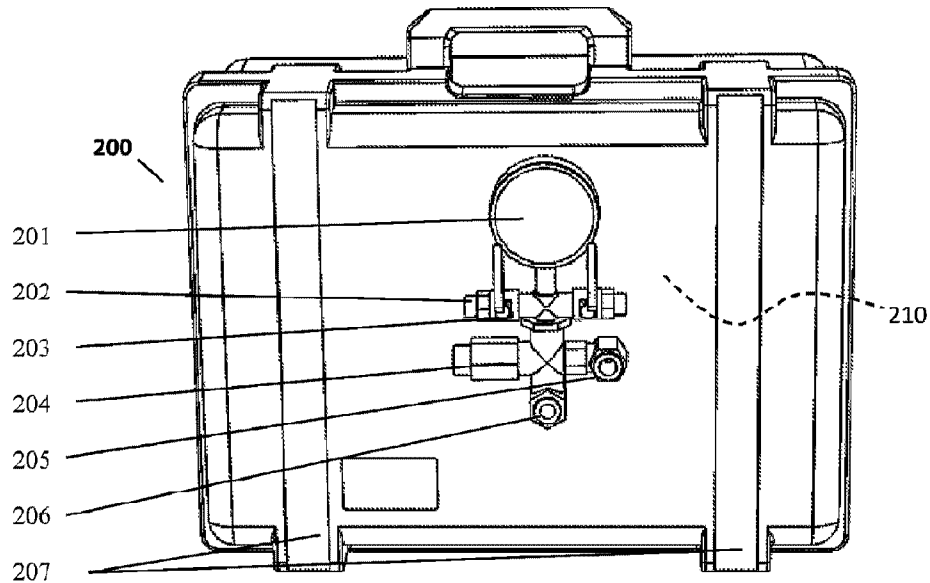
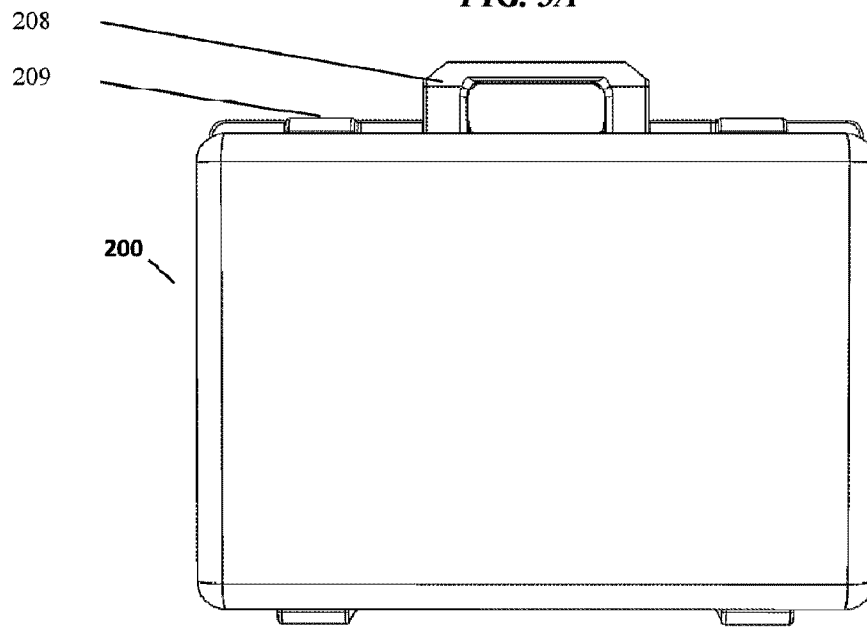
25 18. The method of claim 16, wherein adjusting the pressure of the nozzle assemblies is made to optimize the accuracy and precision of vaccine administration, and is based upon the speed of movement of the automatic poultry feeder system along the track.

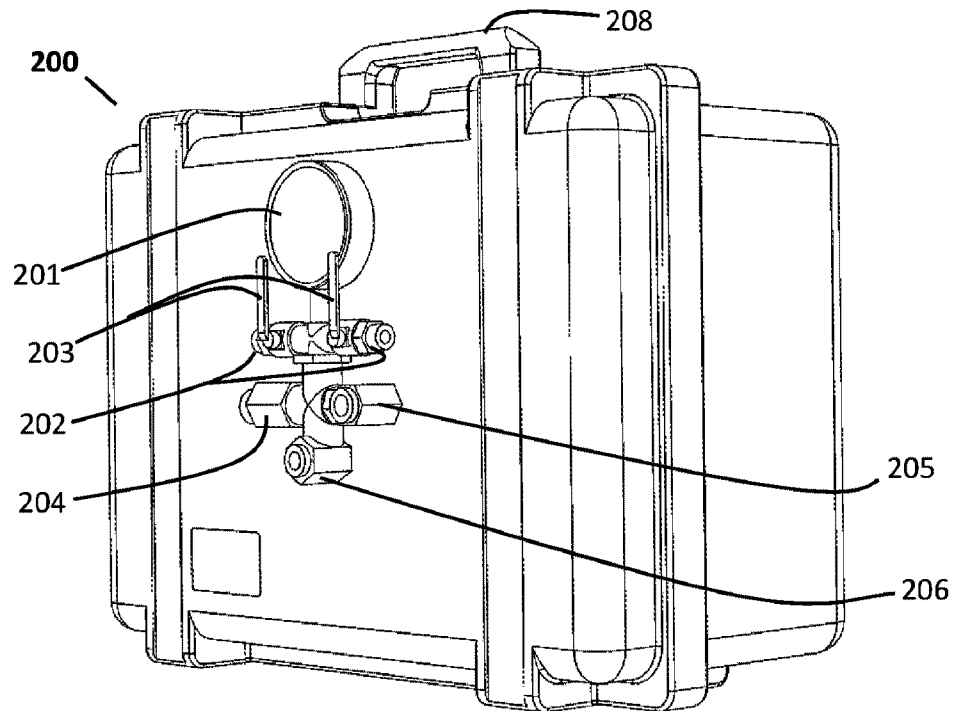
30 19. The method of claim 15, wherein the pressure is increased for relatively faster automatic poultry feeder systems, and the pressure is decreased for relatively slower automatic poultry feeder systems.

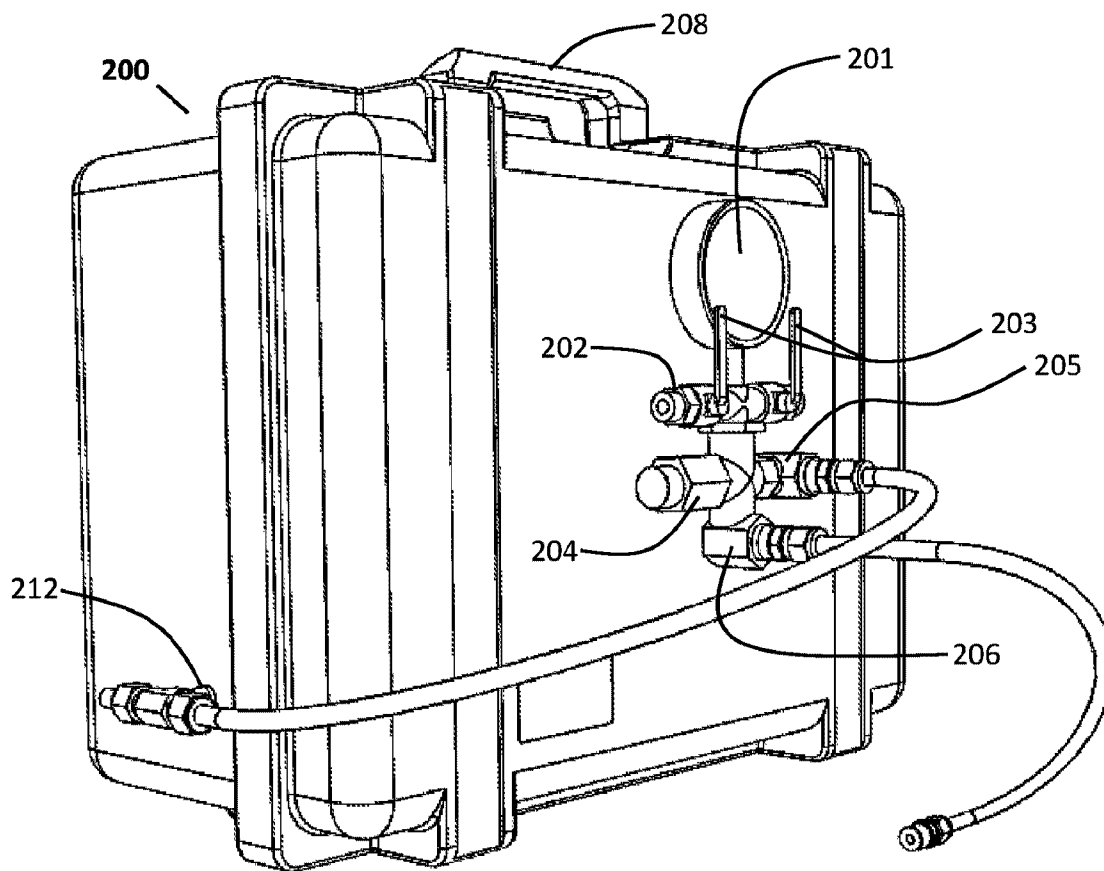
**FIG. 1**

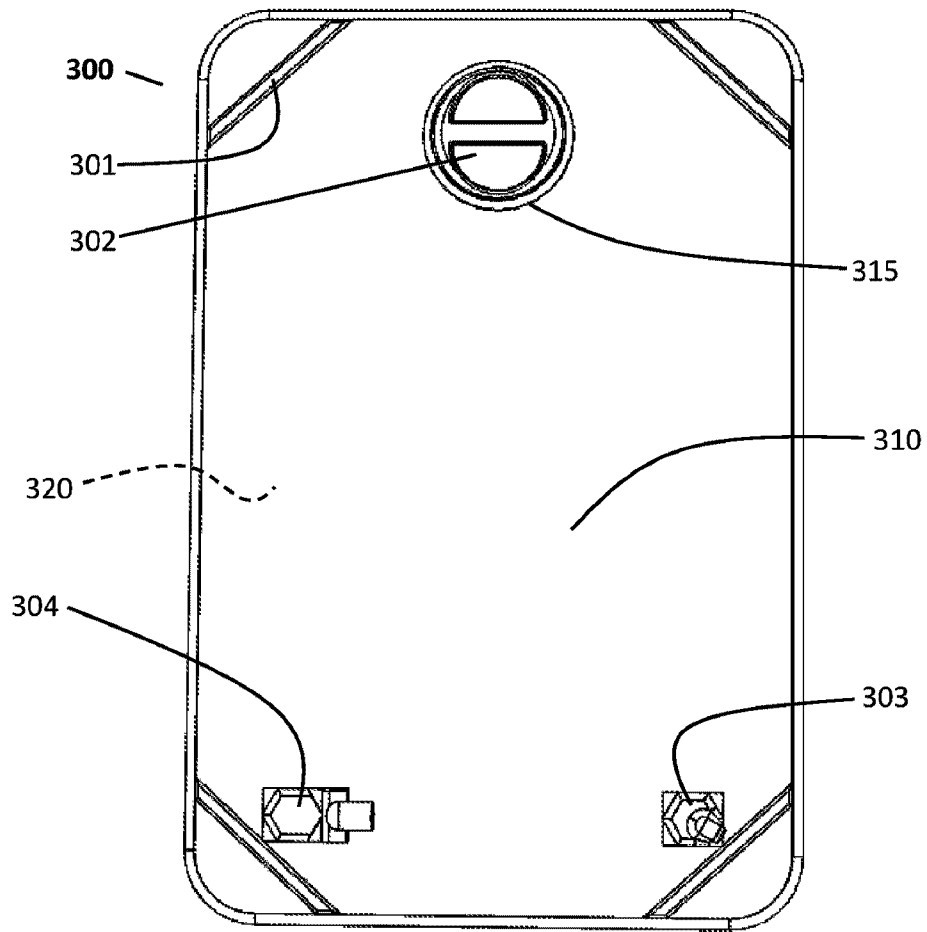
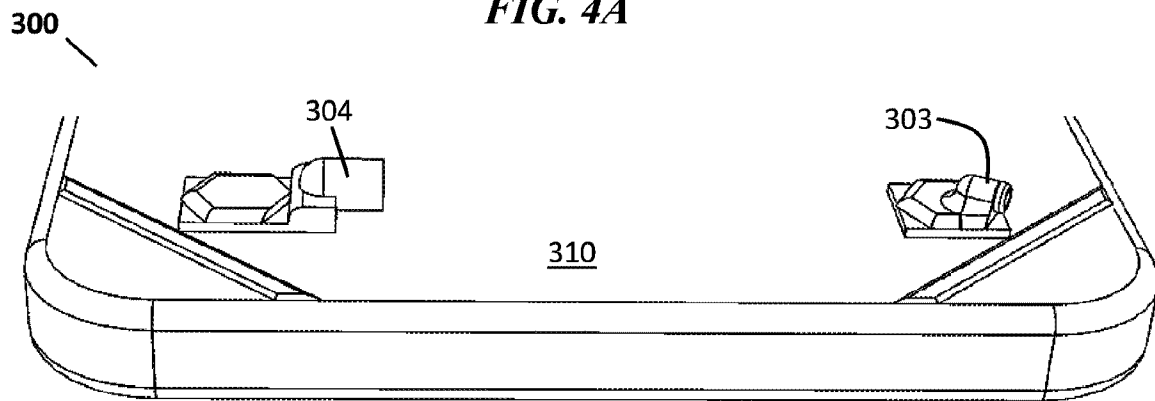
**FIG. 2A****FIG. 2B****FIG. 2C**

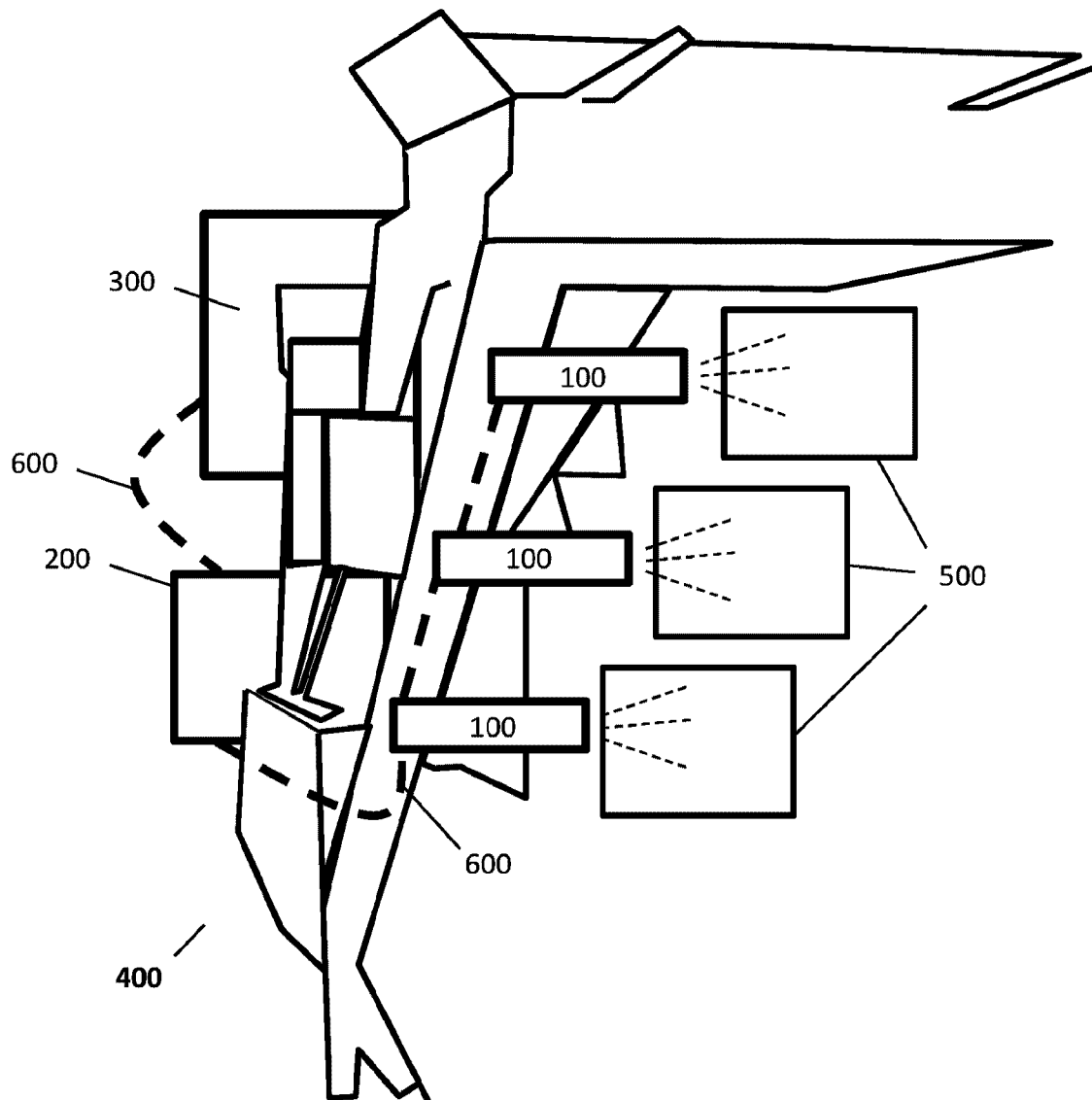
**FIG. 2D****FIG. 2E**

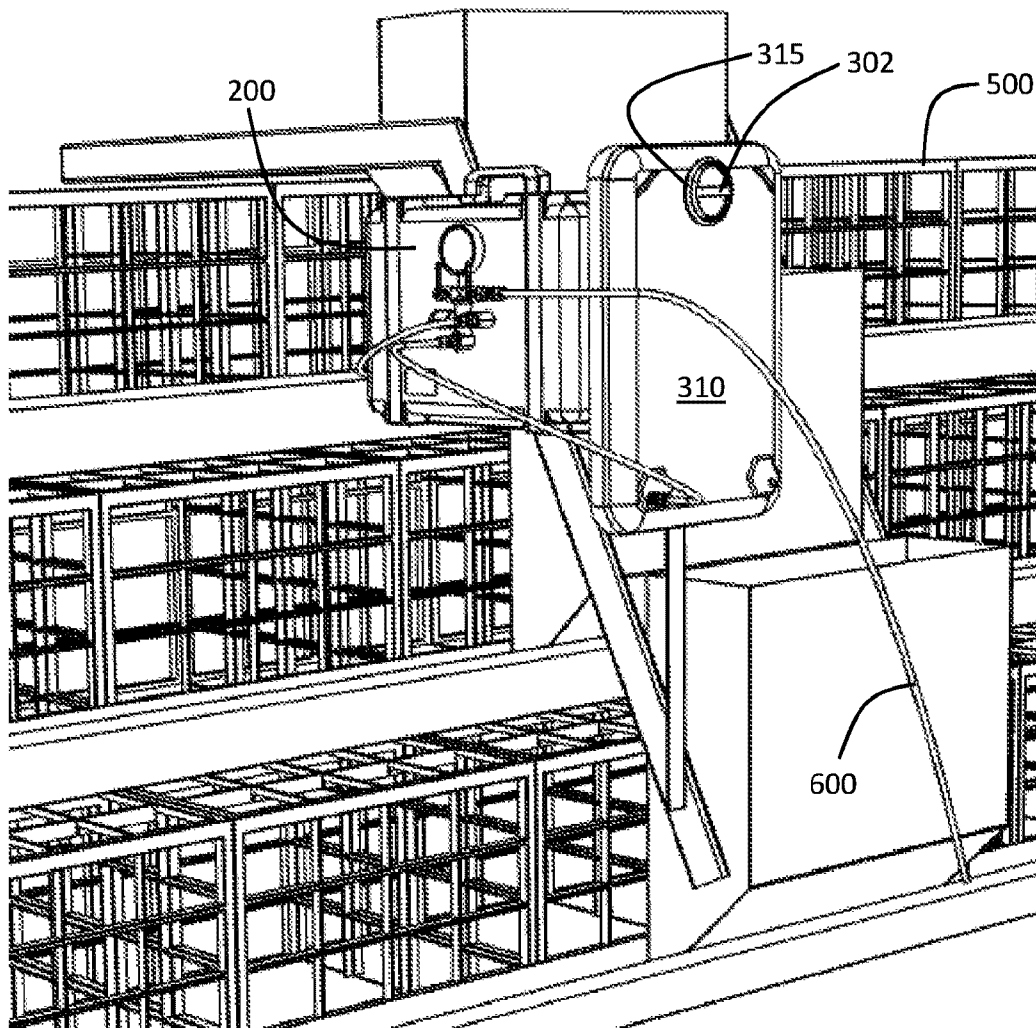
**FIG. 3A****FIG. 3B**

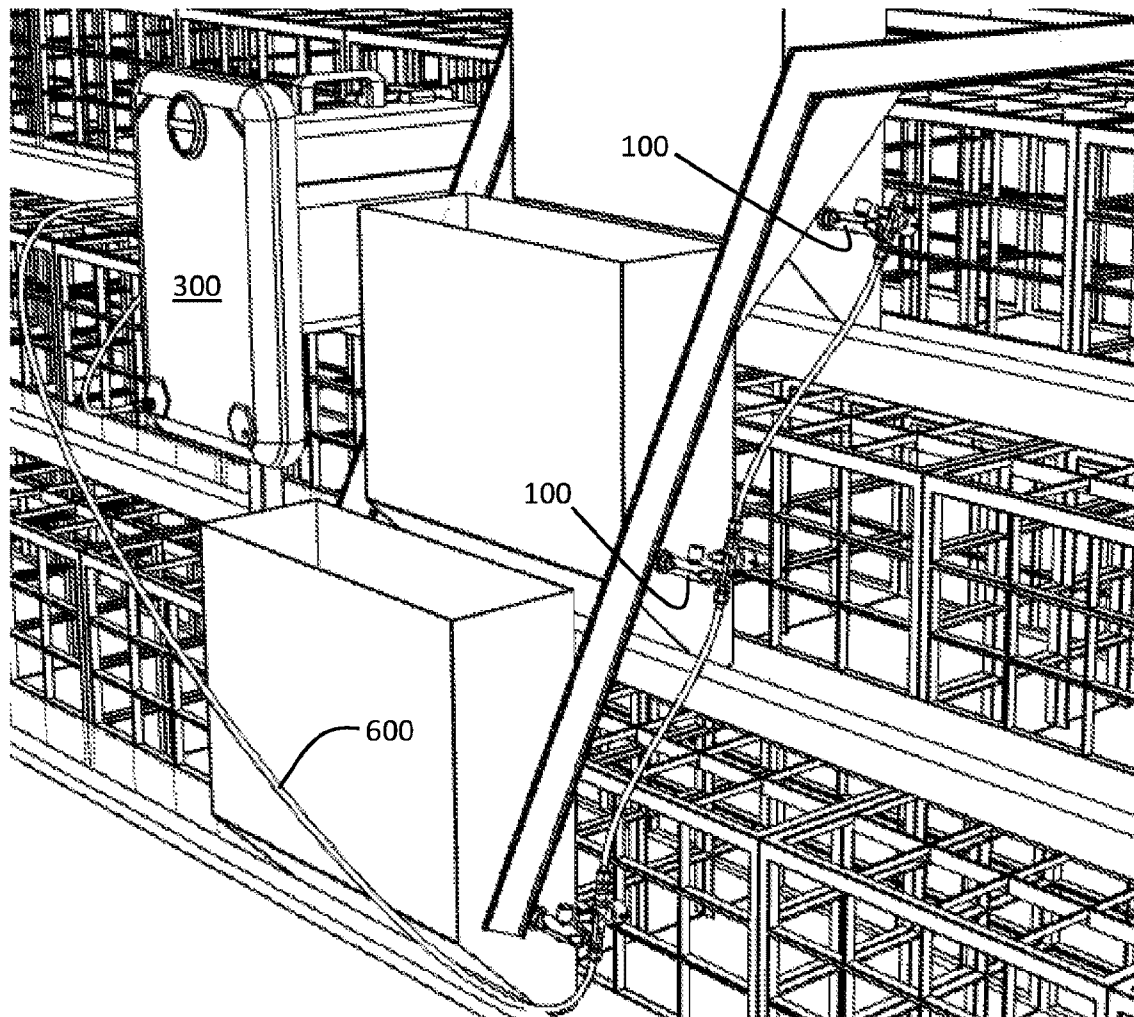
*FIG. 3C*

**FIG. 3D**

**FIG. 4A****FIG. 4B**

**FIG. 5**

**FIG. 6**

*FIG. 7*

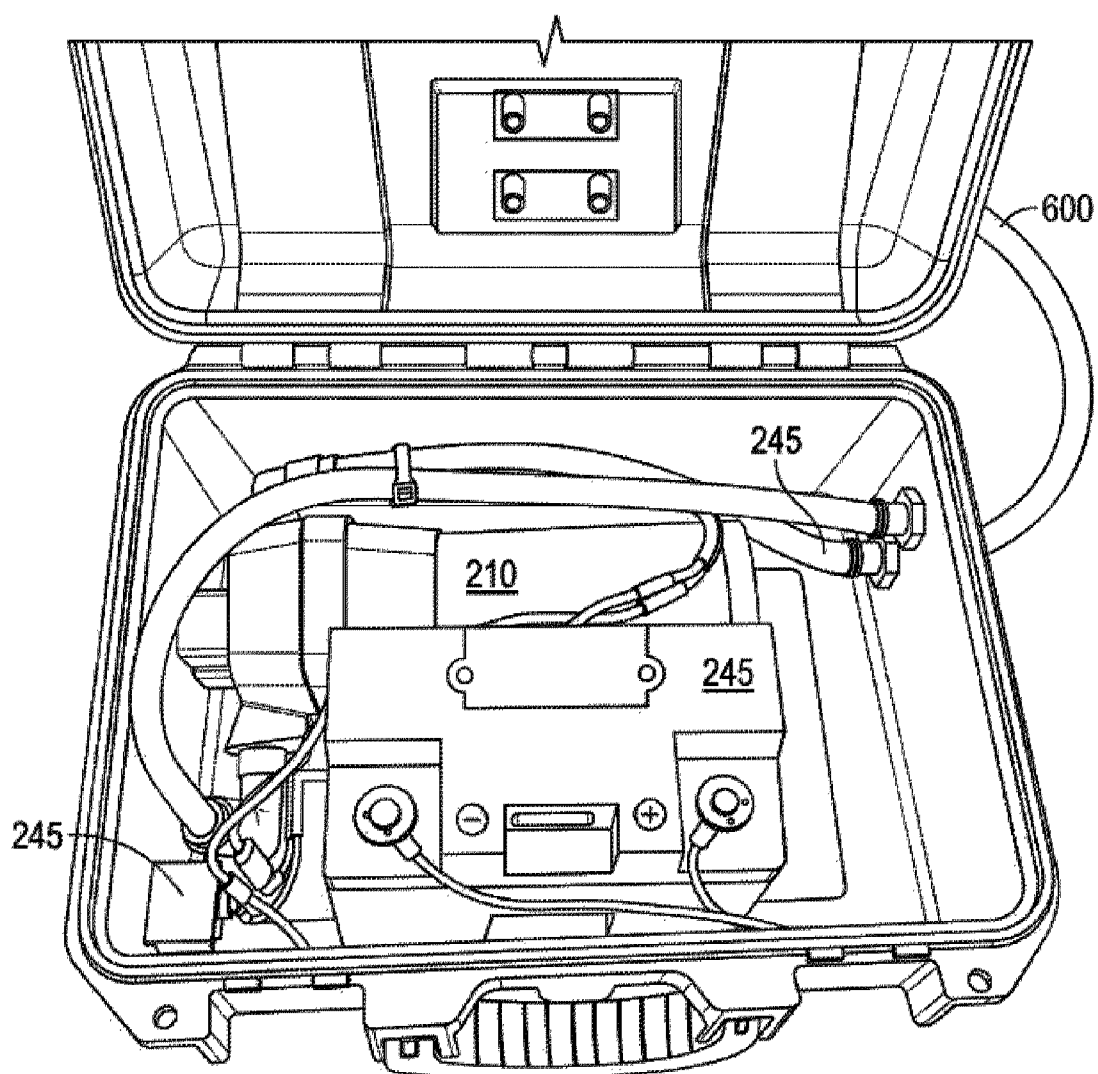


FIG. 8

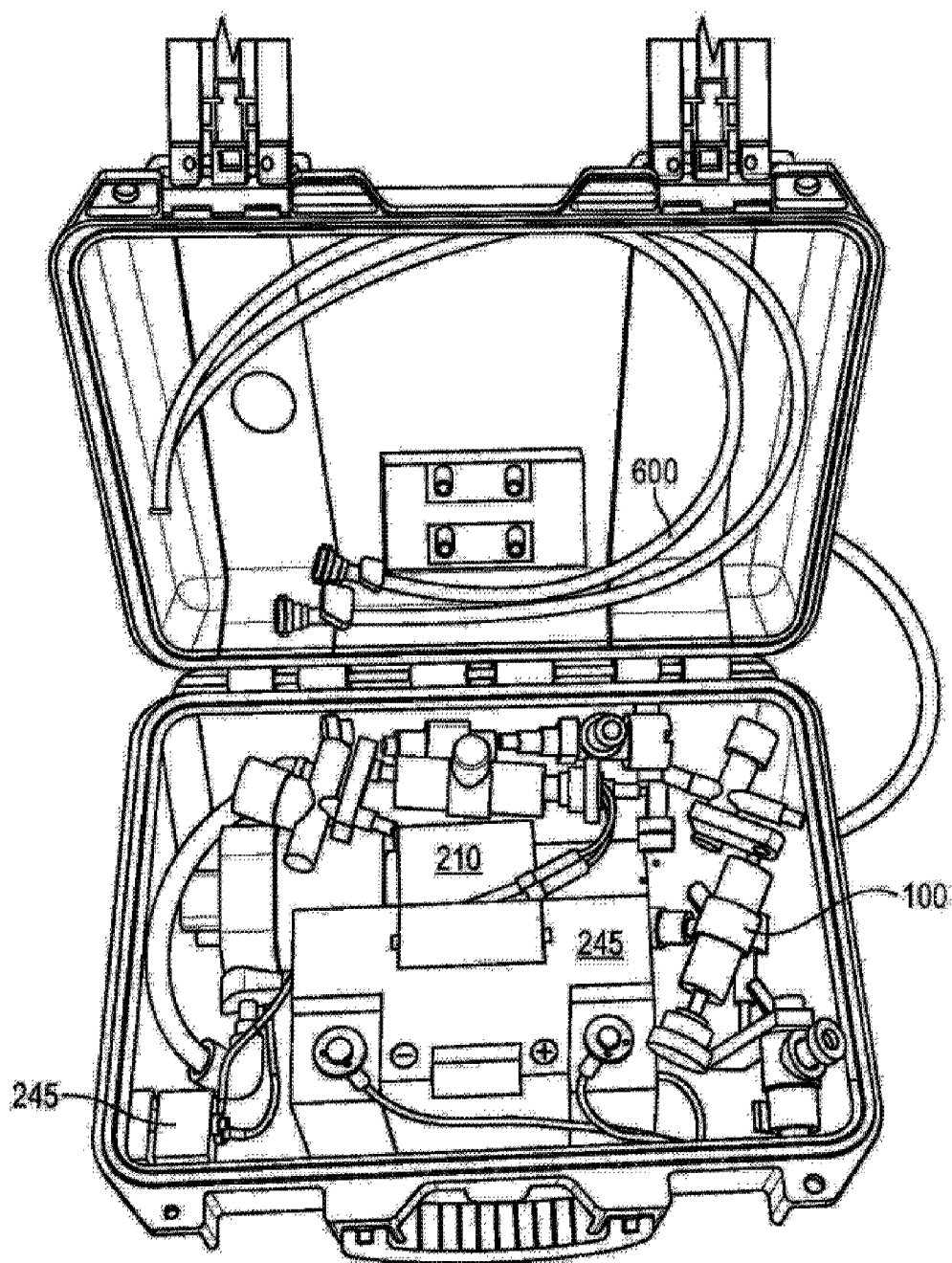


FIG. 9

