

### [54] CONTAINER ASSEMBLY

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[51] Int. Cl. .... **B65d 21/00**

[58] Field of Search..... 312/351, 330, 198;  
220/97 R, 97 B, DIG. 14, 72, DIG. 15;  
206/508, 507, 509, 515; 211/126; 108/53,  
108/51, 58

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### [57] ABSTRACT

A container assembly for use with heavy products such as meat or the like including a 90° nestable and stackable container body molded of plastic material having upper stacking parts extending along the upper edge portion of the end walls thereof and the adjacent end sections of the side walls thereof presenting substantially continuous horizontally extending stacking surfaces of shallow U-shaped configuration in plan and complementary lower stacking parts each including a horizontally extending portion of complementary configuration in plan to the associated upper stacking part disposed in vertical alignment therewith and a pair of continuous elongated wall portions extending downwardly from the horizontally extending portion throughout the horizontal extent thereof and providing substantially continuous downwardly facing horizontal surfaces and a shelf structure separately molded of plastic material having end supporting portions for engaging the upwardly facing surfaces defining the hand holes in the end walls of the container body and side supporting portions for engaging the upwardly facing nesting surfaces of the side walls of the container body, the shelf structure being removable and configured to be disposed in a horizontally stable stacking relation with like shelf structures.

13 Claims, 14 Drawing Figures

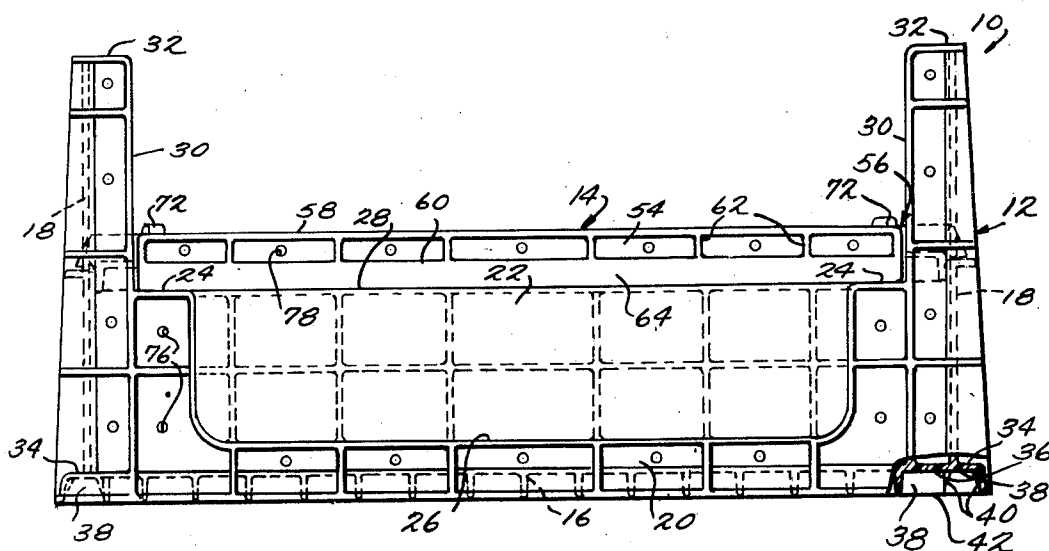


**Fig. 9.**

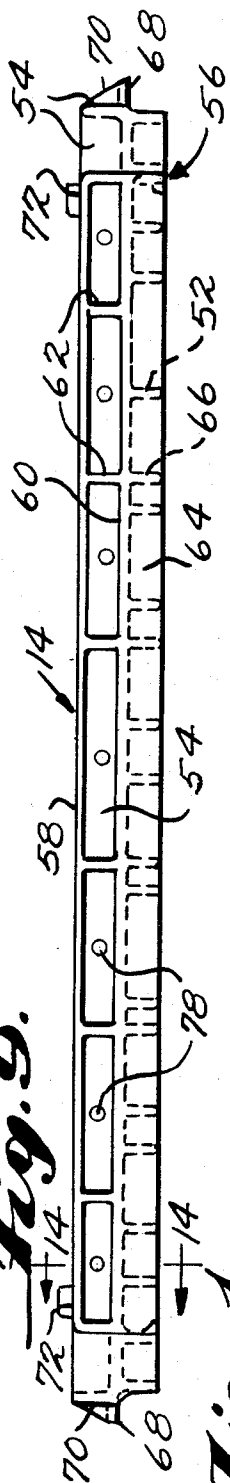


**Fig. 1.**

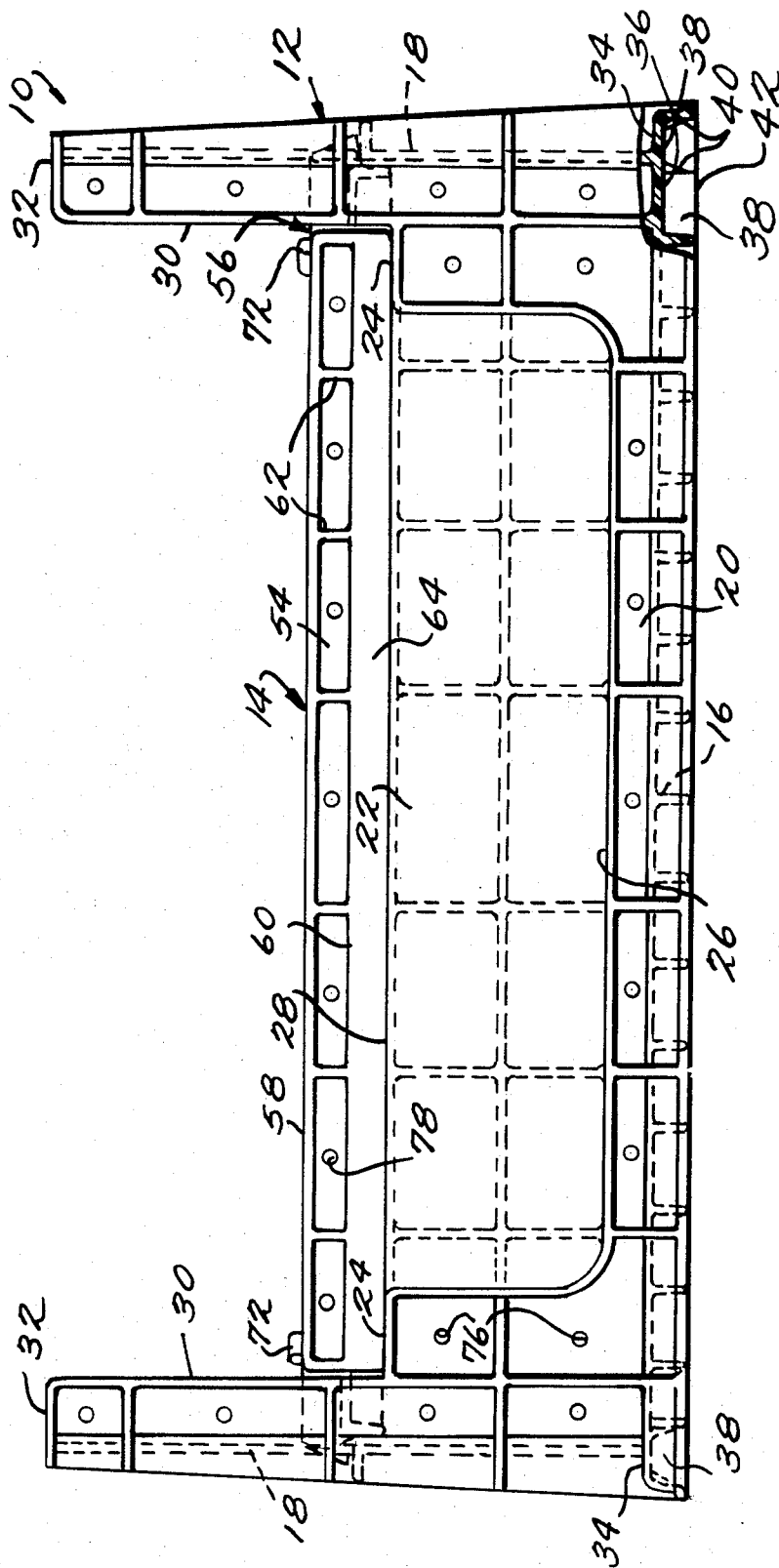


**Fig. 2.**

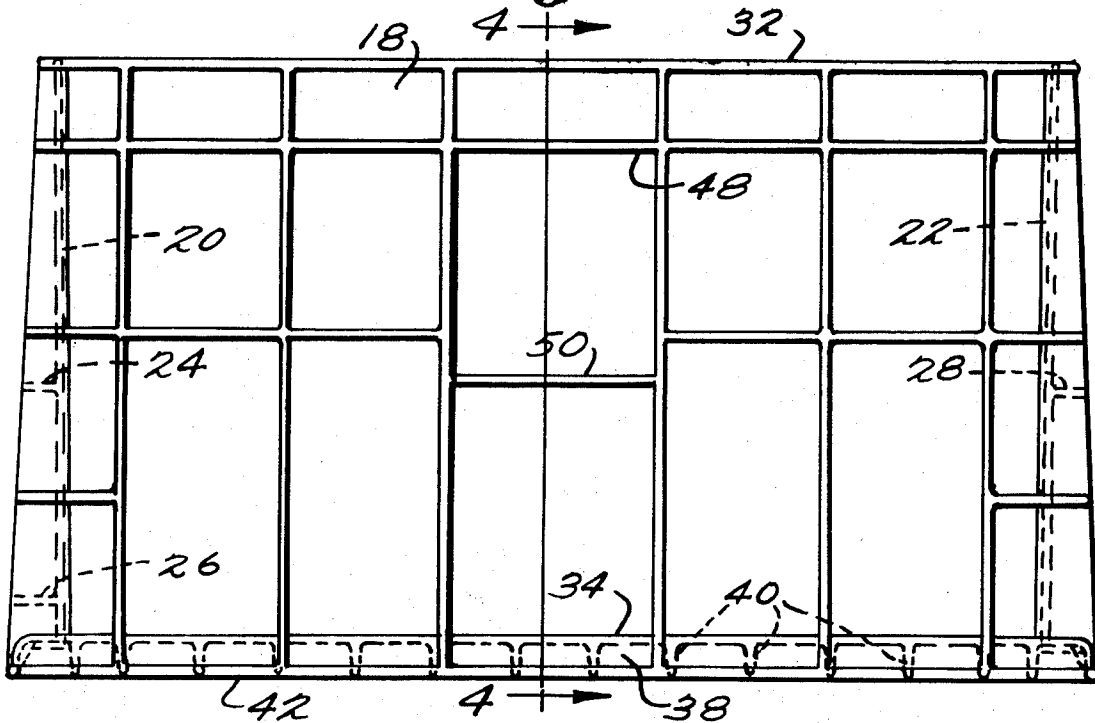


**Fig. 10.**

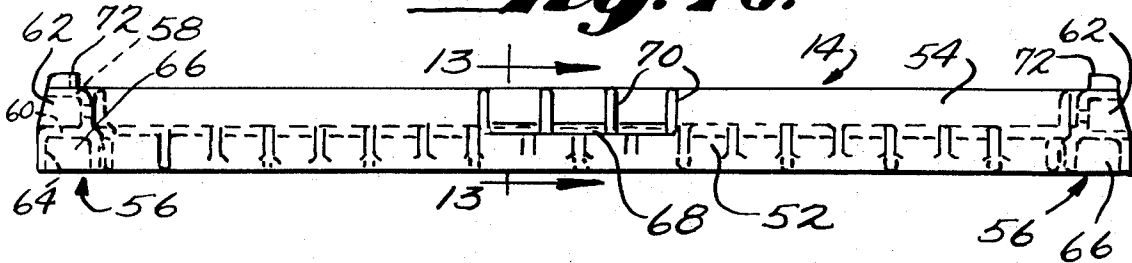


**Fig. 12.**

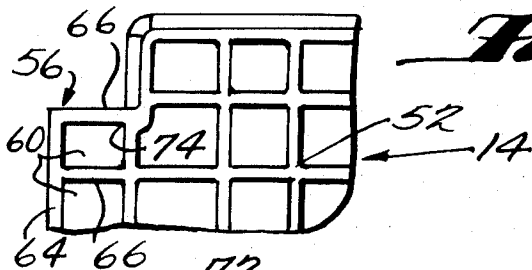


**Fig. 13.**

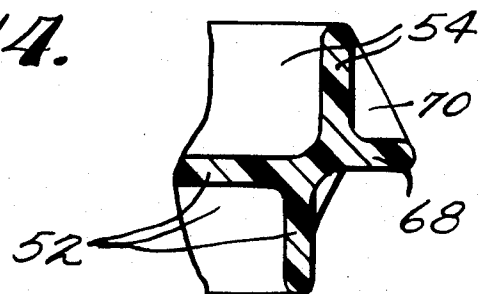


**Fig. 14.**

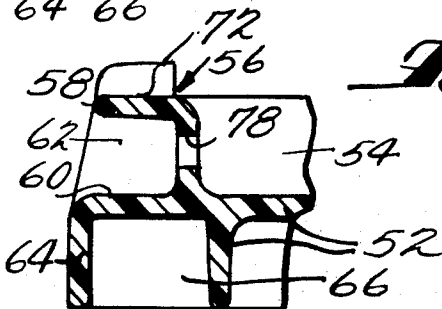


**Fig. 3.**

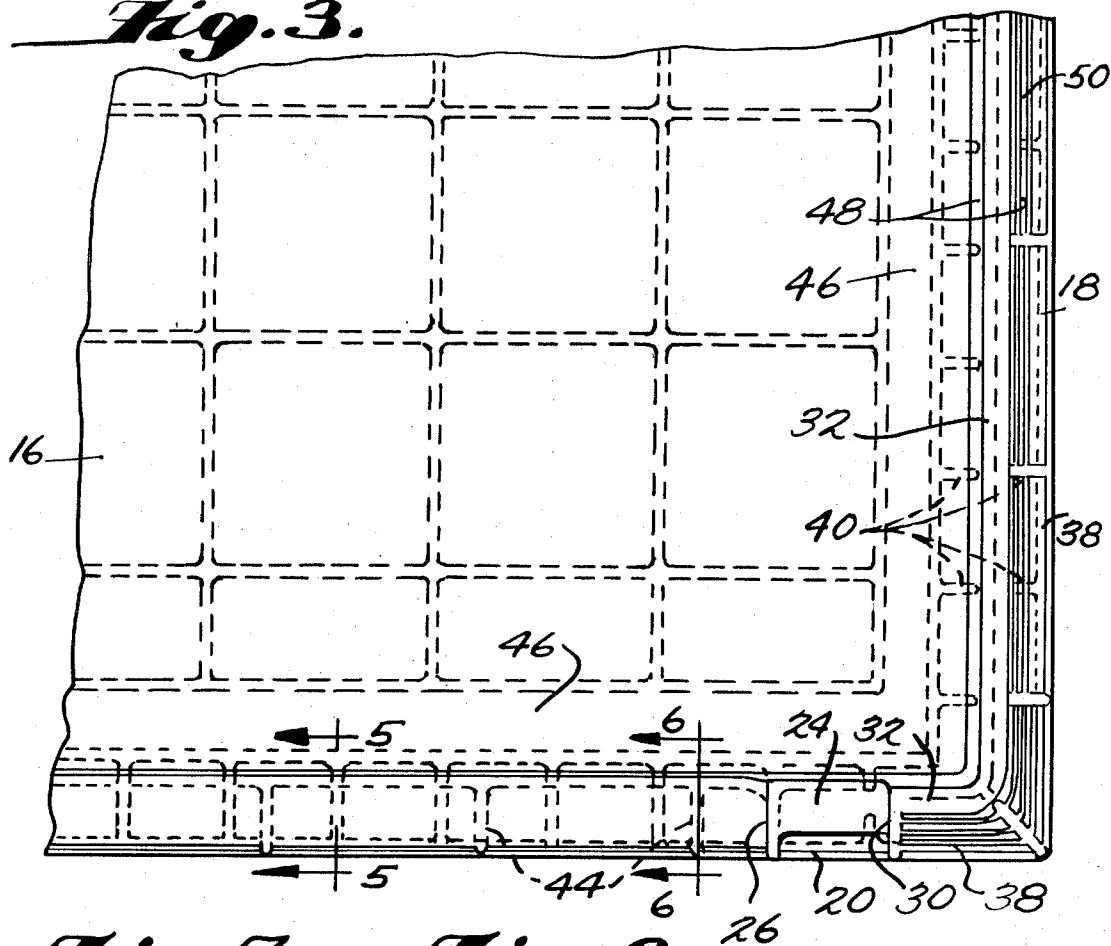


**Fig. 7.**

**Fig. 8.**

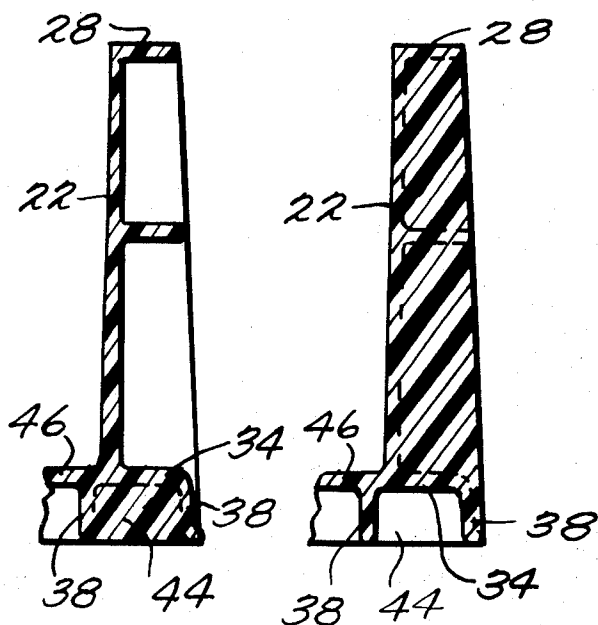


**Fig. 5.**

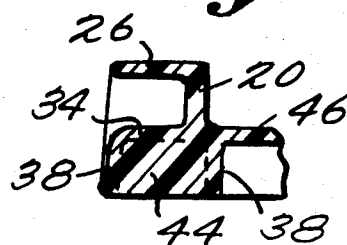


**Fig. 6.**

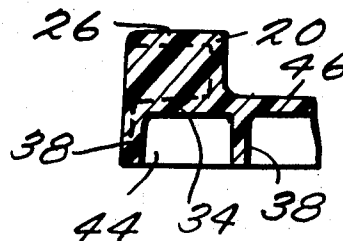


*Fig. 4.*

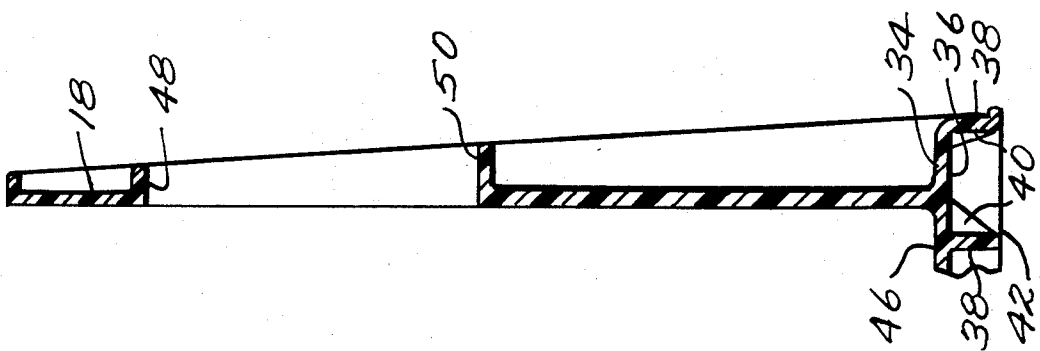
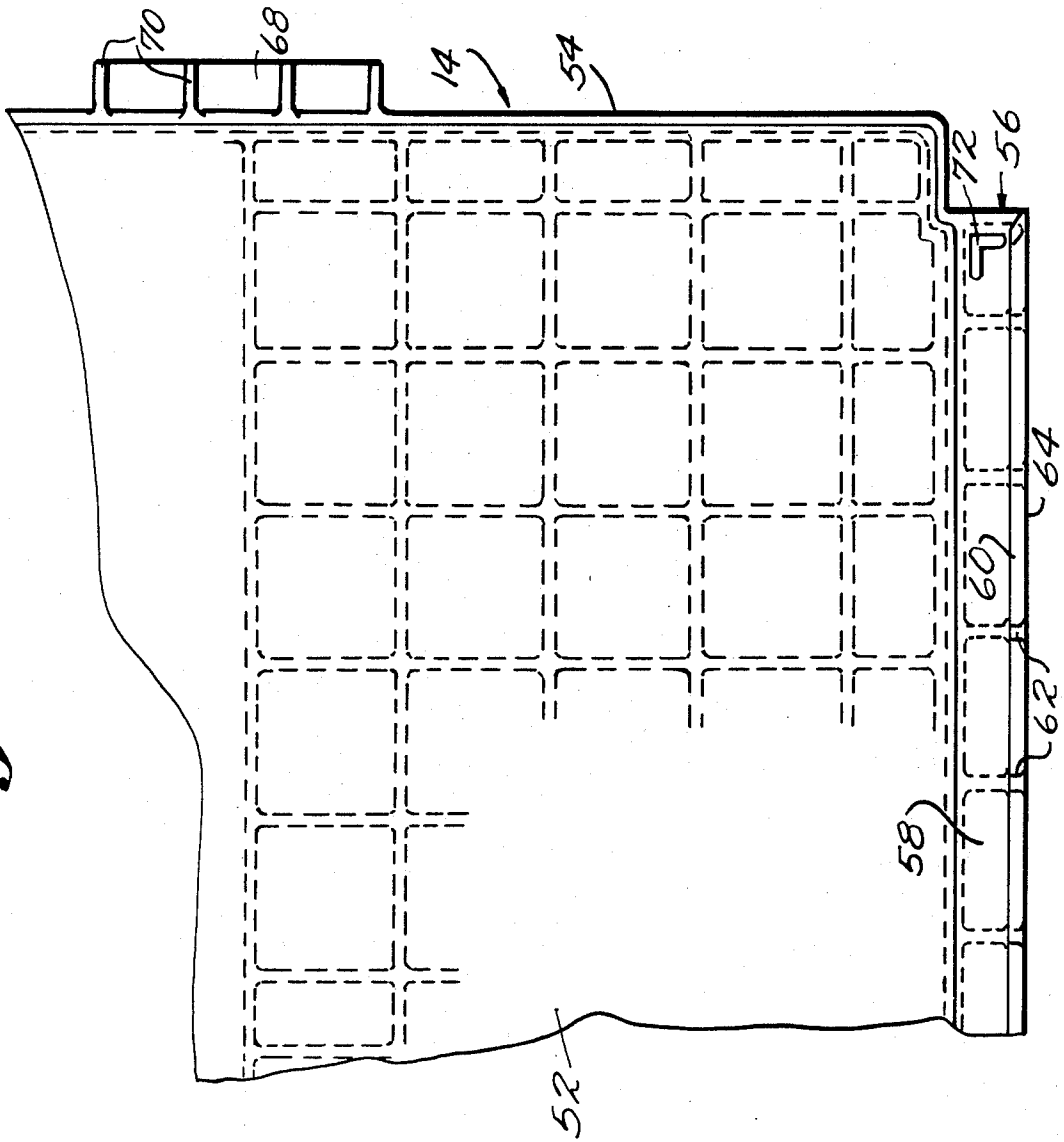


*Fig. 11.*



## CONTAINER ASSEMBLY

This invention relates to containers and more particularly to nestable and stackable containers molded of plastic material for use with heavy products, such as meat or the like.

Nestable and stackable containers molded of plastic material as a unitary structure are now in popular use throughout the supermarket industry. These containers have been used to good advantage in handling bakery products. One well-accepted container of this type is operable to be nested in a like container when rotated horizontally 90° with respect to the first container. Examples of containers of this type are disclosed in commonly-assigned Bockenstette U.S. Pat. No. 3,387,740 dated June 11, 1968 and Rebka, U.S. Pat. No. 197,672 dated Mar. 10, 1964. While these tray-type containers have proven quite satisfactory for use in handling relatively light bakery products, their construction is not suitable for handling larger, heavier products such as meat. The handling of meat products presents a further problem in that the products come in various sizes and shapes and hence a container capable of handling products of this type must be of particularly rugged construction and provide functions capable of accommodating various size chunks or packages of meat product. The type of individual load herein contemplated is over 100 pounds, such as 110 pounds or the like.

One of the advantageous features of the bread trays disclosed in the aforesaid patents is that the stacking means provided thereon have the operational capability of enabling a tray to be initially positioned over a like tray in laterally offset relation and then rectilinearly moved with a sliding supporting action into a vertically aligned stacked position. In order to provide this function, the end walls of the container are provided with stacking rails along their upper edges which cooperate with parallel stacking rails formed along the bottom edges thereof. The particular arrangement is such that when the container reaches its stacked position the cooperating stacking rails permit the container to move downwardly into aligned stacked relation to be held therein against substantial horizontal movement in a stable fashion.

While this type of rectilinear sliding support into stacked relation is quite convenient, it does require the operator to initially transversely orient the container on relatively narrow upper stacking rails. However, when dealing with a total container load of over 100 pounds, the provision of stacking means which provide this initial transverse alignment requirement cannot be conveniently met and hence the utilization of a stacking means construction which provides a rectilinear sliding support action into stacked relation is not practically feasible.

The present invention is based upon the basic principle that the greatest operator convenience can be provided by constructing the cooperating stacking parts of the container so that substantially continuous horizontally extending surfaces will be interengaged when a filled container is initially moved into a position over a container therebelow in substantially any position slightly out of vertical alignment. By providing substantially continuous horizontal interengaging surfaces in this fashion, the operator need not concern himself about alignment in any particular direction while he is fully supporting the total weight of the container. The

continuous interengaging horizontal surfaces permit the filled container to be moved in any direction with a sliding support action into a position of vertical alignment where the support of the upper container is shifted to other surfaces and a horizontally stable stacked relationship is obtained.

Accordingly, it is an object of the present invention to provide a stacking container molded of plastic material into a unitary container body having a 90° nesting capability and improved stacking means thereon operable in accordance with the principles set forth above to obtain the advantages thereof.

As previously indicated, a requirement for handling meat products is the capability of handling loads of various sizes. This capability is provided in accordance with the principles of the present invention by providing a shelf structure, molded of plastic material separate from the container body, which has support portions extending laterally from the sides and ends thereof for cooperation with the nesting surfaces of the container body and the upwardly facing surfaces in the end walls of the container body defining the hand holes. The shelf structure is thus operable to be moved into and out of supported relation within the container body. When in supported relation with the container body, the shelf structure is capable of supporting as much as 50 pounds of product. The shelf structure is configured so that when disposed out of supported relation with the container body, it can be positioned in horizontally stable stacked relation with like shelf structures.

Accordingly, it is a further object of the present invention to provide a container assembly of the type described including a 90° nestable and stackable container body and a stackable shelf structure capable of cooperation therewith to render the container suitable to support various size meat products or the like.

Another object of the present invention is the provision of a container body of the type described having a low-low side wall of improved construction enabling the contents of the container body to be removed from the bottom wall thereof even when the shelf structure is utilized therewith.

Still another object of the present invention is the provision of a container assembly including a container body and a shelf structure separately molded of plastic material which are of simple but rugged construction, convenient and efficient in operation and economical to manufacture.

These and other objects of the present invention will become more apparent during the course of the following detailed description and appended claims.

The invention may best be understood with reference to the accompanying drawings wherein an illustrative embodiment is shown.

In the drawings:

FIG. 1 is a side elevational view of a container assembly embodying the principles of the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an end view of the container body forming a part of the container assembly shown in FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a fragmentary top plan view of the container body shown in FIG. 2;

FIG. 4 is a fragmentary sectional view taken along the line 4—4 of FIG. 2;

FIG. 5 is a fragmentary sectional view taken along the line 5—5 of FIG. 3;

FIG. 6 is a fragmentary sectional view taken along the line 6—6 of FIG. 3;

FIGS. 7 and 8 are fragmentary sectional views corresponding to those of FIGS. 5 and 6 taken through the opposite side wall from that shown in FIG. 3;

FIG. 9 is a side elevational view of the shelf structure forming a part of the container assembly of FIG. 1;

FIG. 10 is an end view of the shelf structure;

FIG. 11 is a fragmentary top plan view of the shelf structure;

FIG. 12 is a fragmentary bottom plan view of the shelf structure;

FIG. 13 is a fragmentary sectional view taken along the line 13—13 of FIG. 10; and

FIG. 14 is a fragmentary sectional view taken along the line 14—14 of FIG. 9.

Referring now more particularly to the drawings, there is shown in FIG. 1 thereof a container assembly, generally indicated at 10, in assembled relation which embodies the principles of the present invention. As shown, the container assembly includes a nestable and stackable container body, generally indicated at 12, molded as a unitary structure from a suitable plastic material, such as polypropylene or the like and a shelf structure, generally indicated at 14, separately molded of plastic material, such as polypropylene or the like.

As best shown in FIGS. 1-3, the container body 12 includes a bottom wall 16 of generally rectangular configuration in plan having a pair of opposed generally parallel end walls 18 extending upwardly from the ends thereof and a pair of opposed side walls 20 and 22 extending upwardly from the sides thereof between the end walls 18 and integrally connected therewith.

As previously indicated, the container body is of the stackable and nestable type and includes stacking means along the upper and lower portions of the end walls for horizontally stably supporting the container body in a vertically aligned stacked relation on a like container body. The stacking means of the container body 12 is of a particular construction which will be described more fully hereinafter. The nesting arrangement is of the 90° type and to this end, the side walls 20 and 22 are formed with a horizontal extent greater than the horizontal extent of the end walls 18 and have recesses in the upper central portion thereof of a size sufficient to permit another like container body to be disposed in nested relation therein, when oriented in a position of 90° horizontal rotation, to a depth sufficient to permit another like container body to be disposed in stacked relation thereabove on the lowermost container body.

In the preferred embodiment shown, the recess in each side wall is of a horizontal extent generally equal to the horizontal extent of the end walls 18 so as to permit a single like container body to be nested therein. It will be understood, however, that it is within the contemplation of the present invention to form the recesses with a horizontal extent double that of the horizontal extent of the end walls so as to permit a pair of like containers in side-by-side relation to each other to be mounted in nested relation therein.

As best shown in FIG. 1, the recess in each side wall serves to roughly divide each side wall into a central section having a vertical height approximately one-half the vertical height of the end walls and an end section at each end of the central section having a height generally equal to the height of the end walls. As clearly

shown in FIG. 1, the central section of the side wall 20 is preferably of the "low-low" type which includes a pair of upwardly facing nesting surfaces 24 at each end thereof and a central recess 26 extending between the nesting surfaces 24. The opposite side wall 22 provides a single upwardly facing nesting surface 28 extending throughout the horizontal extent of the central section thereof. The end sections of the side walls 20 and 22 are of similar construction, each providing generally vertically inwardly extending surfaces 30 which serve to confine the like container body in nested relation against transverse horizontal movement.

The stacking means of the present invention includes an upper stacking part formed along the upper marginal edge portion of each end wall 18 and the adjacent end sections of the side walls. As best shown in FIG. 3, each stacking part provides an upwardly facing substantially continuous horizontal surface 32 which is of shallow U-shaped configuration in plan.

The stacking means also includes a lower stacking part associated with each end wall 18 which is complementary in shape with the shape of the associated upper stacking part and the upwardly facing horizontal surface 32 thereof. Each lower stacking part includes a generally horizontally extending wall portion 34 which is disposed above the lower surface of the container body 12. Each wall portion 34 is of generally shallow U-shaped configuration in plan, generally conforming to the shape of the associated stacking surface 32. Each wall portion 34 provides a downwardly facing horizontal support surface 36 disposed in vertical alignment with the associated upwardly facing surface 32 of the upper stacking part. Extending downwardly from the inner and outer edges of the horizontal wall portion 34 is a pair of inner and outer depending wall portions 38. The depending wall portions, as shown, are disposed generally vertically, although it is within the contemplation of the present invention that these walls diverge outwardly and downwardly. With the particular vertical configuration shown, the wall portions 38 are strengthened by a series of horizontally spaced triangular strengthening ribs 40. These triangular strengthening ribs 40 thus provide upwardly and inwardly inclined guide surfaces for engaging the inner and outer edges of the surface 32 of the upper stacking parts to guide the surfaces 32 into aligned engagement with the surfaces 36 when two like container bodies are moved into stacked relation.

The depending wall portions 38 are provided with substantially continuous downwardly facing horizontally extending surfaces 42. The continuous nature of these surfaces and their configuration in plan are adapted to cooperate with the continuous upwardly facing horizontal surfaces 32 to interengage and support an upper container body on a like lower container body in the event that the operator initially moves the upper container body over the lower container body in a position slightly out of vertical alignment therewith. Depending upon the particular misalignment, certain portions of the surfaces 42 will engage the surfaces 32 to support the upper container body on the lower container body in the position of misalignment into which they have been initially moved by virtue of the configuration of the surfaces. The smooth continuous nature of these interengaging surfaces permits the operator to slide the upper container body into a position of vertical alignment wherein the upper container body will

drop down onto the lower container body until the surfaces 36 engage the surfaces 32.

It can thus be seen that the provision of horizontally continuous surfaces of shallow U-shaped configuration both at the upper portion and lower portion of the container body within the stacking parts thereof provides for a convenient stacking operation in which the operator is permitted to interengage the upper container body on the lower container body in supported relation thereon without the necessity of effecting alignment while the weight of the upper container body (which may be as much as 110 pounds) is supported by the operator.

In addition to the stacking functions noted above, the lower stacking parts, including the wall portions 34 and 38 thereof and the associated strengthening ribs 40, also form parts of a continuous peripheral structure which is connected between the bottom wall 16 and all of the walls 18, 20 and 22 in a manner which materially aids in providing the necessary strength characteristics enabling the container body 12 to handle the heavy loads contemplated. With reference to FIGS. 5-8, it will be noted that the extremities of the wall portions 34 and 38 which extend into each side wall 20 and 22 are formed continuously throughout each side wall so as to provide the aforesaid continuous peripheral structure with a cross-section which is of generally inverted U-shaped configuration throughout the lower portion of the container body. As can be seen in FIGS. 5-8, the portion of this peripheral structure extending through the central sections of the side walls 20 and 22 are reinforced by a plurality of horizontally spaced vertically extending ribs 44 integrally joined to the wall portions 34 and 38 and extending throughout the interior space defined thereby.

This continuous peripheral structure is rigidly interconnected with the vertical walls 18, 20 and 22, each of which is formed of interior imperforate panels having exterior intersecting vertically and horizontally disposed strengthening ribs extending horizontally outwardly thereof. As can be seen from FIGS. 4-8, the lower edge of the panels of each vertical wall is integrally interconnected to the horizontal wall portion 34 adjacent the inner marginal edge thereof and each vertically disposed rib has its lower edge integrally interconnected with the outer extent of the horizontal wall portion and extends downwardly along the exterior of the outer wall portion 38.

The connection of the bottom wall to the peripheral structure, rather than being rigid as with the vertical walls, provides a desirable degree of flexibility between the bottom wall and the vertical walls which prevents excessive inward deflection of the upper portions of the end walls 18 when supporting loads of 100 pounds or more. With reference to FIG. 3, it will be noted that the bottom wall 16, like the vertical walls, is constructed of an imperforate interior panel and a plurality of intersecting perpendicularly interrelated ribs extending outwardly therefrom. The peripheral edge of the interior panel of the bottom wall is integrally joined to the peripheral structure at the juncture between the wall portions 34 and inner wall portions 38 thereof, however, even the outermost peripheral ribs of the bottom walls are maintained in spaced relation from the peripheral structure and are not integrally connected thereto. The bottom wall thus provides a peripheral web portion 46, defined by the outer marginal portion of the panel of

the bottom wall, which may flex under load without transmitting the flexure resulting from the load to the vertical walls. This action materially aids in maintaining the alignment of the stacking parts in operation. Moreover, the resulting sectional modulus of the low-low wall 20 is of a value sufficient to provide the necessary strength therein without collapse under the heavy loads contemplated.

Referring now more particularly to FIGS. 2 and 4, the central portion of each end wall 18 is formed with a hand hole 48, the lower portion of which is defined by a rib having an upwardly facing horizontally extending surface 50. The surfaces 50, as well as the nesting surfaces 24 and 28, are adapted to support the shelf structure 14 within operative relation within the container body 12, as shown in FIG. 1.

As best shown in FIGS. 9-11, the shelf structure 14 includes a horizontally extending bottom wall 52, which, like the walls of the container body 12, is preferably constructed of an imperforate panel having a multiplicity of intersecting ribs extending outwardly from the exterior or bottom surface thereof, the strengthening ribs including ribs defining the periphery of the bottom wall. The bottom wall 52 also includes an upwardly extending peripheral wall 54 which provides the upper surface of the shelf construction with a recess which serves to contain therein any liquids, such as blood or the like, which may be deposited thereon during operation.

The bottom wall 52, including the upper peripheral wall 54, is of a rectangular configuration in plan of a size to engage within the interior of the container body 12. Extending outwardly from each side of the bottom wall throughout a horizontal extent thereof generally equal to the horizontal extent of the ends of the bottom wall is a side supporting portion, generally indicated at 56.

Each side supporting portion 56 is formed by a horizontal wall 58 extending outwardly from the upper edge of the associated central section of the peripheral wall 54 and a parallel lower wall 60 extending outwardly from the lower edge of the peripheral wall 54. These horizontal walls are interconnected by a series of horizontally spaced vertically extending strengthening ribs 62. Extending downwardly from the outer edge of the lower wall 60 is a vertical wall or flange 64 which terminates at the horizontal level of the bottom wall 52. Here again, a plurality of horizontally spaced vertically extending ribs 66 are formed integrally between the angularly related walls 60 and 64 and associated peripheral rib of the bottom wall 52.

The shelf structure 14 also includes end supporting portions 68. The end supporting portions 68 have a horizontal extent generally equal to the horizontal extent of the hand opening 48 of the container body 12 and are formed by a wall extending horizontally outwardly from the lower edge of the peripheral wall 54. The wall defining the end supporting portion 68 is suitably strengthened, as by a plurality of horizontally spaced, vertically extending triangular strengthening ribs 70.

It will be understood that the shelf structure 14 is adapted to be moved into and out of supported relation within the container body 12 during the normal operation of the container assembly when it is desired to fill the container body with meat products having a relatively small size (i.e., a size which will not fill up sub-

stantially the entire height thereof). The shelf structure 14 is moved into operative supported relation within the container body by a simple manual movement which includes insertion of one end supporting portion 68 through an associated hand hole 48 until the bottom surface of the former is disposed in supporting relation with the surface 50. The shelf structure can now be simply pivoted downwardly during which movement the opposite end supporting portion 68 will move through the opposite hand hole 48 until the lower surface of the end supporting portion 68 engages the surface 50.

It will be noted that the vertical dimension of the hand holes is greater than that normally provided in order to permit this downward pivotal movement of the shelf structure into supported relation within the container body. This vertical extent is preferably at least equal to the horizontal extent of the hand holes so as to enable the operator to grip the portion of the end walls defining the vertical sides of the hand holes during operation. This action is particularly desirable when moving a filled container assembly on the top of a high stack.

It will also be noted that the surfaces 50 are disposed at a level substantially equal to the level of the upwardly facing nesting surfaces 24 and 28. The slight offset between the level of these surfaces is accounted for by the vertical position of the end supporting portions with respect to the bottom surfaces provided by the side supporting portions. It will be noted that the lower surface of the side supporting portions 56 will engage the corresponding upwardly facing nesting surfaces 24 and 28 provided by the side walls 20 and 22 respectively of the container body. The shelf structure 14 is thus supported in operative position within the container body 12 along each side and each end thereof. This four-sided support is of particular importance from a strength point of view, since the shelf structure 14 must withstand loads of up to 50 pounds or more.

It can thus be seen that in normal operation, the utilization of the shelf structure 44 in conjunction with the container body will be dependent upon the particular needs of the moment with respect to the size of the meat products to be loaded. It will be understood that where the shelf structure is utilized, the shelf structure 14 will normally be removed from supported relation with the container body during the unloading of the container body. However, it will be noted that the provision of the low-low wall 20 enables the operator to easily remove the contents of the container body from the bottom wall 16 while in stacked relation, even when the shelf structure is utilized.

It will further be understood that in transporting the container assemblies back to the loading site, the container bodies are mounted in nested relation and the shelf structures are configured so that they can be mounted in a horizontally stable stacked relationship. To this end, an upstanding generally L-shaped stacking lug 72 is provided adjacent each end of each side supporting portion 56. The specific location of each stacking lug 72 is related to a vertically aligned recess, indicated at 74, formed on the aligned lower surface of the side supporting portion 56 by the juncture between the flange 64, end ribs 66 and associated peripheral rib of the bottom 52, as shown in FIG. 12.

It will further be understood that it is usual practice to run the container assembly through a washing ma-

chine or the like periodically in order to maintain the components in a clean condition. In order to provide proper drainage when either of the components is supported within a washing machine, suitable drain holes are provided. With respect to the container body 12, there are a multiplicity of drain holes 76 formed in the side wall 20. These drain holes extend through the interior panel of the side wall and communicate exteriorly with each of the recessed exterior surfaces provide by the outwardly extending ribs. With respect to the shelf construction 14, a drain opening 78 is formed along one side of the peripheral wall 54 between each pair of ribs 62.

It thus will be seen that the objects of this invention have been fully and effectively accomplished. It will be realized, however, that the foregoing preferred specific embodiment has been shown and described for the purpose of illustrating the functional and structural principles of this invention and is subject to change without departure from such principles. Therefore, this invention includes all modifications encompassed within the spirit and scope of the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A nestable and stackable container for meat and the like comprising a unitary container body molded of plastic material, said container body including a rectangular bottom wall, a pair of opposed end walls extending upwardly from opposite end of said bottom wall, a pair of opposed side walls of a horizontal extent greater than the horizontal extent of said end walls extending upwardly from said bottom wall between said end walls, each of said side walls including a central section of a horizontal extent greater than the horizontal extent of said end walls and a maximum vertical extent generally equal to one-half the vertical extent of said end walls and an end section of a vertical extent generally equal to the vertical extent of said end walls between each end of said central section and the adjacent end of the adjacent end wall, each end wall and the end sections integral therewith including complementary upper and lower stacking parts formed along the upper and lower extremities thereof, said side wall central sections having nesting surface means formed in the upper portions thereof for supporting a like container body disposed in a 90° horizontally rotated orientation in a nested position therein when said container body is empty to a depth permitting said container body to support another like container body in said stacked position thereon above the container body nested therein, the improvement in combination therewith which comprises each upper stacking part being of shallow U-shaped configuration in plan, each lower stacking part including a horizontally extending portion of complementary configuration in plan to the associated upper stacking part disposed in vertical alignment therewith and a pair of continuous elongated wall portions extending downwardly from said horizontally extending portion throughout the horizontal extent thereof, the wall portions of said lower stacking parts providing substantially continuous downwardly facing horizontal surfaces for engaging a horizontal support surface to support said container body thereon, the upper stacking parts providing substantially continuous upwardly facing horizontal surfaces for engaging the downwardly facing horizontal surfaces of the lower stacking parts of a like container body when the latter filled with a supply of meat of the order of 100 pounds is moved into

supported relation thereon in a position of slight vertical misalignment so as to enable the like container to be slidably supported for horizontal movement into an operatively stacked position of vertical alignment wherein the support of the like container is shifted to the horizontal portions of the lower stacking parts thereof and the wall portions thereof are disposed in substantially horizontally surrounding relation to the upper stacking parts of said container body to thereby prevent substantially horizontal movement of the like container body out of said operative stacked relation.

2. A container as defined in claim 1 wherein all of the walls of said container body are formed essentially of imperforate interior planar panels having exterior intersecting strengthening ribs extending outwardly thereof normal to the exterior surface of the associated panel.

3. A container as defined in claim 2 wherein one side wall includes a plurality of wash water drain holes extending through the panels thereof in spaced relation to said bottom wall.

4. A container as defined in claim 1 wherein said end walls have hand openings formed therein the lower portions of which are defined by upwardly facing surfaces extending generally horizontally at a vertical level substantially at the level of the nesting surface means formed in the upper portion of said side walls, and a shelf structure molded of plastic material separate from said container body operable to be moved into and out of supported relation within said container body, said shelf structure including a bottom wall of a rectangular configuration to fit within the interior of said container body, side supporting portions extending laterally outwardly from the central part of each side of said shelf bottom wall throughout an extent generally equal to the end dimension thereof and end supporting portions extending laterally outwardly from the central part of each end of said shelf bottom wall through an extent generally equal to the horizontal dimension of said hand openings, said supporting portions having downwardly facing surfaces for engaging the upwardly facing nesting surfaces of said side walls and the upwardly facing surfaces defining the lower portion of said end wall hand openings when said shelf structure is disposed in supported relation within said container body, said shelf structure being configured to be disposed in horizontally stable vertically stacked relation with a like shelf structure when out of supported relation within said container body.

5. A container assembly for meat and the like comprising a container body molded of plastic material including a rectangular bottom wall having a pair of opposed generally parallel end walls extending upwardly from opposite ends thereof, upper stacking means along the upper edge of each end wall, lower stacking means along the lower edge of each end wall complementary with said upper stacking means so as to enable said container body to be supported on a like container body in a stacked position of vertical alignment and to be stably supported in said stacked position against substantial horizontal movement in any direction out of said stacked position, said container body including opposed side walls of a horizontal extent greater than the horizontal extent of said end walls extending upwardly from said bottom wall between said side walls, said side walls having nesting surface means formed in the upper portions thereof for supporting a like container body

disposed in a 90° horizontally rotated orientation in a nested position therein when said container body is empty to a depth permitting said container body to support another like container body in said stacked position thereon above the container body nested therein, said end walls having hand openings formed therein the lower portions of which are defined by upwardly facing surfaces extending generally horizontally at a vertical level substantially at the level of the nesting surface means formed in the upper portion of said side walls, and a shelf structure molded of plastic material separate from said container body operable to be moved into and out of supported relation within said container body, said shelf structure including a bottom wall of a rectangular configuration to fit within the interior of said container body, side supporting portions extending laterally outwardly from the central part of each side of said shelf bottom wall throughout an extent generally equal to the end dimension thereof and end supporting portions extending laterally outwardly from the central part of each end of said shelf bottom wall throughout an extent generally equal to the horizontal dimension of said hand openings, said supporting portions having downwardly facing surfaces for engaging (1) the upwardly facing nesting surfaces of said side walls and (2) the upwardly facing surfaces defining the lower portion of said end wall hand openings when said shelf structure is disposed in supported relation within said container body, said shelf structure being configured to be disposed in horizontally stable vertically stacked relation with a like shelf structure when out of supported relation within said container body.

6. A container assembly as defined in claim 5 wherein said shelf bottom wall includes an imperforate bottom panel having intersecting strengthening ribs extending downwardly therefrom and a continuous peripheral wall extending upwardly from the peripheral edges thereof.

7. A container assembly as defined in claim 6 wherein a plurality of wash water drain openings are formed in one side of said peripheral wall above said imperforate panel.

8. A container assembly as defined in claim 5 wherein the configuration of said shelf structure providing the stacking function thereof includes a stacking lug extending upwardly from each end of each side supporting portion positioned in vertical alignment with a lug receiving pocket therebelow.

9. A container assembly as defined in claim 5 wherein each side supporting portion includes upper and lower horizontally extending generally parallel wall portions extending outwardly from the upper and lower edges of said peripheral wall, a flange extending downwardly from the outer edge of the lower horizontal wall portion and a plurality of horizontally spaced vertical ribs integrally joined in strengthening relation therewith.

10. A container for meat and the like comprising a container body molded of plastic material including a rectangular bottom wall having a pair of opposed generally parallel end walls extending upwardly from opposite ends thereof, upper stacking means along the upper edge of each end wall, lower stacking means along the lower edge of each end wall complementary with said upper stacking means so as to enable said container body to be supported on a like container body in a stacked position of vertical alignment and to

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be stably supported in said stacked position against substantial horizontal movement in any direction out of said stacked position, said container body including opposed side walls of a horizontal extent greater than the horizontal extent of said end walls extending upwardly from said bottom wall between said side walls, said side walls having nesting surface means formed in the upper portions thereof for supporting a like container body disposed in a 90° horizontally rotated orientation in a nested position therein when said container body is empty to a depth permitting said container body to support another like container body in said stacked position thereon above the container body nested therein, said nesting surface means dividing said side walls into two end sections of a height generally equal to the height of said end walls and a central section extending therebetween of a height generally one-half the height of the end sections, the central section of one of said side walls having a recess formed in the upper central major portion thereof, the recessed portion of said one side wall including a structure of inverted U-shaped cross-sectional configuration, a plurality of horizontally spaced strengthening ribs integrally joined to the exterior surfaces thereof and extending vertically throughout the interior space defined thereby, an integral vertical panel extending upwardly adjacent the inner edge of the inverted U-shaped structure, a horizontal rib extending horizontally outwardly from the upper edge of said panel and a plurality of horizontally spaced vertically extending ribs integrally interconnected with the horizontal rib, panel and adjacent inverted U-shaped structure.

11. A container as defined in claim 10 wherein said lower inverted U-shaped structure extends completely around the lower peripheral portion of said container body, said bottom wall being relatively flexibly connected with said peripheral structure by a peripheral horizontally extending web integrally joined therewith.

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12. A container as defined in claim 11 wherein the part of said inverted U-shaped peripheral structure extending along each end wall and the associated end sections of said side walls constitutes said lower stacking means, said upper stacking means including the upper part of each end wall and the associated end sections of said side walls, said upper and lower stacking parts having upwardly and downwardly facing horizontal surfaces extending continuously through.

13. A container as defined in claim 12 wherein said end walls have hand openings formed therein the lower portions of which are defined by upwardly facing surfaces extending generally horizontally at a vertical level substantially at the level of the nesting surface means formed in the upper portion of said side walls, and a shelf structure molded of plastic material separate from said container body operable to be moved into and out of supported relation within said container body, said shelf structure including a bottom wall of a rectangular configuration to fit within the interior of said container body, side supporting portions extending laterally outwardly from the central part of each side of said shelf bottom wall throughout an extent generally equal to the end dimension thereof and end supporting portions extending laterally outwardly from the central part of each end of said shelf bottom wall throughout an extent generally equal to the horizontal dimension of said hand openings, said supporting portions having downwardly facing surfaces for engaging the upwardly facing nesting surfaces of said side walls and the upwardly facing surfaces defining the lower portion of said end wall hand openings when said shelf structure is disposed in supported relation within said container body, said shelf structure being configured to be disposed in horizontally stable vertically stacked relation with a like shelf structure when out of supported relation within said container body.

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