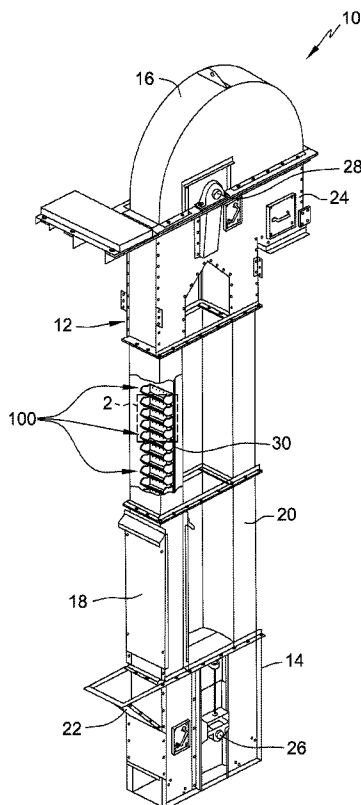




(86) Date de dépôt PCT/PCT Filing Date: 2015/02/20
(87) Date publication PCT/PCT Publication Date: 2015/08/27
(45) Date de délivrance/Issue Date: 2022/03/08
(85) Entrée phase nationale/National Entry: 2016/08/18
(86) N° demande PCT/PCT Application No.: US 2015/016795
(87) N° publication PCT/PCT Publication No.: 2015/127188
(30) Priorité/Priority: 2014/02/21 (US14/186,769)

(51) Cl.Int./Int.Cl. *E02F 3/04* (2006.01),
B65G 17/12 (2006.01), *B65G 47/40* (2006.01)
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(54) Titre : GODET POUR ELEVATEUR A GODETS
(54) Title: BUCKET FOR A BUCKET ELEVATOR



(57) Abrégé/Abstract:

A bucket is adapted to be spaced relatively close to adjacent buckets and has sides with a contoured upper edge to facilitate carrying material above the water level capacity of the bucket.

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property
Organization
International Bureau



(10) International Publication Number
WO 2015/127188 A1

(43) International Publication Date
27 August 2015 (27.08.2015)

- (51) International Patent Classification:
E02F 3/04 (2006.01) *B65G 17/12* (2006.01)
B65G 47/40 (2006.01)
- (21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2015/016795
- (22) International Filing Date:
20 February 2015 (20.02.2015)
- (25) Filing Language: English
- (26) Publication Language: English
- (30) Priority Data:
14/186,769 21 February 2014 (21.02.2014) US
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souri 63105-1847 (US).
- (81) Designated States (*unless otherwise indicated, for every
kind of national protection available*): AE, AG, AL, AM,
AO, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BH, BN, BR, BW, BY,
BZ, CA, CH, CL, CN, CO, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM,
DO, DZ, EC, EE, EG, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, GT,
HN, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IR, IS, JP, KE, KG, KN, KP, KR,
KZ, LA, LC, LK, LR, LS, LU, LY, MA, MD, ME, MG,
MK, MN, MW, MX, MY, MZ, NA, NG, NI, NO, NZ, OM,
PA, PE, PG, PH, PL, PT, QA, RO, RS, RU, RW, SA, SC,
SD, SE, SG, SK, SL, SM, ST, SV, SY, TH, TJ, TM, TN,
TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VC, VN, ZA, ZM, ZW.

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: BUCKET FOR A BUCKET ELEVATOR

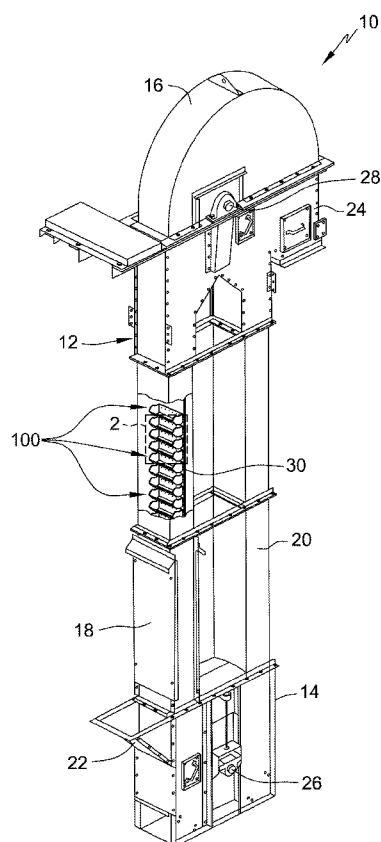


FIG. 1

(57) Abstract: A bucket is adapted to be spaced relatively close to adjacent buckets and has sides with a contoured upper edge to facilitate carrying material above the water level capacity of the bucket.

WO 2015/127188 A1

WO 2015/127188 A1

(84) Designated States (*unless otherwise indicated, for every kind of regional protection available*): ARIPO (BW, GH, GM, KE, LR, LS, MW, MZ, NA, RW, SD, SL, ST, SZ, TZ, UG, ZM, ZW), Eurasian (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, RU, TJ, TM), European (AL, AT, BE, BG, CH, CY, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, HR, HU, IE, IS, IT, LT, LU, LV, MC, MK, MT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, RS, SE, SI, SK, SM, TR), OAPI (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GQ, GW, KM, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

- *with international search report (Art. 21(3))*
- *before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of receipt of amendments (Rule 48.2(h))*

BUCKET FOR A BUCKET ELEVATOR

FIELD

[0001] The present disclosure relates generally to buckets for a bucket elevator and, more particularly, to a bucket adapted to be spaced relatively close to adjacent buckets and having sides with a contoured upper edge to facilitate carrying material above the water level capacity of the bucket.

BACKGROUND

[0002] Bucket elevators are conveying mechanisms typically having a continuous belt with a plurality of buckets attached thereto used to move flowable solid materials (e.g., grains, feeds, fertilizers, seeds, food products, chemicals, sand, salt, gravel) vertically upward from a lower elevation to a higher elevation. In use, a suitable drive mechanism (e.g., an electric motor) is used to drive the continuous belt and thus the buckets around a lower pulley (or foot pulley) and an upper pulley (or head pulley) that is spaced upward from the lower pulley. A supply of flowable solid material is fed to the bucket elevator generally adjacent the lower pulley where it is scooped up by the moving buckets as they pass through the supply of material. The material is then carried upward usually vertical but sometimes at an incline in the bucket to the upper pulley. As the bucket passes over the upper pulley, the material is discharged from the bucket to a discharge chute. The material is thrown from the bucket by centrifugal force as the bucket passes over the upper pulley.

[0003] As one can readily appreciate, the total potential capacity of the bucket elevator can be increased by attaching more buckets and/or buckets with more capacity to the continuous belt. Accordingly, there is an ongoing desire for a bucket for a bucket elevator that has an increased capacity and can be spaced relatively close on the continuous belt.

SUMMARY

[0004] In one aspect, a bucket for a bucket elevator generally comprises a bottom wall, a back wall, a front wall and a pair of opposed side walls collectively defining an interior chamber. Each of the side walls has a contoured upper edge to facilitate carrying material above the water level capacity of the bucket and the bucket is adapted for spacing less than the nominal projection of the bucket.

[0005] In another aspect, a bucket for a bucket elevator defines a vertical axis and a horizontal axis. The bucket generally comprises a bottom wall, a back wall, a front wall and a pair of opposed side walls collectively defining an interior chamber. Each of the side walls has an ear for carrying material above the water level capacity of the bucket and is adapted for spacing less than the nominal projection of the bucket.

[0006] In yet another aspect, a bucket elevator generally comprises a housing having a boot section, a head section spaced vertically above the boot section, an ascending leg section extending upward from the boot section to the head section, and a descending leg section extending downward from the head section to the boot section. The boot section includes an inlet for allowing flowable solid materials to enter the housing and the head section includes an outlet for allowing the flowable solid materials to exit the housing. A foot pulley is disposed in the boot section of the housing and a head pulley is disposed in the head section. A continuous belt is supported by the foot and head pulleys for movement in an endless path within the housing. A plurality of buckets is mounted to the continuous belt such that bottoms of the leading buckets are nested with tops of the trailing buckets.

[0007] In still another aspect, a method of making a bucket for a bucket elevator is disclosed. The bucket has a bottom wall, a back wall, a front wall and a pair of opposed side walls collectively defining an interior chamber. Each of the side walls has an ear for carrying material above the water level capacity of the bucket. The method generally comprises forming a bucket blank using an injection molding process.

[0008] In a further aspect, a bucket is adapted to be spaced relatively close to adjacent buckets and has sides with a contoured upper edge to facilitate carrying material above the water level capacity of the bucket.

[0008a] In a further aspect, there is a bucket for a bucket elevator comprising a bottom wall, a back wall, a front wall and a pair of opposed side walls collectively defining an interior chamber, the bottom wall including a first portion extending downward from the back wall and a second portion extending upward from the bottom wall first portion to the front wall, each of the side walls having a contoured upper edge to facilitate carrying material above a water level capacity of the bucket; wherein the contoured upper edge of each side wall includes a first portion extending from the back wall, a second portion extending upward from the side wall first portion and a third portion that extends from the side wall second portion to the front wall, the first, second, and third portions cooperatively defining an upper extent of an ear of each of the side walls, wherein the bucket is adapted for spacing relative to an adjacent bucket less than a nominal projection of the bucket such that the adjacent bucket is nested within the top of the bucket and the first and second portions of the bottom wall of the adjacent bucket are offset from and disposed vertically below at least a portion of the ears of each of the side walls of the bucket.

[0008b] In a further aspect, there is a plurality of buckets for a bucket elevator defining a vertical axis and a horizontal axis, each bucket of the plurality of buckets comprising a bottom wall, a back wall, a front wall and a pair of opposed side walls collectively defining an interior chamber, the bottom wall including a first portion extending downward from the back wall and a second portion extending upward from the bottom wall first portion to the front wall, each of the side walls having a contoured upper edge of each side wall including a first portion extending from the back wall, a second portion extending upward from the side wall first portion and a third portion that extends from the side wall second portion to the front wall, the first, second, and third portions of the side wall cooperatively defining an upper extent of an ear of each of the side walls, each bucket of the plurality of buckets being adapted for spacing relative to an adjacent bucket less than a nominal projection of the bucket such that a leading bucket of the plurality of buckets is nested within the top of a trailing bucket of the plurality of buckets and the first and second portions of the bottom wall of the leading bucket

are offset from and disposed vertically below at least a portion of the ears of each of the side walls of the trailing bucket of the plurality of buckets.

[0008c] In a further aspect, there is a centrifugal bucket elevator comprising: a housing having a boot section, a head section spaced vertically above the boot section, an ascending leg section extending upward from the boot section to the head section, and a descending leg section extending downward from the head section to the boot section, the boot section including an inlet for allowing flowable solid materials to enter the housing, the head section including an outlet for allowing the flowable solid materials to exit the housing; a foot pulley disposed in the boot section of the housing; a head pulley disposed in the head section; a continuous belt supported by the foot and head pulleys for movement in an endless path within the housing; and a plurality of buckets mounted to the continuous belt, each of the buckets including a bottom wall, a back wall, a front wall and a pair of opposed side walls collectively defining an interior chamber, the bottom wall including a first portion extending downward from the back wall and a second portion extending upward from the bottom wall first portion to the front wall, each of the side walls having a contoured upper edge, each of the buckets being configured such that centrifugal force is able to throw material out of the bucket and out of the housing through the outlet, wherein the contoured upper edge of each side wall includes a first portion extending from the back wall, a second portion extending upward from the side wall first portion and a third portion that extends from the side wall second portion to the front wall, the first, second, and third portions cooperatively defining an upper extent of an ear of each of the side walls, wherein each of the buckets are mounted to the continuous belt such that spacing between the buckets is less than a nominal projection of the buckets and leading buckets of the plurality of buckets are each nested within the tops of trailing buckets of the plurality of buckets such that the first and second portions of the bottom walls of the leading buckets are offset from and disposed to vertically overlap at least a portion of the ears of each of the side walls of the trailing buckets.

[0008d] In a further aspect, there is a method of making a bucket for a bucket elevator, the bucket having a bottom wall, a back wall, a front wall and a

pair of opposed side walls collectively defining an interior chamber, the bottom wall including a first portion extending downward from the back wall and a second portion extending upward from the bottom wall first portion to the front wall, each of the side walls having a contoured upper edge of each side wall including a first portion extending from the back wall, including a second portion extending upward from the side wall first portion and a third portion that extends from the side wall second portion to the front wall the first, second, and third portions cooperatively defining an upper extent of an ear of each of the side walls, wherein the bucket is adapted for spacing relative to an adjacent bucket less than a nominal projection of the bucket such that the adjacent bucket is nested within the top of the bucket and the first and second portions of the bottom wall of the adjacent bucket are offset from and disposed vertically below at least a portion of the ears of each of the side walls of the bucket, the method comprising: forming a bucket blank using an injection molding process.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] Figure 1 is a perspective view of an exemplary bucket elevator having a plurality of buckets of one suitable embodiment of the present disclosure.

[0010] Figure 2 is an enlarged fragmented view taken from Figure 1 illustrating five of the plurality of buckets attached to a continuous belt of the bucket elevator.

[0011] Figure 3 is a side view of the buckets and continuous belt of Figure 2.

[0012] Figure 4 is a perspective view of one of the buckets of Figure 1 removed from the bucket elevator.

[0013] Figure 5 is a front elevation of the bucket seen in Figure 4.

[0014] Figure 6 is a rear elevation thereof.

[0015] Figure 7 is a right side elevation thereof.

[0016] Figure 8 is a left side elevation thereof.

[0017] Figure 9 is a top plan thereof.

[0018] Figure 10 is a bottom plan thereof.

[0019] Figure 11 is a perspective view illustrating a plurality of another suitable embodiment of a bucket of the present disclosure attached to the continuous belt of the bucket elevator.

[0020] Figure 12 is a side elevation of another suitable embodiment of a bucket of the present disclosure attached to the continuous belt of the bucket elevator.

[0021] Figure 13 is a side elevation of still another suitable embodiment of a bucket of the present disclosure attached to the continuous belt of the bucket elevator.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0022] Referring now to the drawings and in particular to Figure 1, an exemplary bucket elevator, indicated generally at 10, having a plurality of buckets of one suitable embodiment of the present disclosure is illustrated therein. The buckets of the embodiment seen in Figure 1 are indicated generally by reference number 100 and described in more detail below. As illustrated in Figure 1, the bucket elevator 10 comprises a housing, indicated at 12, defining a boot section 14, a head section 16 spaced vertically above the boot section, an ascending leg section 18 extending vertically upward from the boot section to the head section, and a descending leg section 20 extending vertically downward from the head section to the boot section. The boot section 14 includes an inlet 22 (e.g., an inlet chute) for allowing flowable solid materials (e.g., grains, feeds, fertilizers, seeds, food products, chemicals, sand, salt, gravel) to enter the housing 12, and the head section 16 includes an outlet 24 (e.g., an outlet chute), which is

spaced vertically from the inlet 22, for allowing the flowable solid materials to exit the housing.

[0023] In the illustrated embodiment, a foot pulley 26 is disposed in the boot section 14 of the housing 12, and a head pulley 28 is disposed in the head section 16. A continuous belt 30 is supported by the foot and head pulleys 26, 28 for movement in an endless path within the housing 12. A suitable drive mechanism (not shown), such as an electric motor, is operatively connected to the head pulley 28 for driving the continuous belt 30 about the endless path. Each of the illustrated buckets 100 are mounted to the continuous belt 30. While the bucket elevator 10 illustrated in Figure 1 is a vertical centrifugal discharge bucket elevator, it is contemplated that the bucket elevator can have any suitable configuration without departing from some aspect of the present disclosure.

[0024] In use, solid flowable material is delivered to the boot section 14 of the housing 12 through the inlet 22. As the suitable drive mechanism drives the continuous belt 30 and thus the buckets 100 along the endless path and around the foot pulley 26, the moving buckets scoop up material as they pass through the boot section 14 of the housing 12. The material is then carried vertically upward in the buckets 100 through the ascending leg section 18 to the head section 16. As the buckets 100 containing the material pass over the head pulley 28, centrifugal force throws the material out of the buckets and out of the housing 12 through the outlet 24. The empty buckets 100 then travel downward through the descending leg section 20 to the boot section. The buckets 100 repeat this cycle as long as material is fed through the inlet 22 to the boot section 14 of the housing 12 and the continuous belt 30 is driven along the continuous path by the drive mechanism.

[0025] Figures 2 and 3, which are enlarged fragmentary views taken from Figure 1, illustrate a plurality of the buckets 100 mounted to the continuous belt 30. In the illustrated embodiment, each of the buckets 100 is releasably mounted to the continuous belt 30 using suitable fasteners (e.g., nuts 32 and elevator bolts 34 as seen in Figure 2). It is understood, however, that the buckets 100 can be mounted to the continuous belt 30 using any suitable method. It is also understood that the buckets 100 of the present disclosure can be mounted to any suitable conveying device without departing from some aspect of this disclosure.

[0026] Figures 4-10 illustrate one of the buckets 100 seen in Figures 1-3 removed from the bucket elevator 10. As illustrated in Figures 4-10, the bucket 100 suitably comprises a bottom wall 102, a back wall 104, a front wall 106 and a pair of

opposed side walls 108 collectively defining an interior chamber 110 for receiving and transporting flowable solid material. As seen therein, the bucket 100 has an open top defined by the upper edges of the back wall 104, front wall 106, and side walls 108 for providing access to the interior chamber 110. More specifically, the open top allows the bucket 100 to receive and discharge the flowable solid material as the bucket is being moved by the continuous belt 30. It is understood that the interior chamber 110 of the bucket 100 can have any suitable volume. In one suitable embodiment, for example, the interior chamber 110 can have volume between about 0.3 cubic feet and about 0.81 cubic feet or more.

[0027] In the illustrated embodiment, the back wall 104 extends generally vertically upward from the bottom wall 102. The back wall 104 defines a generally planer back surface 112 of the bucket 100 adapted for face-to-face engagement with the continuous belt 30 when the bucket is mounted to the belt. A plurality of holes 114 (six being illustrated in Figures 4-6) extend through the back wall 104 and are sized and shaped to receive the elevator bolts 34 (or other suitable fastener) used to mount the bucket 100 to the continuous belt 30. It is understood that the back wall 104 can have any suitable number of holes 114. For example, a bucket 100 having a greater interior chamber 110 volume may have more holes 114 than a bucket having a lesser interior chamber volume. The front wall 106 extends upward and outward from the bottom wall 102. In other words, the front wall 106 is outwardly inclined (or angled outward) as it extends away from the bottom wall. The inclined front wall 106 facilitates the bucket 100 scooping materials into its interior chamber 110 and discharging material therefrom as the bucket is being moved by the continuous belt 30.

[0028] With reference now to Figures 7 and 8, each of the illustrated side walls 108 defines at least four edges: a generally vertical first side edge 120; a contoured upper edge 122; a bottom edge 124; and an angled second side edge 126. In the illustrated embodiment, the first side edge 120 corresponds to the intersection of the back wall 104 with the respective side wall 108, the bottom edge 124 corresponds with the intersection of the bottom wall 102 with the respective side wall, and the second side edge 126 corresponds with the intersection of the front wall 106 with the respective side wall. The contoured upper edge 122 of each of the side walls 108 defines a portion of an upper extent of the bucket 100. As mentioned above, the upper edges 122 of the side walls 108 along with the upper edges of the back and front walls 104, 106 define the open top of the bucket 100. (See, e.g., Figures 4 and 9). With reference again to Figures 7 and 8, each

of the side walls 108 defines a vertical (or first) axis VA and a horizontal (or second) axis HA (as viewed in Figures 7 and 8).

[0029] In the illustrated embodiment, the upper edge 122 of each side wall 108 includes a first, generally horizontal portion 128 extending from the first side edge 120 (and thus the back wall 104), a curved second portion 130 extending upward along a slightly concaved pathway from the first portion, and a curved third portion 132 that extends along a convex pathway from the second portion to the second side edge 126 (and thus the front wall 106). It is contemplated, however, that the upper edge 122 and thus the first, second, and third portions 128, 130, 132 can have any suitable shape and configuration without departing from some aspects of this disclosure. For example, Figure 11 illustrates an embodiment of the bucket 100' having linear segments defining the first, second, and third portions 128', 130', 132' of the upper edge.

[0030] As illustrated in Figures 7 and 8, the first, second and third portions 128, 130, 132 cooperatively define the upper extent of an ear 134 of each of the side walls 108. As seen in Figures 7 and 8, the ears 134 are a portion of the side walls 108 that are located above the water level capacity of the bucket 100 and indicated in the drawings by cross-hatching. More specifically, the ears 134 of the illustrated embodiment are the portions of the side walls 108 that extend above a line drawn (i.e., the dashed line seen in Figures 7 and 8) between the upper extent of the back wall 104 and the upper extent of the front wall 106. The water level capacity WL of the bucket 100 is illustrated in Figure 3 and, in the illustrated embodiment, is defined by the upper edge of the front wall 106.

[0031] In the illustrated embodiment, each of the ears 134 has a generally truncated teardrop shape. That is, each of the ears 134 is generally shaped like a teardrop cut longitudinally in half. More specifically, the ears 134 are rounded or bulbous near the front wall 106 of the bucket 100 and taper from the rounded section towards the back wall 104. Accordingly, the majority of the surface area of each of the ears 134 is disposed forward (i.e., towards the front of the bucket 100) of the vertical axis VA. In other words, more than 50% of the surface area of the ear 134 is disposed forward the vertical axis VA. More suitably, more than 75% of the surface area of the ear 134 is disposed forward the vertical axis VA. In some suitable embodiments, the entire ear 134 can be disposed forward the vertical axis. In such an embodiment, the entire ear 134 would be spaced vertically above the inclined front wall 106. That is, no portion of the ear 134 would be spaced directly above the bottom wall 102. Rather, the ear 134 would be horizontally offset in a forward direction relative to the bottom wall 102.

[0032] With reference still to Figures 7 and 8, each of the ears 134 has an ear axis EA extending in part horizontally and in part vertically relative to the side wall 108. In one suitable embodiment, the ear axis EA and vertical axis VA cooperatively define an angle α between about 15 degrees and about 55 degrees. In one preferably suitable embodiment, the angle α between the ear axis EA and the vertical axis VA is between about 20 degrees and about 40 degrees. In the illustrated embodiment, for example, the angle α between the ear axis EA and the vertical axis VA is about 26 degrees.

[0033] As mentioned above, it is often desirable to mount the maximum number of buckets 100 possible to the continuous belt 30 to thereby maximize the total potential capacity of the bucket elevator. Thus, in one suitable embodiment of the bucket elevator 10, the spacing between buckets 100 is minimized so that the maximum number of buckets can be mounted to the continuous belt 30. When a plurality of buckets 100 of the present disclosure are mounted to the continuous belt 30 as seen in Figures 2 and 3, the bottom of the leading buckets 100 can be nested with the top of the trailing buckets. More specifically, the bottom of the leading buckets 100, which is defined by the bottom wall 102 and the front wall 106, can be disposed in close proximity (e.g., within about 0.25 inches) from the top of the trailing bucket such that a portion of the bottom of the leading bucket is offset from and disposed vertically below at least a portion of the top of the trailing bucket. As seen in Figure 3, the bottom wall 102 and part of the front wall 106 of the leading bucket 100 illustrated therein is offset from and disposed vertically below at least a portion of the ears 134 of each of the side walls 108. The ears 134 of the side walls 108 being located near the front wall 106 facilitate the bucket 100 carrying material above the water level capacity of the bucket.

[0034] In one suitable embodiment, for example, the spacing between buckets 100 can be equal to or less than the nominal projection of the bucket. For example, the buckets can suitably be spaced the bucket's nominal projection minus 0.25 inches, 0.5 inches, or 0.75 inches. In one particularly suitable embodiment, the spacing between buckets 100 is the buckets' nominal projection minus 1 inch. It is understood, however, that the buckets 100 can have other suitable spacing without departing from some aspects of this disclosure.

[0035] The bucket 100 may be fabricated from any number of materials, for example, but not limited to, suitable plastics (e.g., high density linear polyethylene, thermoplastic urethane, nylon) and suitable metals (e.g., aluminum, stainless steel, carbon steel, ductile iron) and using any suitable method. For example, a bucket fabricated from plastic can be formed using an injection molding process. It is understood that the bucket

can be machined following the molding process. In one suitable embodiment, for example, a bucket blank can be formed using an injection molding process and then machined to cut the profiled upper edges of the side walls 108 and the upper edge of the back wall 104. It is understood, however, that the bucket 100 may be constructed of any suitable materials and using any suitable method without departing from some aspects of this disclosure.

[0036] Figure 12 illustrates another suitable embodiment of a bucket, indicated generally at 200. Besides having different side walls 208, the bucket 200 illustrated in Figure 12 is substantially the same as the bucket 100 illustrated in Figures 4-10. As seen therein, each of the side walls 208 of the bucket 200 defines at least four edges: a generally vertical first side edge 220; a contoured upper edge 222; a bottom edge 224; and an angled second side edge 326. In the illustrated embodiment, the first side edge 220 corresponds to the intersection of a back wall of the bucket 200 with the respective side wall 208, the bottom edge 224 corresponds with the intersection of a bottom wall of the bucket with the respective side wall, and the second side edge 226 corresponds with the intersection of a front wall of the bucket with the respective side wall.

[0037] The contoured upper edge 222 of the side wall 208 defines a portion of an upper extent of the bucket 200. In the embodiment illustrated in Figure 12, the upper edge 222 includes a first, generally horizontal portion 228 extending from the first side edge 220 (and thus the back wall of the bucket) and a curved second portion 232 that extends along a convex pathway from the first portion to the second side edge 226 (and thus the front wall of the bucket). As seen in Figure 12, the side wall 208 of this embodiment includes an ear 234 (i.e., the portion of the side wall located above the water level capacity WL of the bucket 200) indicated in the drawing by cross-hatching. The water level capacity WL of the bucket 200 is illustrated in Figure 12 and, in the illustrated embodiment, is defined by the upper edge of the front wall of the bucket.

[0038] Figure 13 illustrates yet another suitable embodiment of a bucket, indicated generally at 300. Besides having different side walls 308, the bucket 300 illustrated in Figure 13 is substantially the same as the bucket 100 illustrated in Figures 4-10. As seen therein, each of the side walls 308 of the bucket 300 defines at least four edges: a generally vertical first side edge 320; a contoured upper edge 322; a bottom edge 324; and an angled second side edge 326. In the illustrated embodiment, the first side edge 320 corresponds to the intersection of a back wall of the bucket 300 with the respective side wall 308, the bottom edge 324 corresponds with the intersection of a

bottom wall of the bucket with the respective side wall, and the second side edge 326 corresponds with the intersection of a front wall of the bucket with the respective side wall.

[0039] The contoured upper edge 322 of the side wall 308 defines a portion of an upper extent of the bucket 300. In the embodiment illustrated in Figure 13, the upper edge 322 includes a first, generally horizontal portion 328 extending from the first side edge 320 (and thus the back wall of the bucket) and a second portion 332 that extends from the first portion to the second side edge 326 (and thus the front wall of the bucket). As seen in Figure 13, the side wall 308 of this embodiment includes an ear 334 (i.e., the portion of the side wall located above the water level capacity WL of the bucket 300) indicated in the drawing by cross-hatching. The water level capacity WL of the bucket 300 is illustrated in Figure 13 and, in the illustrated embodiment, is defined by the upper edge of the front wall of the bucket.

[0040] When introducing elements of the present invention or the embodiment(s) thereof, the articles “a,” “an,” “the,” and “the” are intended to mean that there are one or more of the elements. The terms “comprising,” “including,” and “having” are intended to be inclusive and mean that there may be additional elements other than the listed elements.

[0041] As various changes could be made in the above products and methods without departing from the scope of the invention, it is intended that all matter contained in the above description and shown in the accompanying drawings shall be interpreted as illustrative and not in a limiting sense.

CLAIMS:

1. A bucket for a bucket elevator comprising a bottom wall, a back wall, a front wall and a pair of opposed side walls collectively defining an interior chamber, the bottom wall including a first portion extending downward from the back wall and a second portion extending upward from the bottom wall first portion to the front wall, each of the side walls having a contoured upper edge to facilitate carrying material above a water level capacity of the bucket;

wherein the contoured upper edge of each side wall includes a first portion extending from the back wall, a second portion extending upward from the side wall first portion and a third portion that extends from the side wall second portion to the front wall, the first, second, and third portions cooperatively defining an upper extent of an ear of each of the side walls, wherein the bucket is adapted for spacing relative to an adjacent bucket less than a nominal projection of the bucket such that the adjacent bucket is nested within the top of the bucket and the first and second portions of the bottom wall of the adjacent bucket are offset from and disposed vertically below at least a portion of the ears of each of the side walls of the bucket.

2. The bucket set forth in claim 1 wherein the side wall second portion is concave and the side wall third portion is convex.

3. The bucket set forth in claim 1 wherein the upper edge defines a generally truncated teardrop shape.

4. A bucket elevator comprising a plurality of the buckets set forth in claim 1.

5. A plurality of buckets for a bucket elevator defining a vertical axis and a horizontal axis, each bucket of the plurality of buckets comprising a bottom wall, a back wall, a front wall and a pair of opposed side walls collectively defining an interior chamber, the bottom wall including a first portion extending downward from the back wall and a second portion extending upward from the bottom wall first portion to the front wall, each of the side walls having a contoured upper edge of each side wall including a first portion extending from the back wall, a second

portion extending upward from the side wall first portion and a third portion that extends from the side wall second portion to the front wall, the first, second, and third portions of the side wall cooperatively defining an upper extent of an ear of each of the side walls, each bucket of the plurality of buckets being adapted for spacing relative to an adjacent bucket less than a nominal projection of the bucket such that a leading bucket of the plurality of buckets is nested within the top of a trailing bucket of the plurality of buckets and the first and second portions of the bottom wall of the leading bucket are offset from and disposed vertically below at least a portion of the ears of each of the side walls of the trailing bucket of the plurality of buckets.

6. The plurality of buckets set forth in claim 5 wherein each of the ears is generally truncated teardrop shaped.

7. The plurality of buckets set forth in claim 6 wherein each of the ears comprises a bulbous portion disposed adjacent the front wall and a tapered portion disposed adjacent the back wall, the tapered portion tapering downward from the bulbous portion to the back wall.

8. A bucket elevator comprising a plurality of the buckets set forth in claim 5.

9. A centrifugal bucket elevator comprising:

a housing having a boot section, a head section spaced vertically above the boot section, an ascending leg section extending upward from the boot section to the head section, and a descending leg section extending downward from the head section to the boot section, the boot section including an inlet for allowing flowable solid materials to enter the housing, the head section including an outlet for allowing the flowable solid materials to exit the housing;

a foot pulley disposed in the boot section of the housing;

a head pulley disposed in the head section;

a continuous belt supported by the foot and head pulleys for movement in an endless path within the housing; and

a plurality of buckets mounted to the continuous belt, each of the buckets including a bottom wall, a back wall, a front wall and a pair of opposed side walls collectively defining an interior chamber, the bottom wall including a first portion extending downward from the back wall and a second portion extending upward from the bottom wall first portion to the front wall, each of the side walls having a contoured upper edge, each of the buckets being configured such that centrifugal force is able to throw material out of the bucket and out of the housing through the outlet, wherein the contoured upper edge of each side wall includes a first portion extending from the back wall, a second portion extending upward from the side wall first portion and a third portion that extends from the side wall second portion to the front wall, the first, second, and third portions cooperatively defining an upper extent of an ear of each of the side walls, wherein each of the buckets are mounted to the continuous belt such that spacing between the buckets is less than a nominal projection of the buckets and leading buckets of the plurality of buckets are each nested within the tops of trailing buckets of the plurality of buckets such that the first and second portions of the bottom walls of the leading buckets are offset from and disposed to vertically overlap at least a portion of the ears of each of the side walls of the trailing buckets.

10. The bucket elevator set forth in claim 9 wherein spacing between buckets is the nominal projection minus 2.54 cm (1 inch).

11. The bucket elevator set forth in claim 9 wherein the ears of each of the buckets are for carrying material above a water level capacity of the bucket.

12. A method of making a bucket for a bucket elevator, the bucket having a bottom wall, a back wall, a front wall and a pair of opposed side walls collectively defining an interior chamber, the bottom wall including a first portion extending downward from the back wall and a second portion extending upward from the bottom wall first portion to the front wall, each of the side walls having a contoured upper edge of each side wall including a first portion extending from the back wall, including a second portion extending upward from the side wall first portion and a third portion that extends from the side wall second portion to the front wall the first, second, and third portions cooperatively defining an upper extent of an ear of each of the side walls, wherein the bucket is adapted for spacing relative to an

adjacent bucket less than a nominal projection of the bucket such that the adjacent bucket is nested within the top of the bucket and the first and second portions of the bottom wall of the adjacent bucket are offset from and disposed vertically below at least a portion of the ears of each of the side walls of the bucket, the method comprising:

forming a bucket blank using an injection molding process.

13. The method of making a bucket set forth in claim 12 further comprising machining the bucket blank to form the ears on each of the side walls.

14. The method of making a bucket set forth in claim 13 further comprising cutting material from the upper edge of the back wall.

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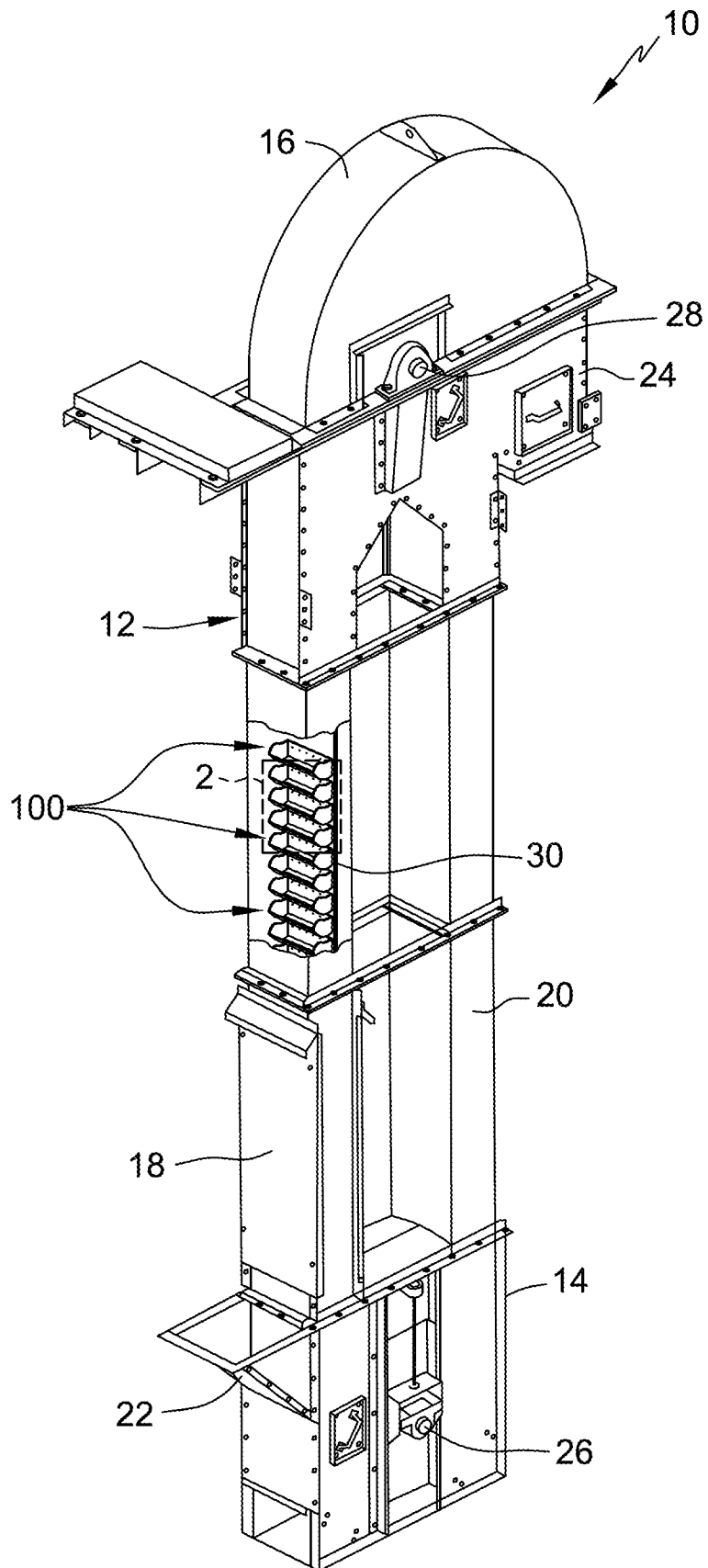


FIG. 1

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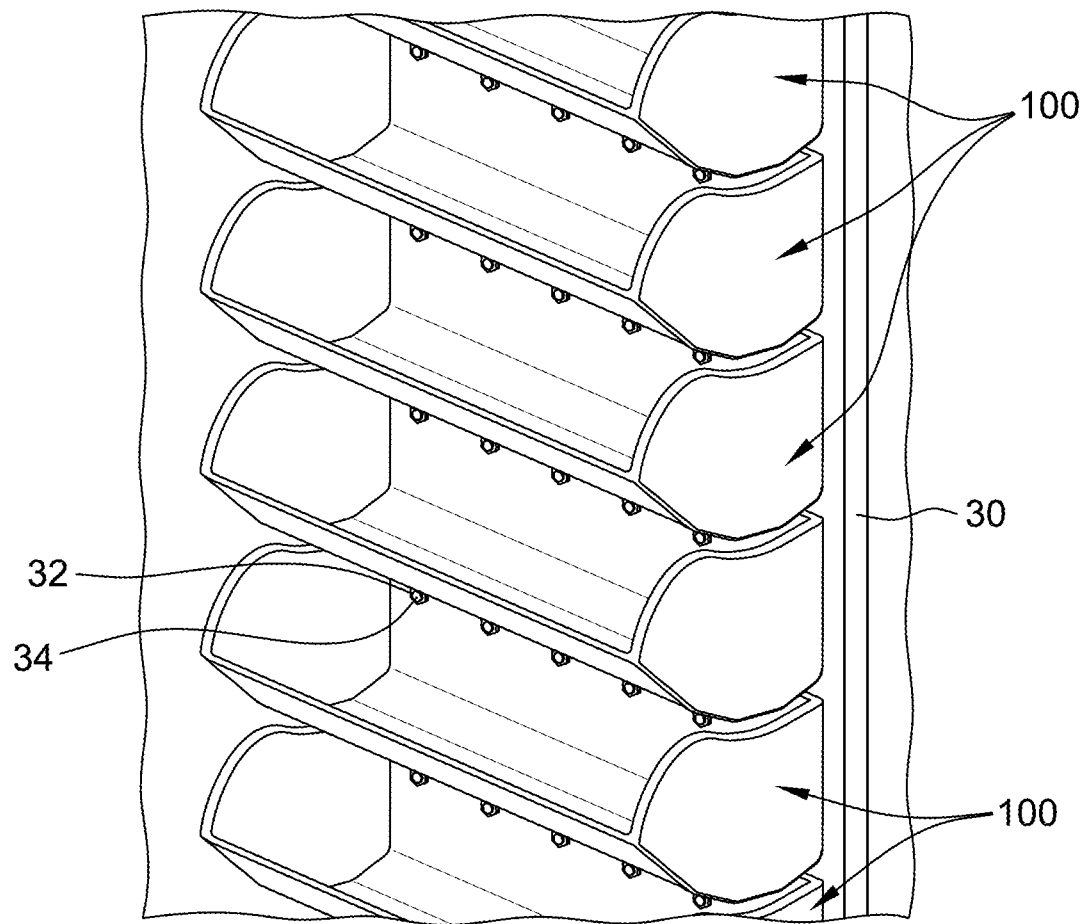


FIG. 2

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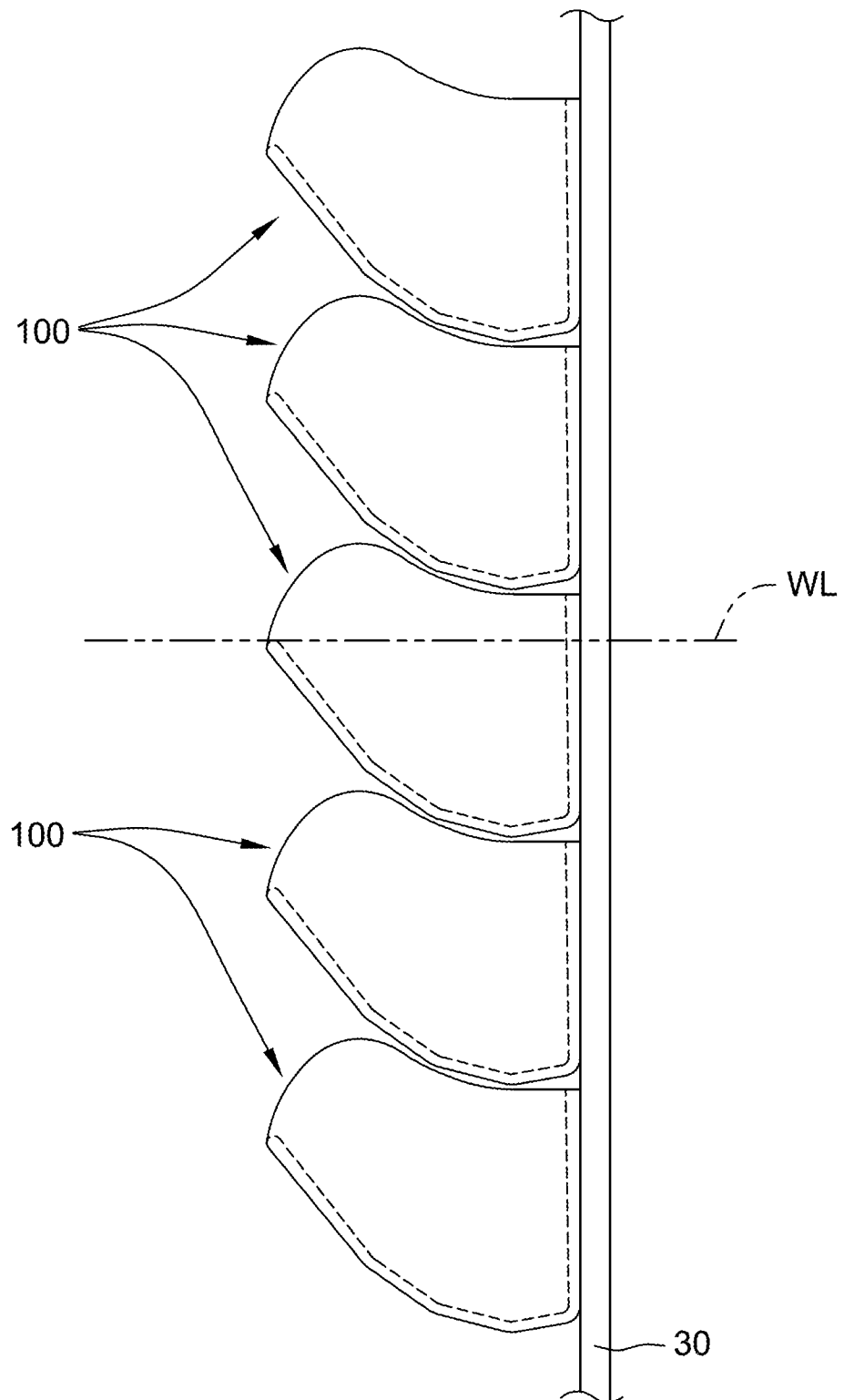


FIG. 3

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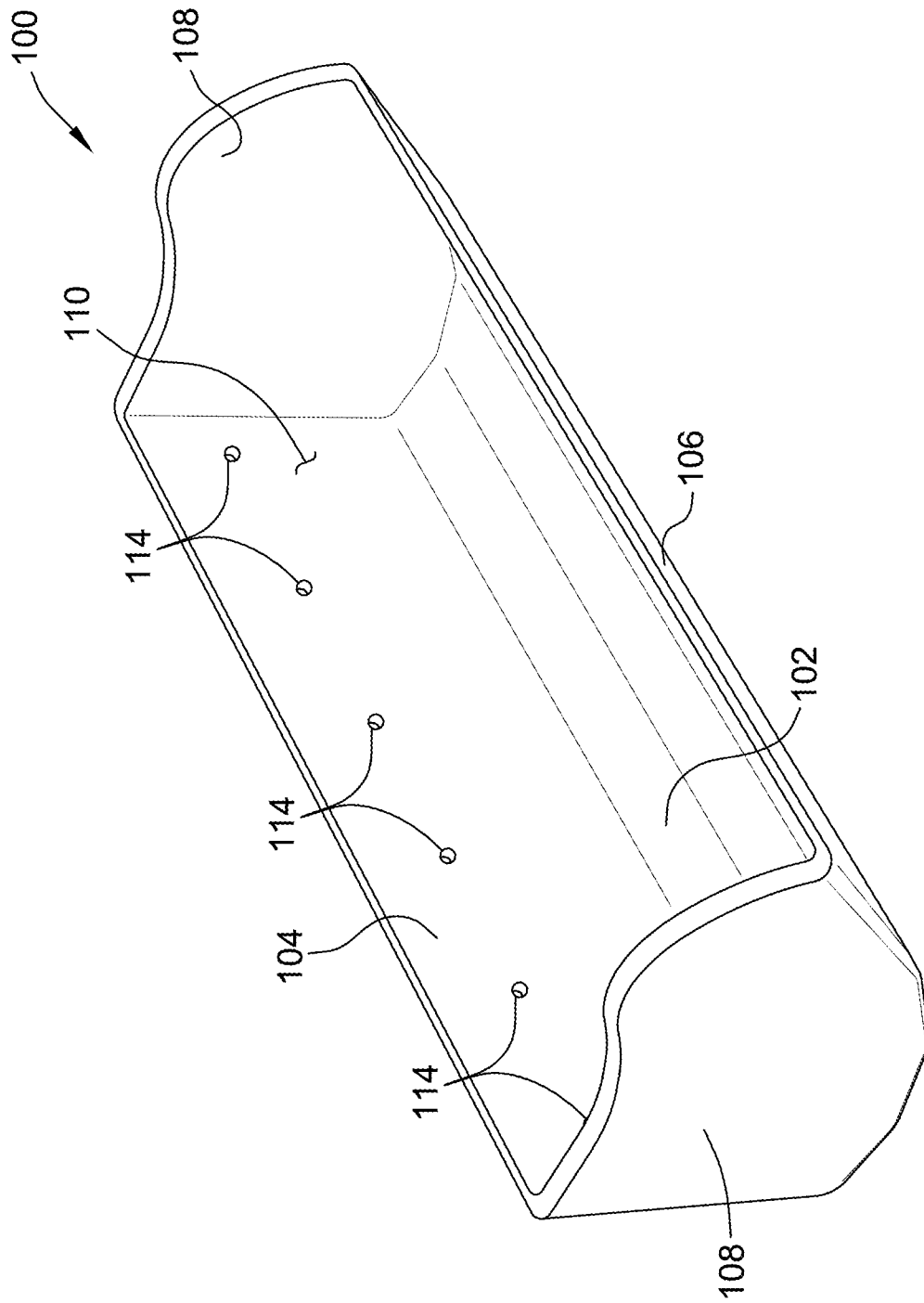


FIG. 4

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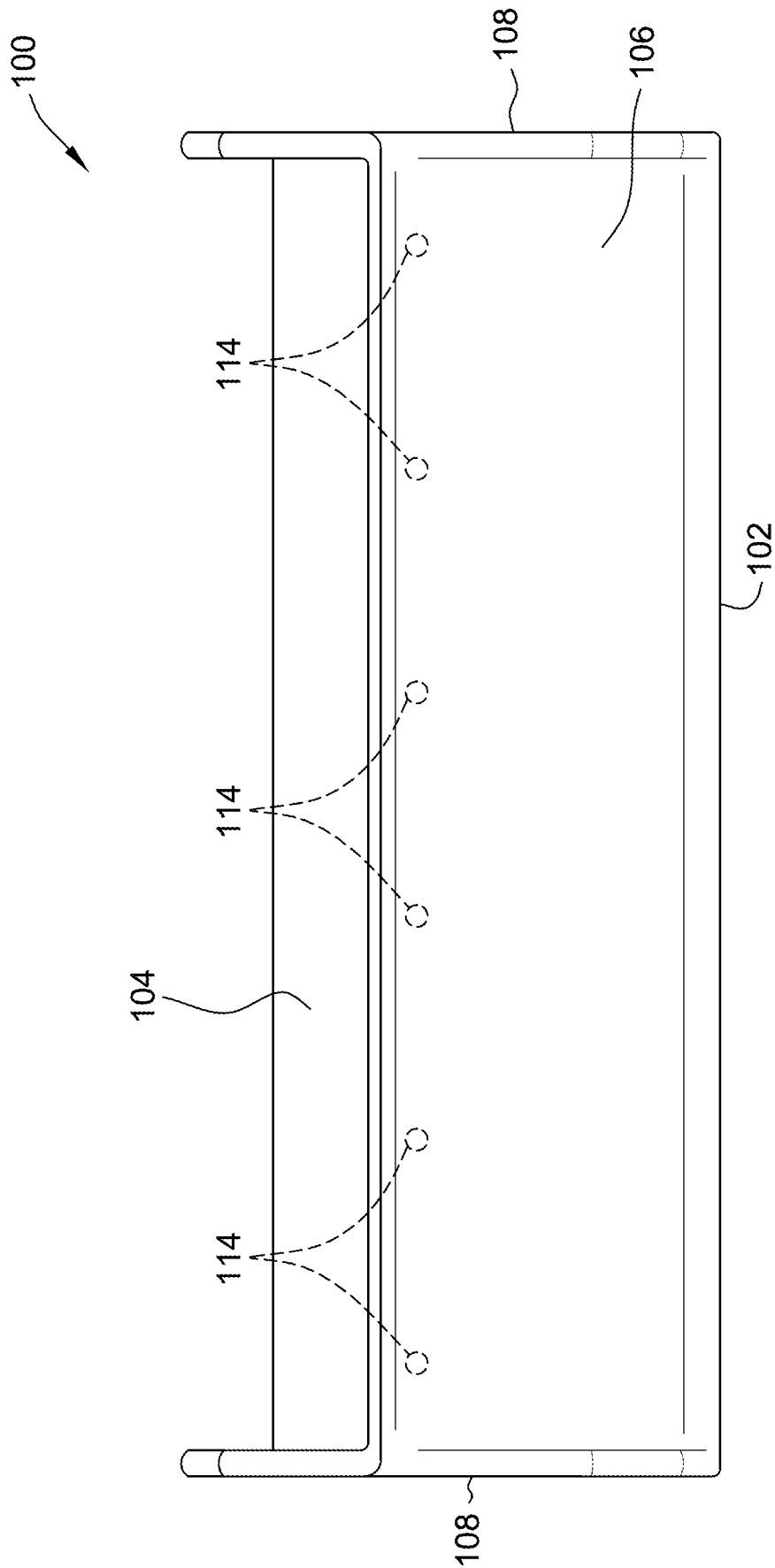


FIG. 5

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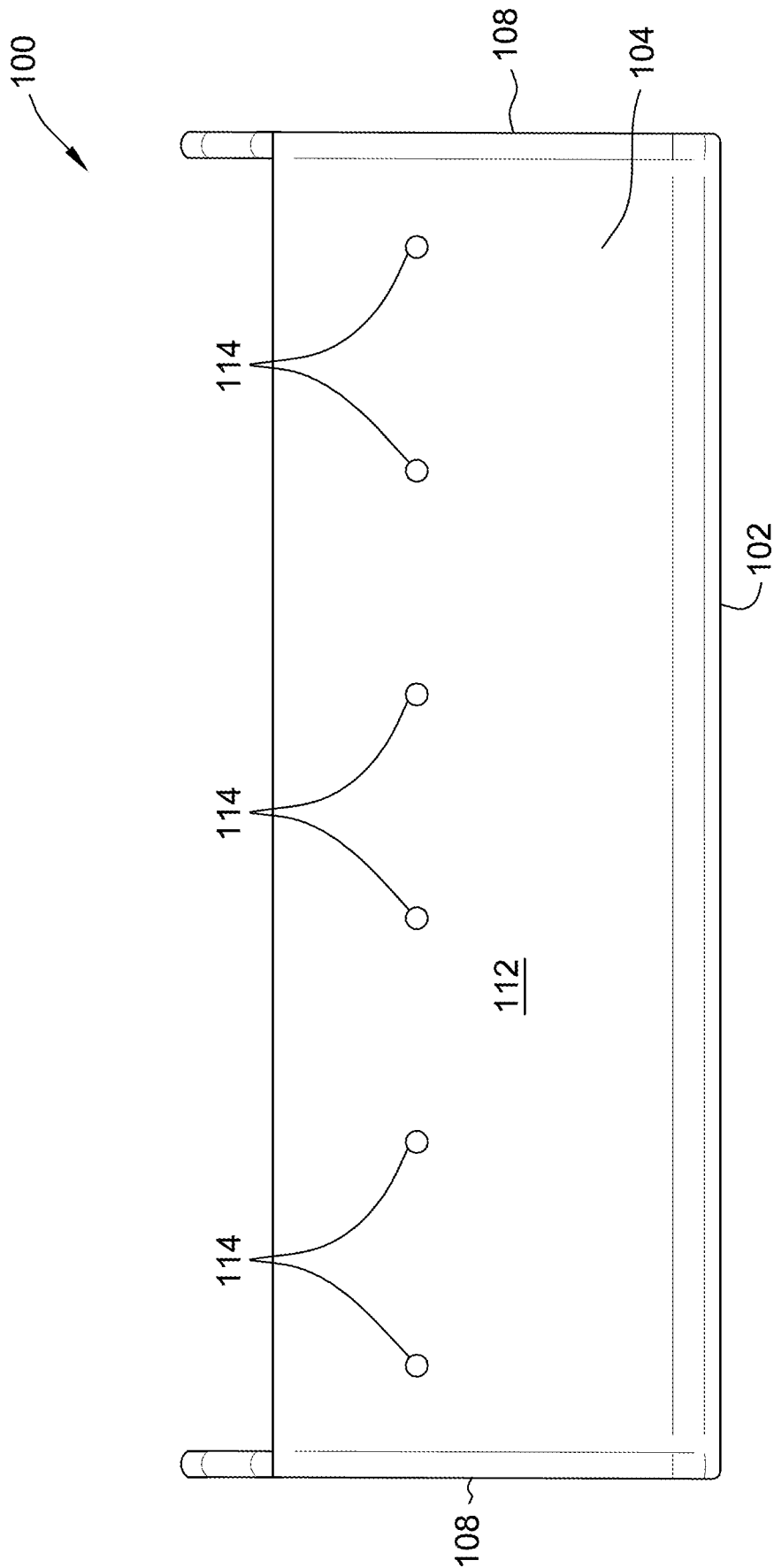


FIG. 6

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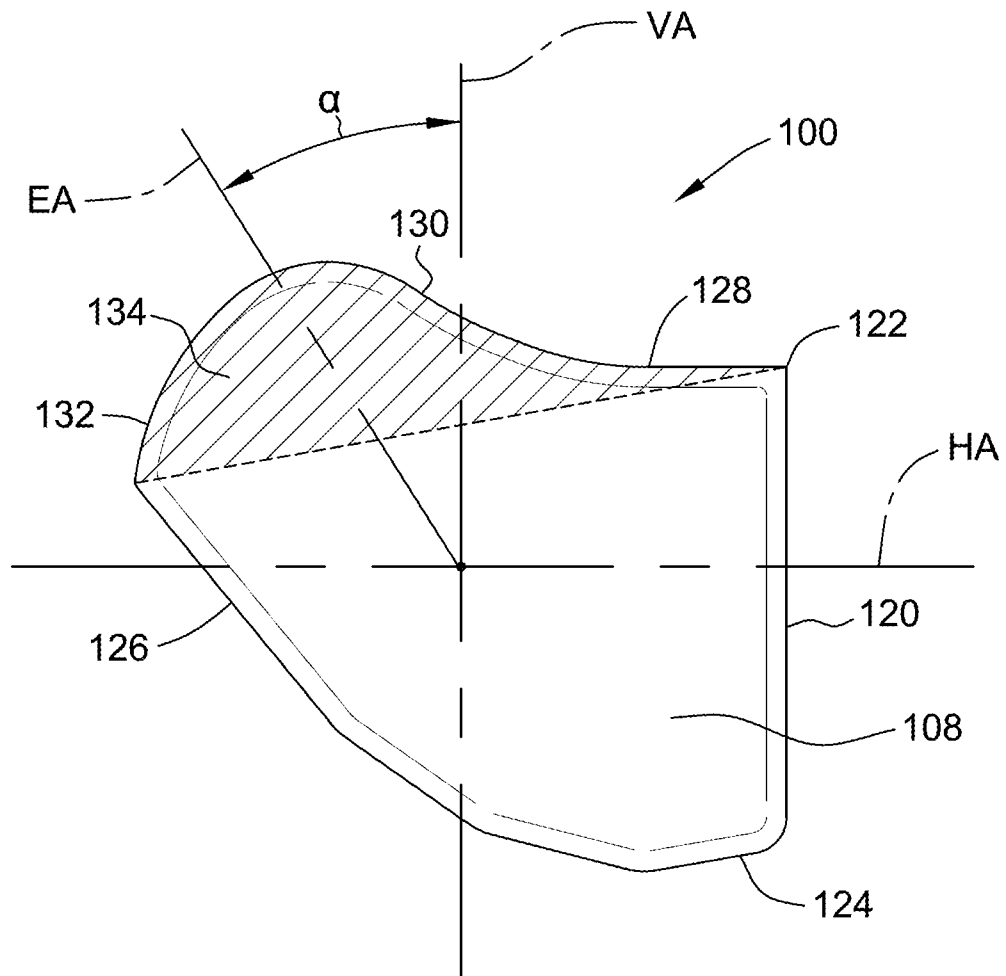


FIG. 7

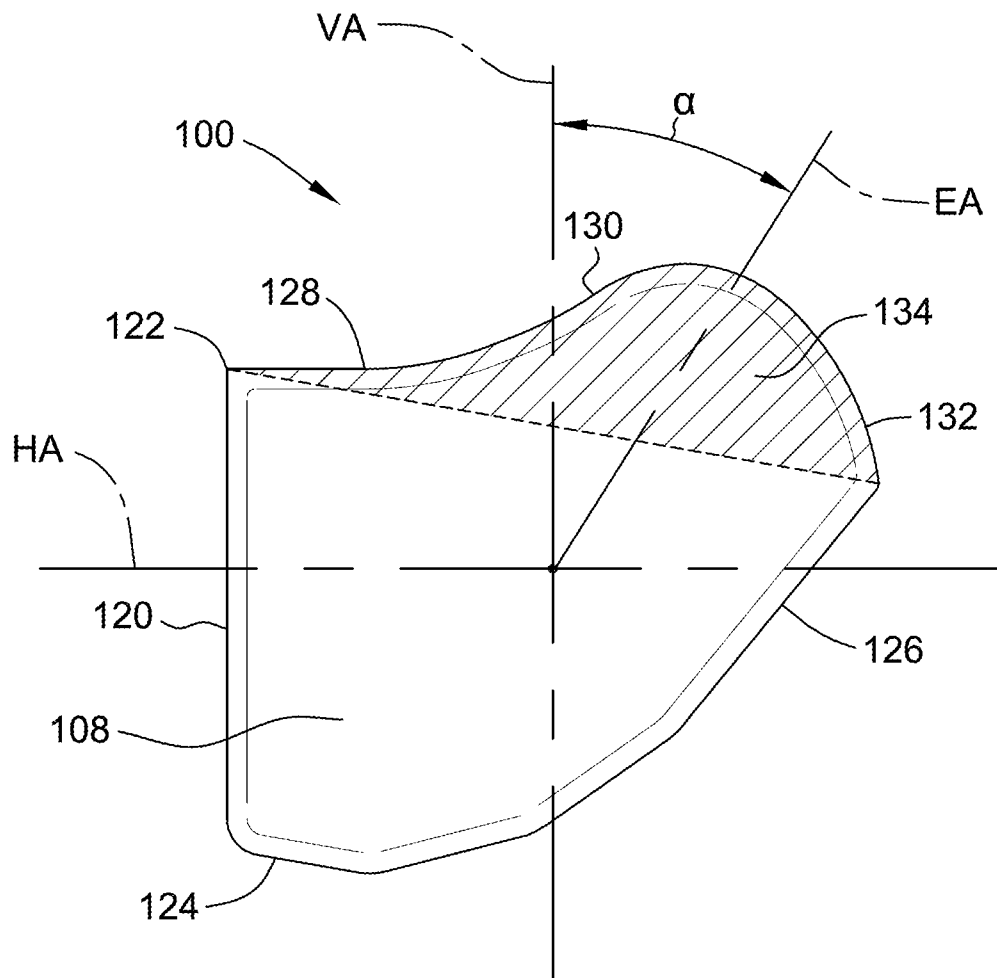


FIG. 8

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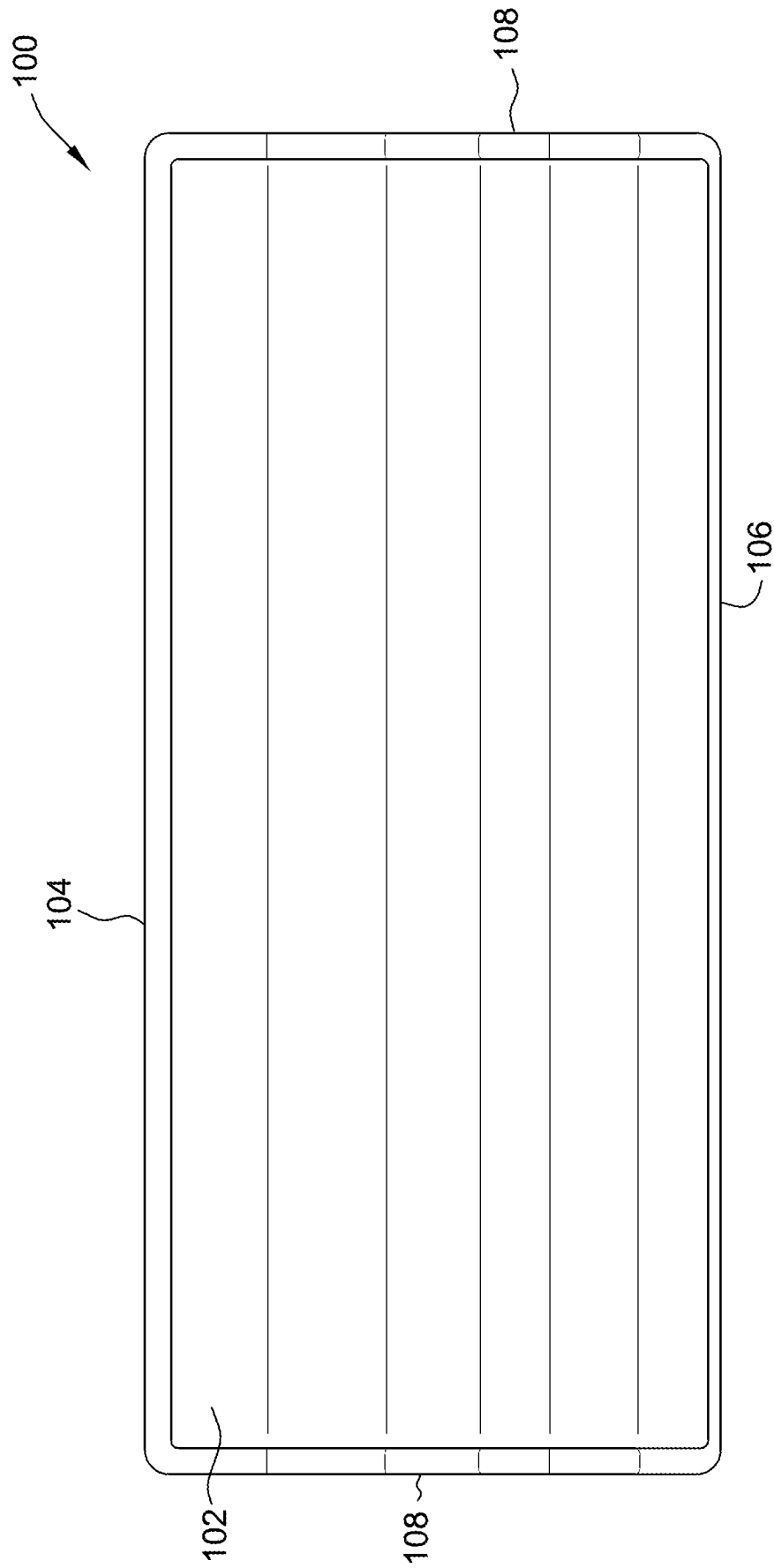


FIG. 9

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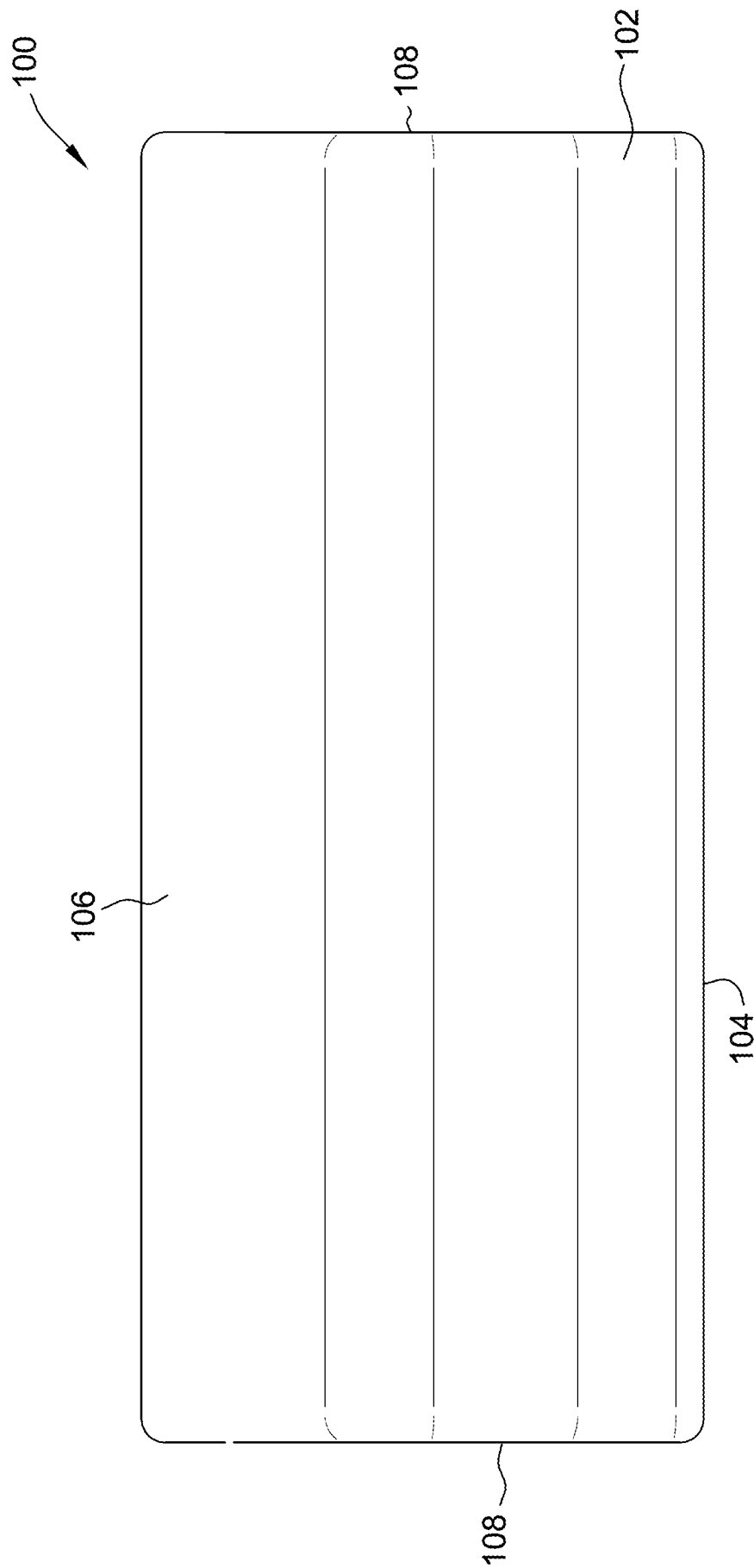


FIG. 10

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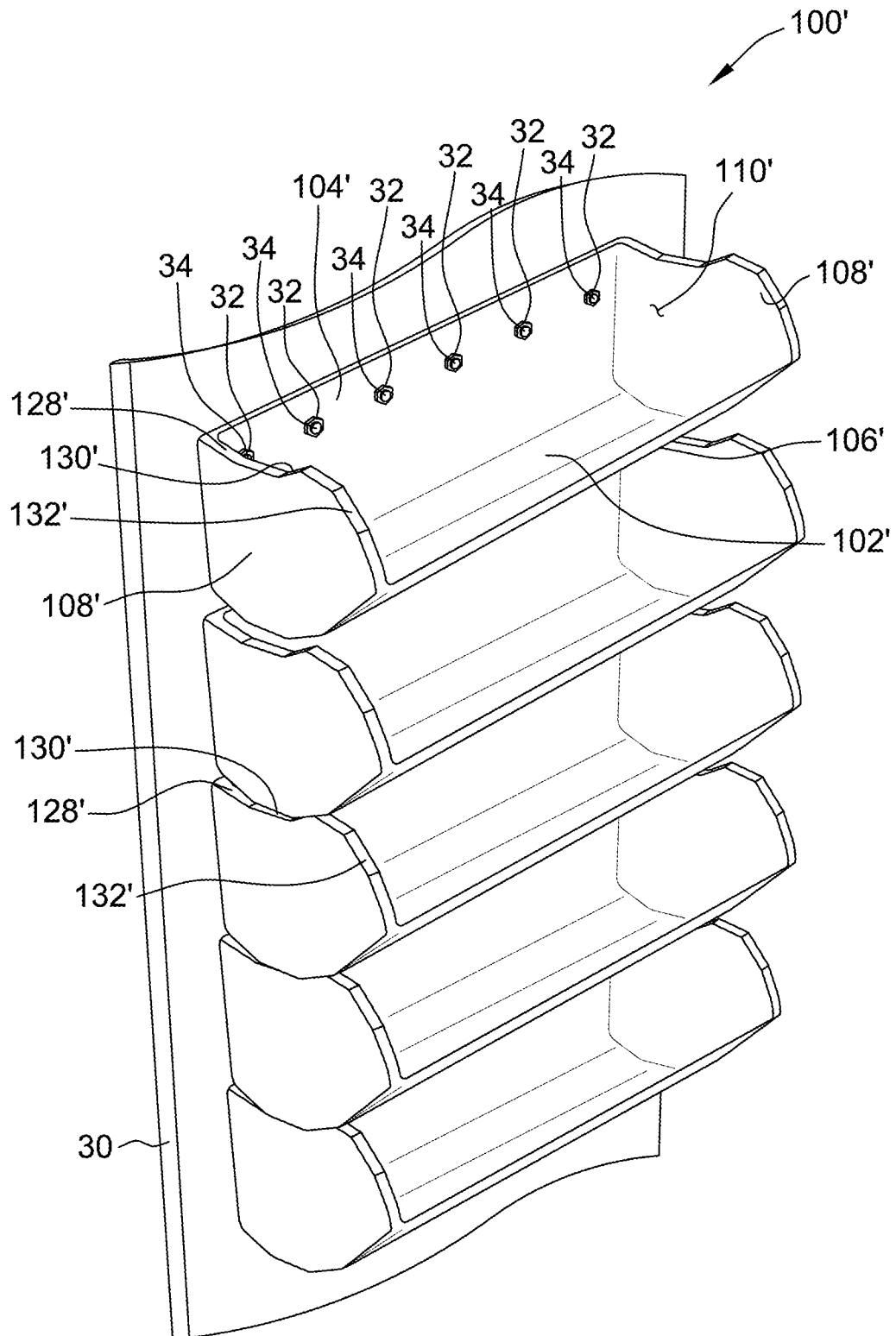


FIG. 11

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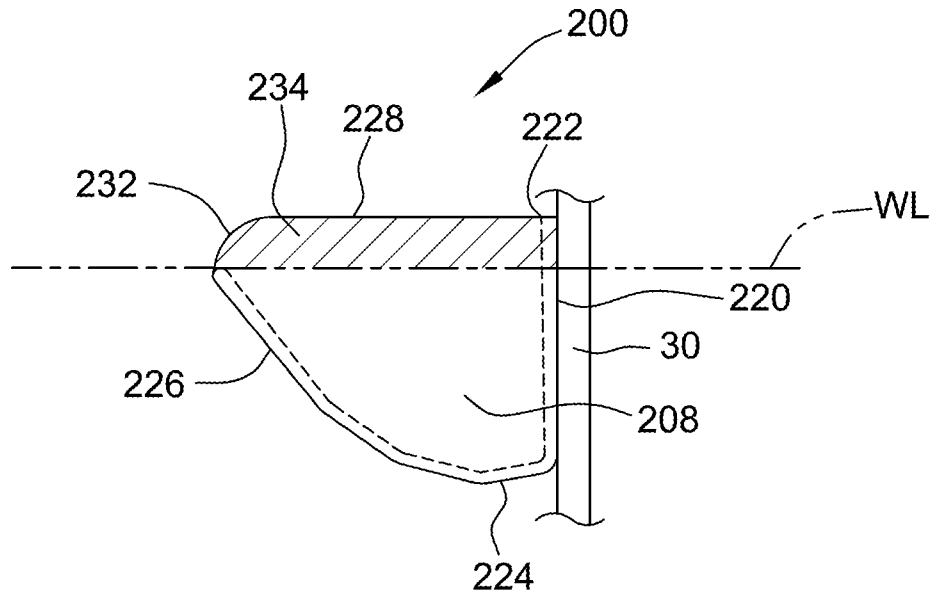


FIG. 12

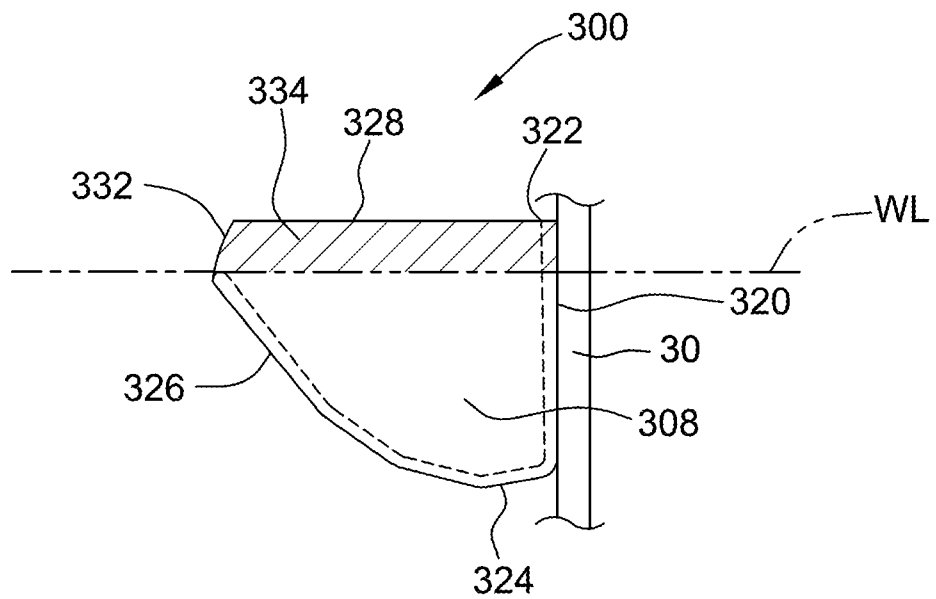


FIG. 13

