



(86) Date de dépôt PCT/PCT Filing Date: 2015/02/11
(87) Date publication PCT/PCT Publication Date: 2015/08/20
(45) Date de délivrance/Issue Date: 2018/09/18
(85) Entrée phase nationale/National Entry: 2016/08/11
(86) N° demande PCT/PCT Application No.: US 2015/015424
(87) N° publication PCT/PCT Publication No.: 2015/123303
(30) Priorité/Priority: 2014/02/11 (US61/938,370)

(51) Cl.Int./Int.Cl. *A01C 7/18* (2006.01),
A01C 7/08 (2006.01), *A01C 7/20* (2006.01)

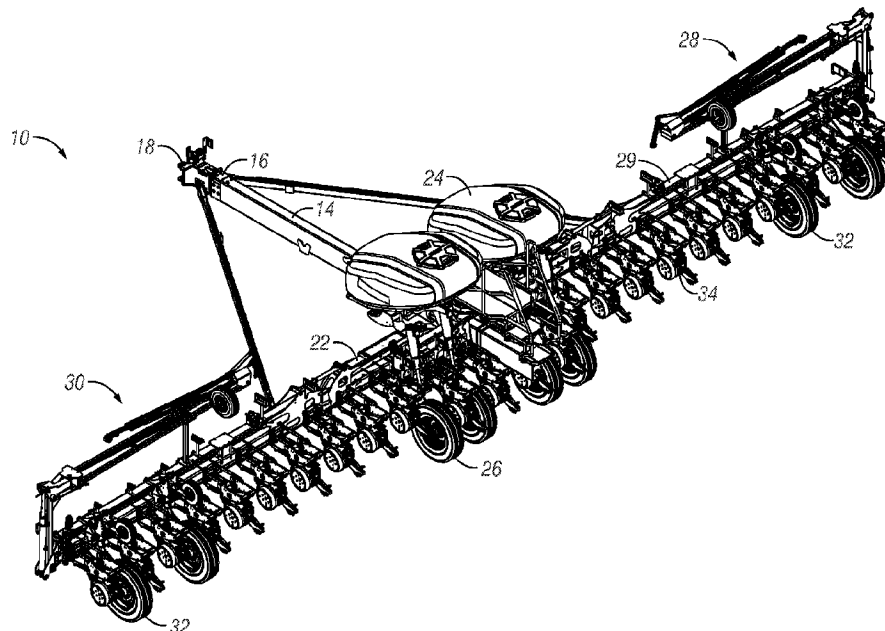
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(54) Titre : JARDINIÈRE AYANT UN APPAREIL DE DISTRIBUTION DE GRAINES

(54) Title: PLANTER WITH SEED DELIVERY APPARATUS



(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

An agricultural implement is provided that includes a number of row units. The row units include one or more seed meters for receiving, singulating, and dispensing seed to the ground such that preferred spacing of subsequent seed is attained. Seed delivery systems are included to aid in transporting the seed from the seed meter to the ground in a controlled manner to mitigate skips and to aid in controlling the spacing of the seeds, which can be based upon the ground speed of the implement as it moves through the field. The seed delivery systems can control the transport of the seed to a furrow in the field such that the seed can experience zero or near zero relative velocity so that the seed will have little to no movement once positioned in the furrow.

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

(19) World Intellectual Property
Organization
International Bureau

(43) International Publication Date
20 August 2015 (20.08.2015)



(10) International Publication Number
WO 2015/123303 A1

- (51) International Patent Classification:
A01C 7/18 (2006.01)
- (21) International Application Number:
PCT/US2015/015424
- (22) International Filing Date:
11 February 2015 (11.02.2015)
- (25) Filing Language: English
- (26) Publication Language: English
- (30) Priority Data:
61/938,370 11 February 2014 (11.02.2014) US
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- (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.
- (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).

Declarations under Rule 4.17:

— as to applicant's entitlement to apply for and be granted a patent (Rule 4.17(ii))

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: PLANTER WITH SEED DELIVERY APPARATUS

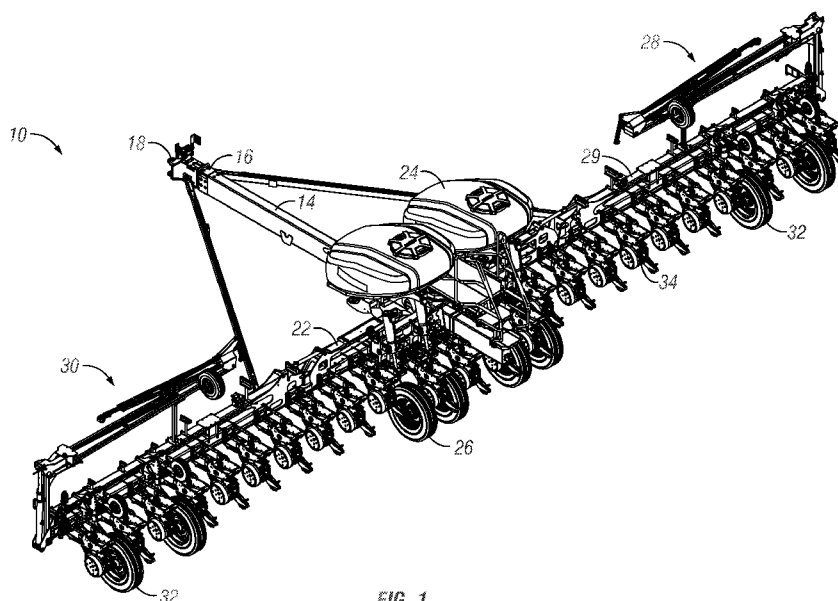


FIG. 1

(57) Abstract: An agricultural implement is provided that includes a number of row units. The row units include one or more seed meters for receiving, singulating, and dispensing seed to the ground such that preferred spacing of subsequent seed is attained. Seed delivery systems are included to aid in transporting the seed from the seed meter to the ground in a controlled manner to mitigate skips and to aid in controlling the spacing of the seeds, which can be based upon the ground speed of the implement as it moves through the field. The seed delivery systems can control the transport of the seed to a furrow in the field such that the seed can experience zero or near zero relative velocity so that the seed will have little to no movement once positioned in the furrow.

WO 2015/123303 A1

Published:

— *with international search report (Art. 21(3))*

TITLE: PLANTER WITH SEED DELIVERY APPARATUS

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

10 The present invention relates generally to agricultural implements. More particularly, but not exclusively, the invention relates to an agricultural planter with a seed delivery apparatus for delivering seed from a metering system of a row unit to a furrow created in the ground.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

15 An agricultural row crop planter is a machine built for distributing seed into the ground. The row crop planter generally includes a horizontal toolbar fixed to a hitch assembly for towing behind a tractor. Row units are mounted to the toolbar. In different configurations, seed may be stored at individual hoppers on each row unit, or it may be maintained in a central hopper and delivered to the row units on an as needed basis. The
20 row units include ground-working tools for opening and closing a seed furrow, and a seed metering system for distributing seed to the seed furrow.

In its most basic form, the seed meter includes a housing and a seed disc. The housing is constructed such that it creates a reservoir to hold a seed pool. The seed disc resides within the housing and rotates about a generally horizontal central axis. As the seed
25 disc rotates, it passes through the seed pool where it picks up individual seeds. The seeds are subsequently dispensed into a seed chute where they drop into the seed furrow.

Seed spacing in the seed furrow is controlled by varying the rotational speed of the seed disc. Most commonly, seed disc rotation is driven by connection to a common driveshaft. The driveshaft runs horizontally along the length of the toolbar to connect to
30 each row unit, and is driven by a single motor or a ground contact wheel. In this configuration, the planting rate can be adjusted for all row units uniformly by adjusting the rotational speed of the common drive shaft. This can be a tedious task, and an operator is

unlikely to adjust the gear ratio as often as necessary to maximize yields. Generally, an optimal overall rate for a given acreage will be selected prior to planting and will be maintained at that rate regardless of soil conditions. Whether using a mechanical, air, or vacuum style seed disc, the seed disc is installed inside of the seed meter using

5 independent fasteners and requires the use of tools to facilitate changing the disc. For example, if a farmer uses the same planter to plant corn and soybeans, he would use a different disc for the respective seed types. With planters continuing to grow in size, and more row units being added, the task of changing seed discs using independent fasteners and tools adds unnecessary burden to changing out seed discs.

10 More recently, planters have been designed to provide for independent driving of each of the seed discs in each seed meter. The meters include a motor, such as an electric motor, that is attached to the meter. The output shaft extends from the motor and into the meter such that a portion of the shaft is operatively connected to the seed disc. Therefore, the motor will operate to rotate the seed disc.

15 The most common seed delivery system for delivering seed from the seed disc to the furrow may be categorized as a gravity drop system. In the case of the gravity drop system, a seed tube has an inlet end, which is positioned below the seed metering system. The singulated seeds from the seed metering system drop into the seed tube and fall via gravitational force from a discharge end thereof into the seed trench. Monitoring systems
20 are commonly used to monitor the operation of the planter. Such systems typically employ a seed sensor attached to each seed tube to detect the passage of seed therethrough.

However, such a gravity system can affect the seed spacing of the planter. For example, as the spacing of the seed is dependent on the rotational velocity of the seed disc and the gravitational constant, interruptions, forces, or other occurrences acting on the seed
25 can greatly affect the spacing. For example, if the seed bumps against a wall of the seed tube on the way to the furrow; this can cause a delay or a non-vertical fall of the seed. If a preceding or following seed does not experience the same interruption, the seeds could be spaced too close or far from one another.

Furthermore, as the speed of planting increases, this causes additional problems.
30 Drawing a planting implement through the field at faster speeds increases the speed of deposited seeds relative to the ground, causing seeds to roll and bounce upon landing in the

trench or furrow and resulting in inconsistent plant spacing. The adverse agronomic effects of poor seed placement and inconsistent plant spacing are well known in the art.

Therefore, there is a need in the art for an agricultural planting implement that includes a seed delivery apparatus that aids in delivering seed from a singulating seed meter to a furrow or trench in the field, such that the spacing of adjacent seed is more consistent to increase the yield obtained of the end crop.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Therefore, it is a principal object, feature, and/or advantage of the present invention to overcome the deficiencies in the art.

It is another object, feature, and/or advantage of the present invention to provide an agricultural planter with a seed delivery apparatus to provide consistent spacing between adjacent seed.

It is yet another object, feature, and/or advantage of the present invention to provide a seed delivery apparatus, mechanism, and/or assembly that will deliver a seed from a seed metering device to the field.

It is still another object, feature, and/or advantage of the present invention to provide a seed delivery apparatus that will provide optimized spacing in a seed furrow.

It is a further object, feature, and/or advantage of the present invention to provide a seed delivery apparatus that will allow for planting with increased speed.

It is still a further object, feature, and/or advantage of the present invention to provide a seed delivery apparatus that provides for seed spacing that will not be influenced by abrupt forces during travel.

It is yet another object, feature, and/or advantage of the present invention to provide a controlled delivery of seed from a seed meter to the ground wherein a seed experiences near zero relative velocity during drop, regardless of the velocity of the planter.

These and/or other objects, features, and advantages of the present invention will be apparent to those skilled in the art. The present invention is not to be limited to or by these objects, features and advantages. No single embodiment need provide each and every object, feature, or advantage.

The present invention relates to various seed delivery systems for providing a desired, equidistant spacing of seed in a field, regardless of the speed of travel of an agricultural planter. Some aspects of the systems can include that the delivery of the seed from a seed meter to a trench or furrow in the ground will not be influenced by factors such as external forces, including the free fall of gravity. Furthermore, at least some of the systems provide setups that provide that the seed will be release with substantially zero relative velocity such that the seed will land softly within a trench or furrow, and will have little to no bounce therein, which will aid in the correct spacing of the seed.

10 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a planting implement.

Figure 2 is a side elevation view of a row unit for use with a planting implement.

Figure 3 is a side elevation view of another row unit showing a seed meter and seed tube of row unit according to some embodiments of the invention.

15 Figure 4 is a side elevation view of the seed meter and seed tube of row unit of Figure 3.

Figure 5 is a side elevation view of an exemplary seed delivery apparatus for use with the row unit according to the invention.

20 Figure 6 is a side elevation view of another exemplary embodiment of a seed delivery apparatus for use with the row unit according to the invention.

Figure 7 is a side elevation view of another exemplary embodiment of a seed delivery apparatus using a belt according to the invention.

Figure 8 is a sectional view of the belt of Figure 5.

25 Figure 9 is a side elevation view of yet another embodiment of a seed delivery apparatus according to the invention.

Figure 10 is a side elevation view of a belt in an open configuration for use with a seed delivery apparatus according to aspects of the invention.

Figure 11 is an end view of the belt of Figure 10.

Figure 12 is a top plan view of the belt of Figure 10.

30 Figure 13 is an end view of the belt of Figure 10 is a rolled up configuration.

Figure 14 is a top plan view of the belt of Figure 13.

Figure 15 is a side elevation view of a seed delivery apparatus utilizing the belt of Figures 10-14.

Figure 16 is a side elevation view of another seed delivery apparatus according to aspects of the invention.

5 Figure 17 is an end view of the apparatus of Figure 16.

Figure 18 is a top plan view of the apparatus of Figure 16.

Various embodiments of the present invention will be described in detail with reference to the drawings, wherein like reference numerals represent like parts throughout the several views. Reference to various embodiments does not limit the scope of the invention. Figures represented herein are not limitations to the various embodiments
10 according to the invention and are presented for exemplary illustration of the invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Fig. 1 shows an agricultural implement 10, in this case, an agricultural planter. The planter 10 is usually attached to and pulled by a tractor. However, it should be appreciated
15 that other equipment and/or vehicles may move the implement 10. For purposes of the present disclosure, the implement 10 will be referred to as a planter.

The planter 10 includes a tongue 14 having a first end 16 and an opposite second end (not shown). The tongue 14 includes a hitch 18 at the first end 16, with the hitch 18
20 being connected to the tractor. At the opposite end of the tongue 14 is a central tool bar 22. The tongue 14 may be a telescoping tongue with components capable of being inserted into one another such that the implement 10 is a front folding style implement. However, the present invention is not to be limited to such front folding style implements and is to include any such implement for use in the agricultural industry.

As shown in Fig. 1, central hoppers 24 are positioned at the central toolbar 22. The hoppers 24 are configured to store seed, fertilizer, insecticide, or other types of material for use in farming. The hoppers 24 may both contain the same material, or could contain
25 separate materials. The use of the central hoppers 24 allows for a large amount of material to be added and stored at a centralized location. However, the invention also contemplates the use of one or more hoppers positioned at each of the row units 34 for providing seed to
30 be planted at the row units, as is shown in Fig. 3. When central hoppers 24 are used at the central toolbar 22, it should be appreciated that the central hoppers will be in fluid

communication with each of the row units 34. This can be done by use of separate hoses to each of the row units, or fewer hoses that include splitters, wherein the hose is split to provide seed or other material to more than one row unit. Also connected to the central toolbar is a plurality of central wheels, which may be known as transport wheels 26

5 extending generally downwardly from the central toolbar 22. The wheels 26 contact the ground and support the central hoppers 24. The wheels stabilize the implement 10 and are the wheels that contact the ground when in a working position or a transport position, e.g., if the implement 10 is a front folding implement such that the wings 28, 30 are folded forward with wing wheels 32 not contacting the ground.

10 Extending generally from both sides of the toolbar 22 are first and second wings 28, 30. The wings 28, 30 are generally identical and mirror images of one another. Therefore, only one wing will be described with the understanding that the other wing will be generally the same configuration. The first wing 28 includes a bar 29. Mounted to the bar 29 are a plurality of row units 34, as well as a plurality of wheels 32. The wheels 32
15 are configured to contact the ground. The row units 34 may be seeders, fertilizers, insecticide sprayers, or other dispensers, discs, or plows. The wings 28, 30 may also include at least one fold cylinder and a down force cylinder. It is further contemplated that multiple down force cylinders be used with an implement having more sections. The fold cylinder(s) is configured to fold the wings to a position wherein the first and second wings
20 28, 30 are generally adjacent the tongue 14 of the implement 10.

Fig. 2 is a side elevation view of a row unit 34, and more specifically, a seeder including a singulating seed meter 36 for use with the present invention. The row unit 34 includes a seed meter 36, furrow opener 38, row hoppers 39, and furrow closer 40. Other aspects of the row unit 34 shown in Fig. 3 include a frame 41, linkage 42, mount 43 for
25 mounting to the planter 10, gauge wheels 44, and depth control mechanism 45. The gauge wheels 44 and depth control mechanism 45 work together to control the depth of the furrow or trench created by the opener 38. Furthermore, the row hopper 39 is connected to a seed supply, such as the central hoppers 24 via air seed delivery system, which can provide the seed meter 36 of each row unit 34 with seed to be planted. The seed meter can
30 be generally any air or mechanical meter capable of singulating seed and delivering seed from the meter 36 via a seed chute 46 extending therefrom.

Fig. 3 is a side elevation view of another embodiment of a row unit 34 according to exemplary aspects of the present invention. The row unit 34 shown in Fig. 3 includes a row hopper 39, which is capable of storing seed or other granular or particulate matter to be dispensed by the row unit 34. Other components of the row unit 34 shown in Fig. 3 are similar to those shown in the embodiment of Fig. 2. As shown in generally dashed lines in Fig. 3, and in more detail in Fig. 4 is a seed meter 36 with a seed tube 47 attached thereto. The seed meter 36 may be an air seed meter or a mechanical seed meter, such as a finger brush seed meter. The seed meter 36 includes a seed disc 37 rotating within the housing thereof. The seed disc 37 includes a plurality of radially spaced seed apertures comprising a seed path. The seed apertures of the seed path pass through a pool of seed where the seed is temporarily attached or affixed to the seed apertures. The seed disc with the attached thereto continues rotation through a singulating mechanism, otherwise known as a seed singulator. A seed singulator 35 includes one or more protrusions positioned on opposite sides of the seed path to make sure that a single seed is attached to each single seed aperture. Thus, the seed singulator prevents or mitigates the chance of doubles being planted.

After passing through the seed singulating mechanism 35, the seed attached to the seed disc 37 continues rotation until it reaches a release point. Such a release point may coincide with a zero pressure differential location or an ejector mechanism within the seed housing of the seed meter 36. Generally located adjacent the release point for the seed meter 36 is a seed chute 46 extending as part of the housing of the seed meters 36. The seed chute 46 is configured to begin directing the seed from the seed meter towards the furrow 48 in the ground. Further shown in Figs. 3 and 4 is a seed tube 47 separate from and attached to the seed chute 46. The seed tube 47 is a mechanism, which is known in the art to further provide a path for the seed 33 to travel after being released from the seed disc 37. Therefore, as shown in Fig. 4, a plurality of seed 33 is passing through the seed tube 47 and into the furrow 38. The rotation of the seed disc 37 within the seed meter 36 will control the spacing of the seed 33 within the furrow 48. For example, matching the rotational velocity of the seed disc 36 to the traveling velocity of the tractor and planter 10 will provide for seed being evenly spaced throughout a field. However, as the seed is being passed through the seed tube 47, it may interact with the walls of the seed tube 47, which can disrupt the falling speed of the seed 33 as it passes through the seed tube. Such

a disruption can cause the seed to not fall at a constant speed. This can create uneven spacing of seed, as some seed will bounce off the walls, and others will not. Therefore, the seeds may be too close or too far from one another within the furrow 48. Such an uneven spacing can cause a seed to battle over nutrients and water, or possibly be planted too far
5 apart from one another. All of these issues can create a lower than desired yield obtained by a farmer.

Therefore, the embodiments of the present invention will provide for improvements to the prior art seed delivery systems, which may be seed tubes 47, such that equal distant spacing of the seed 33 and furrow 48 is obtained. The embodiments herein shown and
10 described will provide for a more consistent and even spacing of the seed, regardless of the planar velocity of travel, as well as without regard to external forces (gravity, obstructions, elevation, slope, etc.) acting on the row units 34 of the planter 10. The various seed delivery systems of the present invention will thus increase the yield obtained by a farmer by providing a higher consistency of seed spacing, such that the seeds will receive their
15 required nutrients and such that the full area of the field being planted will be utilized by the planting of the seed.

Therefore, Fig. 5 shows an embodiment of a seed delivery or dispensing system 50 according to some embodiments of the invention. The seed delivery system 50 shown in Fig. 5 includes a housing 51. Extending from the housing 51 is an attachment area or neck
20 53, which is attached to a portion of a seed tube 47 or a seed chute 46. For example, it is contemplated that the seed delivery system 50 shown in Fig. 5 may be positioned generally adjacent or close to the ground of the field. Therefore, a seed tube 47 can still be utilized to provide an enclosed member for the seed to pass after being released from the seed disc of the seed meter 36. However, the mechanism 50 can also be attached generally adjacent
25 the seed chute 46 and be sized with a diameter such that the seed may not pass through a seed a seed tube 47, such that it will not bounce off the walls of said seed tube 47.

The seed dispensing system 50 further includes a wheel 52 housed within the housing 51 and rotatably attached thereto such that the wheel 52 is able to rotate therein. The wheel 52 may comprise a pliable material, such as foam, rubber, or other compressible
30 or otherwise deformable materials. The diameter of the wheel 52 is slightly less than diameter of the housing 51, such that the wheel is able to rotate within the housing 51 with minimal distance between the outer edge of the wheel 52 and the interior of the wall of the

housing 51. A motor, such as a stepper motor (not shown) is also operably attached to the wheel 52 to provide rotational velocity thereto. For example, the stepper motor may include a belt extending between an output shaft of the motor and the axis of the wheel 52 to provide rotation thereto. Also shown in Fig. 5 is a vented area 57 on the neck or attachment portion 53 of the housing 51. As will be understood, the vented portion provides a pressure differential to exhaust air of the mechanism to slow down seed that is passing from the seed meter towards the seed delivery system 50.

In operation, seed is released from the seed disc 37 of the seed meter 36 and allowed to pass through the tube 47. When the seed meter 36 is an air seed meter, excess air may be pushing the seed down the seed tube 47. The vented portion 57 of the neck 53, which may comprise a plurality of apertures through the wall of the neck 53, can allow for the excess air to be released, which will aid in slowing down the seed as it passes through the neck portion 53. Seed will then continue towards a pinch point 56 between the outer portion of the wheel 52 and the interior of the wall of the housing 51. Such a pinch point is shown as numeral 56 in Fig. 5. The pliable wheel can be partially deformed at the point of the seed to allow the seed to affix at a location on an outer profile of the wheel 52 as it rotates within the housing 51. Therefore, the continued rotation of the wheel 52, shown as the arrow 55 in Fig. 5, will move the seed about the housing 51 and towards a release point 58, wherein the seed will be released from the wheel 52 and deposited in the furrow 48 in the field. Thus, the seed delivery system 50 shown in Fig. 5 provides for a system in which the seed is pinched between the wheel 52 and the interior of a wall of the housing 51 to move the seed through the housing in a controlled manner such that the rotational velocity of the wheel 52 will control the spacing and delivery of the seed in a field.

The wheel 52 and housing 51 may be sized such that they minimize the drop distance from the seed disc 37 to the ground, which would eliminate the length of the seed tube 47 between the release point from the seed disc and the entrance into the housing 51. In addition, the invention contemplates that the wheel 52 may comprise many different sizes, which can account for different seed types, speeds of travel, or other factors that may affect the planting rate of a seed.

Advantages of the seed delivery system 50 shown in Fig. 5 are numerous. For example, the controlled rotation of the wheel 52 in the housing 51 will reduce the amount of bounce and the possibility of bounce of a seed as it passes through a seed tube.

Furthermore, the rotational velocity shown by the arrow 55 of the seed tube can be matched with the velocity of the tractor shown by the arrow 54, such that the seed will experience generally zero relative velocity at the point of release 58. Therefore, the seed will drop substantially straight from the seed disc 52 so that each seed will not bounce
5 within the furrow. In other words, the wheel can be traveling at the same velocity as the planter as the planter moves through the field and can be adjusted accordingly such that a change in planter velocity can cause a similar change in rotational velocity of the wheel 52 as the planters move, which will provide for a consistent and even spacing of the seed in the field. Furthermore, it should be appreciated that there will likely be multiple seeds
10 positioned between the wheel 52 and the housing wall at the same time, such that the continued rotation of the wheel will release seed at the release point 58 on a continued basis to provide for the desired spacing of the seed in the field. Stopping the rotation of the wheel 52 will stop the planting of the seed, wherein the seed will be maintained in position between the wheel and the wall of the housing, such as when the tractor is turning or
15 otherwise in a position where seed is not to be planted.

Fig. 6 shows yet another embodiment of a seed delivery system 60 according to aspects of the present invention. The seed delivery system 60 shown in Fig. 6 is advantageous as the delivery of the seed from the seed disc 37 to the ground will not be affected by some external forces, such as upward forces felt by a row unit 34 as the row
20 unit runs into a bump or other obstruction in the field. In other words, the system 60 shown in Fig. 6 provides a controlled delivery of the seed directly from the seed disc 37 to the ground.

The seed delivery system 60 includes a housing 61 enclosing a plurality of wheels therein, with the wheels being rotatably positioned within the housing 61. The housing 61
25 includes a protrusion 68 extending at least partially into a portion of the seed meter 36 such that seed released from the seed apertures of the seed disc 37 will interact with the protrusion 68 and be directed into the housing 61. The wheels, which include a first wheel 62, second wheel 63, third wheel 64, fifth wheel 65, and Nth wheel 66, wherein the Nth wheel equals the total number of wheels used based upon the height and diameter of
30 wheels, comprise a pliable or deformable material, similar to that as the wheel 52 shown in Fig. 5. Therefore, as the wheels rotate relative to one another within the housing 61, a seed can be pinched between the various wheels and a wall of the housing such that the seed

will be transported from an upward position relative the protrusion 68 to a lower position relative the final release point 67. The relative rotational direction of the wheels are shown in Fig. 6 for exemplary purposes, and are not to be intended as sole rotational direction of the wheels.

5 As mentioned, the number of wheels for use with the seed delivery system 60 can be varied according to various factors. The diameter of the wheels, the height of the seed meter, the type of seed, the speed of travel, etc., all are factors that can affect the number of wheels used with the system.

10 In operation, a seed is released from the seed disc 37 and positioned between the first wheel 62 and a wall of the housing 61. The rotation of the wheel 62 moves the seed towards the second wheel 63, where it becomes affixed thereto and positioned between the second wheel 63 and a wall of the housing 61. The continued rotation of the second wheel 63 will move the seed towards the third wheel 64, where it will be positioned between the third wheel 64 and the wall of the housing 61. This will continue on through the next
15 wheel 65 and any additional wheels towards the final wheel, which is shown as numeral 66 in Fig. 6. The rotation of the final wheel 66 will move the seed towards the release point 67, where it will be released from the seed delivery system 60 into the furrow or positioned at the ground in the field. The rotation of the plurality of wheels will control and provide for the spacing of the seed as it moves from the seed disc 37 and towards the release point
20 67. Furthermore, it should be appreciated that the system will be moving multiple seeds through the wheels at the same time, in order for the seeds to be released at the desired spacing. Each of the wheels can be independently controlled by either a single motor with belts or gears attaching to the wheels, or by individual motors that directly control each wheel, such that the seed can be hurried or slowed as it passes through the plurality of
25 wheels in order to match the velocity of the planter as it moves through the field and in order to provide for consistent and equidistant spacing of the seeds through the field. The independent control also allows for the stopping of the rotation of the wheels in order to stop the planting of the seed, either temporarily or for permanently. The restarting of the rotation of the wheels will continue the planting of the seed as previously mentioned.
30 Furthermore, in the embodiment shown in Fig. 6, the seed does not experience any sort of free fall or be subjected to gravitation such that the seed delivery is fully controlled as it

moves through the housing 61. This will negate any influence of external forces, such as the sudden upward force caused by a bump or other obstruction in a field.

Fig. 7 shows yet another embodiment of a seed delivery system 70 according to aspects of the present invention. The embodiment shown in Fig. 7 includes a seed belt 71 rotated in the direction of the arrow 74 by a first roller 72 and second roller 73. The seed belt 71 is positioned to pass adjacent the seed path of the seed disc 37, and therefore can be at least partially positioned within the seed meter 36 or outside the seed meter 36 such that the seed can be directed to the belt 71. The seed belt 71 can be a bulb seal belt such that a gap or pocket in the belt is able to frictionally hold the seed in place at a location as it is released from the seed disc 37, such that the movement of the belt 71 will carry and deliver the seed from the seed disc 37 to a release point 75 adjacent a furrow in the field. Therefore, the use of the belt 71 of the seed delivery system 70 will also provide an apparatus and method of delivering the seed such that the seed does not free fall under gravitational force, which will negate or otherwise mitigate issues coming therefrom.

A cross-section of the seed belt 71 is shown in Fig. 8. As mentioned, the seed belt 71 may be a bulb seed belt such that it comprises a first bulb 76 and second bulb 77, which are hingeably movable relative to one another via the hinge 79. This allows the bulb sections 76, 77 to open and close relative one another to allow a seed to be deposited adjacent a seed pocket or gap 78 between the first and second bulb sections 76, 77 of the seed belt 71. The seed can be injected or otherwise positioned within the seed pocket or gap 78 between the bulbs 76, 77, wherein the bulbs will be returned adjacent one another to hold the seed in place as the belt continues rotation through the system. Once the seed reaches the release point or a position close thereto, the bulbs 76, 77 can be re-opened to allow the seed to be dispensed therefrom. Furthermore, a scraper or ejector (not shown) can be added adjacent the release point 75 of the seed delivery system 70 to provide additional mechanisms for the release of the seed from the belt 71.

Therefore, in operation, the seed belt 71 is configured to move in the direction shown by the arrow 74 in Fig. 7, with the rotational velocity substantially matching the velocity of the planter in the field. Again, this will provide that the seed experiences zero relative velocity at the release point, to reduce, mitigate, or otherwise prevent bouncing of the seed in the seed furrow or trench. As a portion of the belt reaches the upper roller 72, which may be near the seed disc 37, a portion of the seed meter or a protrusion therefrom,

such as a V-shaped member or protrusion, may open the first and second bulbs 76, 77 of the belt 71, such that a seed that is released from the seed disc 37 is deposited into the gap or pocket 78 of the belt 71. The bulbs 76, 77 are then allowed to rotate relative one another adjacent to one another via the hinge 79 to close, in which case the seed will be
5 held in place within the gap or pocket 78. The belt 71 will continue movement and additional seeds will be dispensed within gaps at equal spacing of the belt 71. As the belt reaches the lower roller member 73, an opener, scraper or ejector mechanism can be positioned in order to open the bulbs 76, 77 and/or provide a protrusion to release the seed from within the seed pocket 78 to be released adjacent the seed release point 75 and into a
10 furrow or trench in the field. The continued movement of the belt 71 about the rollers 72, 73 will continuously provide seed to the furrow or trench in equidistant spacing. Furthermore, as the rollers can be operably attached to one or more motors, the velocity of the rotation of the belt 71 can be continuously updated, such as automatically updated to match the ever changing speed of the tractor through the field. This will further aid in
15 providing equidistant spacing of the seed.

Fig. 9 provides yet another embodiment of a seed delivery system 80 according to embodiments of the present invention. The seed delivery system 80 includes a seed drill 81 operably attached or positioned near a seed disc 37 of a seed meter 36. The seed drill 81 includes a housing 82 and a drill 83 rotatably positioned within the housing 82. The
20 drill 83, which may also be known as an auger, can interact with the seed disc 37 to remove the seed from the seed apertures thereon to position it on the drill 83 as the drill rotates within the housing 82. Furthermore, an ejector mechanism or other release mechanism could release seed from the disc 37 to position the seed on the drill 83 of the seed drill 81. The drill 83 can include flighting or other housing mechanisms to control the
25 movement of the seed as the drill 83 rotates. Such flighting can prevent the seed from simply sliding down the sloped drill.

In operation, the rotation of the drill 83 within the housing 82 of the seed drill 81 is configured to match the velocity of the planter as it moves through the field. Thus, the rotation of the drill 81 will provide that seed will be evenly and equidistantly spaced in a
30 field as the planter moves through the field, regardless of the speed of the planter. Therefore, the invention contemplates that a motor may be connected to the drill 83 to continuously update the rotation of said drill as the rotation of the velocity of the planter

changes. Seed is released from the seed disc 37 to the drill 83, by the drill itself or by an ejector mechanism. The seed is carried by the rotation of the drill 83 through the housing 82 and towards the release point 84, wherein it is delivered to the furrow or trench in the field. Thus, as the seed is constantly being added to the drill, the continued rotation will
5 cause the seed to be evenly spaced through the field as the planter moves therethrough.

Figs. 10-15 show an embodiment of a seed delivery system 90 according to additional aspects of the invention. The seed delivery system 90 includes a belt 91 moved by rollers 92. One or the rollers or more than one of the rollers can be connected to a motor, such as a stepper motor via gears or a belt, in order to provide a rotational velocity
10 thereto. The belt 91 is positioned generally adjacent the seed disc 37 such that the movement of the belt shown by the arrow 93 will work with the rotational spin and velocity of the seed disc, which is shown by the arrow 95 in Fig. 15. This will further work with the direction and velocity of travel shown by the arrow 94 of the planter as it moves through the field. Seed will be released from the seed disc 37 and positioned at or
15 temporarily attached to the belt 91, such that the belt will carry the seed towards the trench or furrow in the ground. The controlled delivery of the seed via the seed belt 91 will provide for a more consistent and equidistant spacing of the seeds, regardless of change in velocity of the planter, external forces, and substantially without the influence of gravity.

As shown in the Figures, the seed belt 91 includes an open position shown by
20 reference numeral 96 (see, e.g., Fig. 11) and a closed position shown by reference numeral 98 (see, e.g., Fi. 13). The belt 91 in the open position shown by numeral 96 is a cross-sectional view of the belt, such that the belt is shown to be moving into or out of the page, while Figs. 10 and 12 show side and top views of the same. As shown in the Figures, the belt includes a plurality of teeth 97, extending generally outwardly from the belt. As the
25 belt 91 passes adjacent the seed disc 37, it will pass through a closing or rolling mechanism, wherein the belt will be rolled upon itself as shown by the arrows 100, 101 in Fig. 11. This will cause the outer teeth 97 of the belt 91 to begin to roll towards each other in a generally upward manner (or downward manner if the configuration is reversed), and towards the configuration shown by the reference numeral 98. Before the belt is closed or
30 substantially closed, a seed is released from the seed disc 37 and can be positioned between the teeth 97 into a pocket or gap 99, as shown in Figs. 13 and 14. The rolling mechanism can continue to close the teeth upon each other to the configuration shown by the reference

numeral 98. The belt 91 can remain in the closed or substantially closed configuration as it passes a vertical portion of the seed delivery system 90 and towards the ground. As the seed housed within the teeth 97 of the belt 91 reach or nears a release point, the belt 91 can be allowed to reopen, such that the teeth will be unhinged towards the open configuration shown by the reference numeral 96. Such an opening will release the seed from the belt 91 at a desired location and into a furrow. The belt 91 can be configured to pass the ground relatively close to the ground such that the seed will not experience much free fall between the belt 91 and the ground, which will reduce the bounce of the seed in the bottom or the trench or furrow.

As the belt 91 continues moving and receiving and releasing seed, the belt 91 will provide for a consistent and equidistant release of the seed to provide for equispacing of the seed as the planter moves through a field. In addition, the speed of the belt 91 on the rollers 92 can be adjusted by a motor or motors operably attached to the rollers 92 in order to match or substantially match the velocity of the planter as it moves through the field.

Therefore, the seed belt 91 of the seed dispensing system 90 provides for yet another way for the seed to be controlled from the seed disc 37 into the ground such that the system 90 will provide equispacing of the seed, regardless of the speed of the planter. Furthermore, as the seed is controlled within the belt 91 during rotation of the belt from the seed disc to the ground, the spacing of the seed in the field will not be influenced by external forces, such as bumps, gravity, or other forces acting on the row unit and/or planter.

Figs. 16-18 show a metering system 505 for use with a row unit and showing yet additional aspects of seed delivering apparatuses according to the invention. As shown, the system includes a housing 510 that provides for the shared housing for at least a portion of a first meter 520 and a second meter 522 and also includes a first hopper portion 512 and a second hopper portion 514. Thus, seed can be delivered, such as by air seed delivery to the hopper portions 512, 514 to be delivered to the seed meters 520, 522. Furthermore, one of the seed meters will be operating to singulate and dispense one of the seed types at a time. For example, either the first or the second meter 520, 522 will be operated but not both at the same time. The operating meter will release a seed approximately at the location of the common or shared seed chute 521, which is adjacent a seed-to-ground delivery system 550. However, it is also contemplated that both of the meters could be operated at the same time. This would be a way to do very high planting rates, effectively

cutting the needed metering rate by each meter in half. The operation of both meters would ensure that the meters are on-the-ready to plant when needed, or could simply be planting alternatively as the planter goes through the field.

The seed-to-ground delivery system 550 is a system which includes a first belt 552 and a second belt 553. The belts are tensioned and comprise an elastomeric material. Any pliable material is contemplated to be used for the belt materials. The first belt 552 is positioned on a first roller 556 and includes a motor for rotating the belt. Likewise, the second belt 553 includes a second roller 558 that is operably attached to a motor that provides for the rotation of the second belt 553. The belts will rotate in a manner such that they will move substantially in sync with one another. Spacing between the first and second belts at the location 555 can be such that a seed can fit in between the pliable materials of the belts, but can be held in place thereat. Thus, when seed is released by one of the first or second meters 520, 522, the seed can be placed between the two belts. As the belts rotate, they will carry or deliver the seed between the belts towards the exit 560, which is substantially adjacent, a furrow in the field.

The rotational speed of the belts can be configured with the travel speed of the planter in with the known height about the furrow bottom of the belt opening 560 such that the seed will experience generally zero relative velocity when landing in the furrow. This will prevent the seed from bouncing or otherwise moving in the furrow which will increase the accuracy of the seed spacing between adjacent and subsequent seeds.

The seed belt provides the advantage of controlling the seed from the release of the seed from a seed meter and to the location of the seed-to-ground opening 560, which is substantially adjacent the bottom of a furrow in the field. Thus, the control delivery of the seed will provide for greater accuracy and seed spacing and seed placement in the ground such that it will have its best chance of growing when recovered with dirt.

Thus, various configurations of seed delivery systems have been shown and described. It should be appreciated that the system shown and described are for exemplary purposes, and the invention of a controlled system for delivering seed from a singulating seed meter to the ground to provide for consistent and equidistant spacing of the seed in the ground has thus been provided. It is to be contemplated that numerous variations, changes, and otherwise, which are obvious to those skilled in the art are to be considered part of the present invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A row unit for use with an agricultural implement, comprising:
at least one air seed meter comprising a seed disc and a seed exit and providing air to hold a
5 seed at a location on the seed disc; and
a seed delivery system for transporting seed from the seed meter to a furrow in the ground,
the seed delivery system comprising:
a seed tube operatively connected to the seed meter; and
a resilient member enclosed in a housing for receiving seed from the seed tube and
10 transporting seed at least partially between the housing and the resilient member to
discharge the seed towards the furrow;
wherein an excess amount of air from the seed meter for holding the seed at the location on
the seed disc pushes the seed in a generally downward direction towards the resilient
member and the air is released from said housing such that the seed is released from
15 the movement of the resilient member.
2. The row unit of claim 1, wherein the resilient member comprises a substantially
circular member positioned in the housing.
- 20 3. The row unit of claim 2, further comprising an electric motor operatively connected
to the resilient member to control the rotational velocity thereof.
4. The row unit of claim 3, wherein the rotational velocity of the resilient member is
determinative on the ground speed of the row unit.
- 25 5. The row unit of claim 1, wherein the seed meter comprises a seed chute for receiving
seed released from the seed disc and positioned adjacent an opening of the seed tube.
6. The row unit of claim 5, wherein housing of the seed delivery system comprises a
30 neck extending from the housing to the seed tube.

7. The row unit of claim 6, wherein air used in the seed meter is used to direct the seed toward and through the seed delivery system.
- 5 8. The row unit of claim 7, wherein the neck comprises an exhaust for allowing the air to pass to slow down the movement of the seed before reaching the resilient member of the seed delivery system.
9. The row unit of claim 1, wherein the resilient member is a wheel comprising foam or
10 rubber.
10. The row unit of claim 1, further comprising first and second seed meters on the row unit and configured to dispense seed into a common seed tube.
- 15 11. A row unit for use with an agricultural implement, comprising:
at least one air seed meter comprising a seed disc and a seed exit and providing air to hold a
seed at a location on the seed disc; and
a seed delivery system for transporting seed from the seed meter to a furrow in the ground,
the seed delivery system comprising:
20 a resilient member enclosed in a housing for receiving seed from the seed member and
transporting seed at least partially between the housing and the resilient member to
discharge the seed towards the furrow;
said seed meter positioned adjacent the resilient member such that the seed experiences a
short drop after being released from the seed disc to contacting the resilient member;
25 and
wherein an excess amount of air from the seed meter for holding the seed at the location on
the seed disc pushes the seed in a generally downward direction towards the resilient
member and the air is released from the housing such that the seed is released from
the movement of the resilient member.
- 30

12. The row unit of claim 11, wherein the resilient member comprises a substantially circular member that is connected to an electric motor for providing rotation thereto.

13. The row unit of claim 11, further comprising a neck between the seed meter and the resilient member for exhausting air from the seed meter to slow the seed before contacting the resilient member.

14. The row unit of claim 11, wherein the resilient member is a wheel comprising foam or rubber.

15. A row unit for use with an agricultural implement, comprising:
at least one seed meter comprising a seed disc and a seed exit; and
a seed delivery system for transporting seed from the seed meter to a furrow in the ground,
the seed delivery system comprising:
a plurality of resilient wheels positioned in a housing, said plurality of wheels positioned
adjacent one another in a substantially vertical manner, rotating in alternating
manner, configured to transmit movement to one another, and defining spaces
between said wheels and the housing;
said wheels configured to receive a seed from the seed meter and to transport the seed from
one wheel to the next via said spaces until the seed reaches a release point and is
released into the furrow in the ground.

16. The row unit of claim 15, wherein the housing of the seed delivery system comprises a lip extending at least partially into the seed meter to guide the seed from the meter to a first wheel within the housing.

17. The row unit of claim 15, wherein said seed delivery system further comprises at least one electric motor operatively connected to the plurality of wheels to control the rotational velocity of said wheels.

18. The row unit of claim 17, further comprising a plurality of electric motors, with each motor operatively connected to a wheel to provide the rotational velocity for said wheel.

19. The row unit of claim 17, wherein each of said plurality of wheels sized to pinch a
5 seed between the wheel and a portion of the housing as the seed moves toward the ground.

20. The row unit of claim 17, wherein at least the bottom-most wheel has a rotational velocity such that the seed will experience a net zero horizontal velocity when entering the furrow.
10

21. A row unit for use with an agricultural implement, comprising:
at least one seed meter comprising a seed disc and a seed exit; and
a seed delivery system for transporting seed from the seed meter to a furrow in the ground,
the seed delivery system comprising:
15 a belt partially positioned within the seed meter passing adjacent the seed disc to receive
seed from the seed disc for transporting to the ground, the belt having an open and a
closed configuration;
a first roller and a second roller for moving the belt along a path; and
a seeding apparatus for opening or closing the belt adjacent the seed disc to place a seed
20 within a closed configuration of the belt for transport to the furrow in the ground;
wherein the seed is manipulated at or near the furrow to release the seed from the belt.

22. The row unit of claim 21, wherein the belt is a bulb belt with first and second bulbs
hingeably connected to one another via a hinge protruding away from the first and second
25 bulbs.

23. The row unit of claim 22, wherein a V-shaped member or protrusion of the seeding apparatus opens the bulbs away from one another to position a seed at least partially within a pocket of the belt.
30

24. The row unit of claim 23, further comprising an ejector near the furrow to release the seed from within the pocket of the belt.
25. The row unit of claim 23, wherein the seed is injected into the pocket of the belt.
- 5 26. The row unit of claim 21, wherein the belt comprises a plurality of teeth that are in a line when in the open configuration, rolled adjacent to one another when the belt is in the closed configuration, and configured to accept rotational movement from the seed disc.
- 10 27. The row unit of claim 26, wherein the belt is rolled with a seed in a pocket[[d]] of the teeth to hold the seed in place as the belt moves along the rollers.
28. The row unit of claim 27, wherein the belt comprises a plurality of rows of teeth that are spaced apart from one another along the length of the belt.
- 15 29. A row unit for use with an agricultural planting implement, comprising:
a plurality of seed meters with a seed disc and a seed exit, each of said plurality of seed meters configured to receive a separate seed variety;
an electric drive motor operatively connected to each of the plurality of seed meters for
20 selectively operating said disk within said meter; and
a seed delivery system at least partially aligned with each of the seed exits of the plurality of seed meters for directing seed from the meters to the ground, said seed delivery system comprising first and second belts positioned such that the belts move in close proximity to one another, and
25 wherein the seed is released from an operating seed meter of the plurality of seed meters into a shared seed chute, the shared seed chute being adjacent to the seed delivery system; and
wherein seed is positioned between the first and second belts to be transported therebetween to a location near or in a furrow in the ground.
- 30

30. The row unit of claim 29, wherein the first and second belts move substantially in sync with one another.

31. The row unit of claim 29, wherein the first and second belts comprise a resilient
5 material.

32. The row unit of claim 29, further comprising a first motor operatively connected to a roller of the first belt, and a second motor operatively connected to a roller of the second belt to provide movement of the belts.
10

33. The row unit of claim 29, further comprising a housing of the seed delivery system for housing the first and second belts therein.

1/15

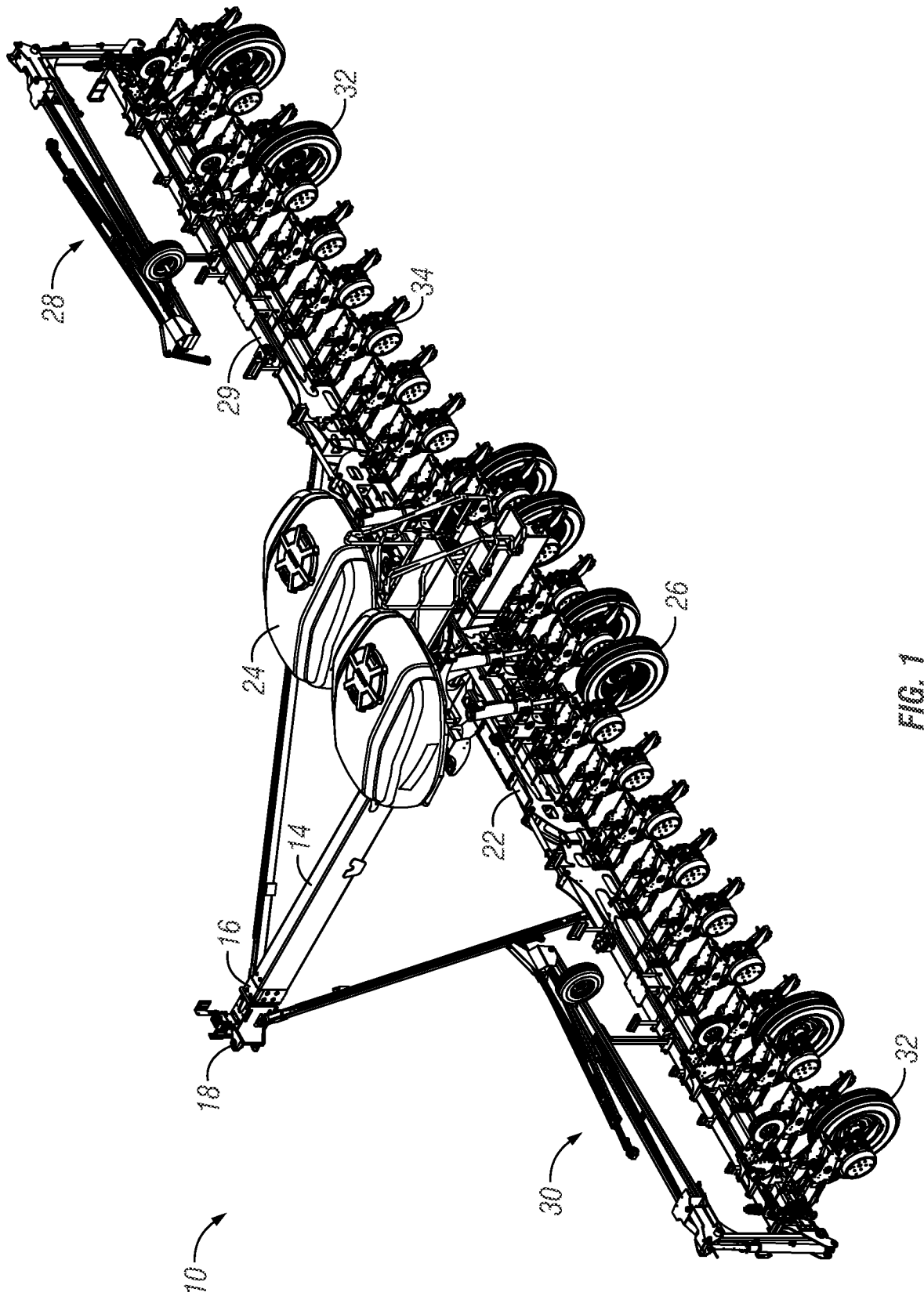


FIG. 1

2/15

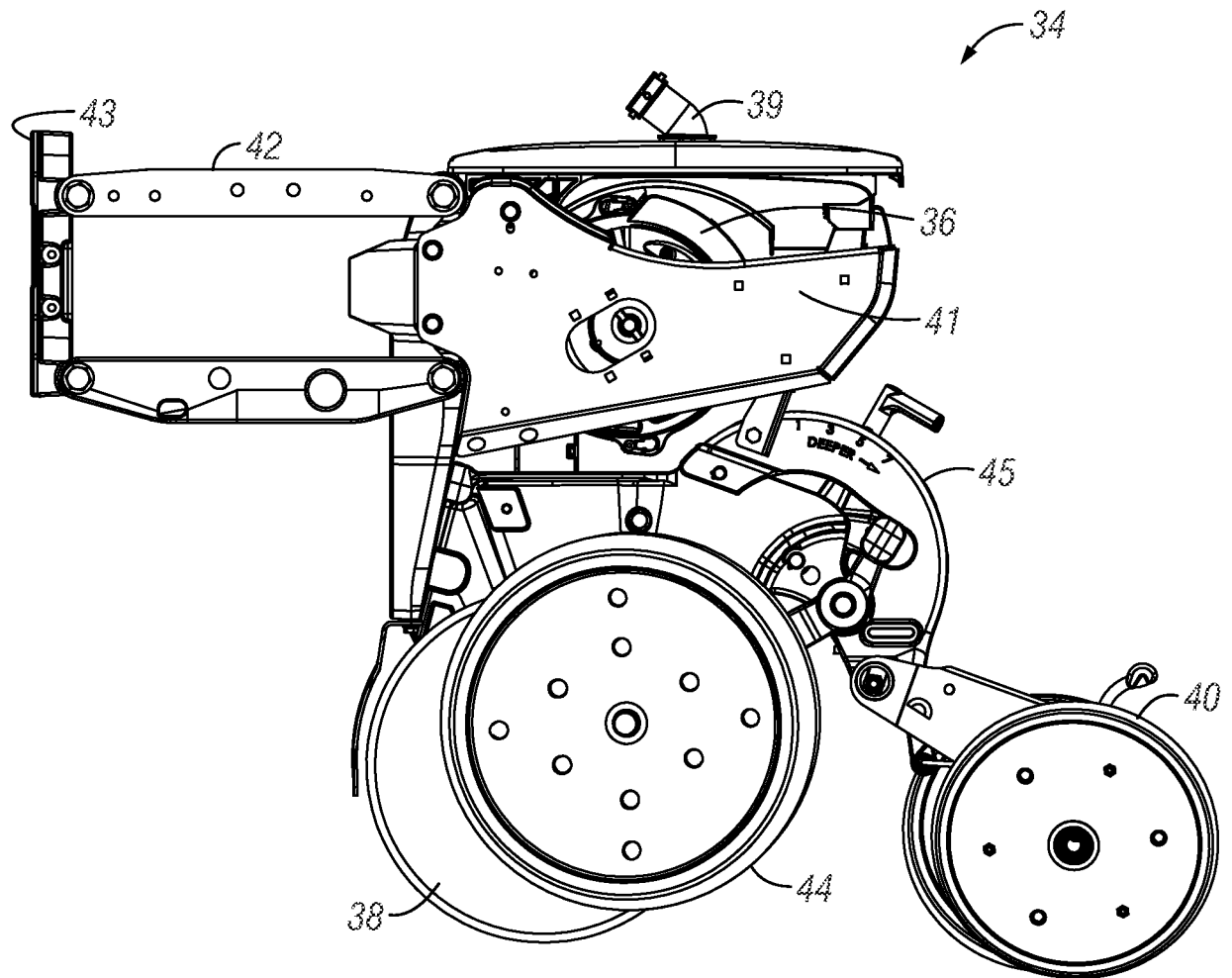


FIG. 2

3/15

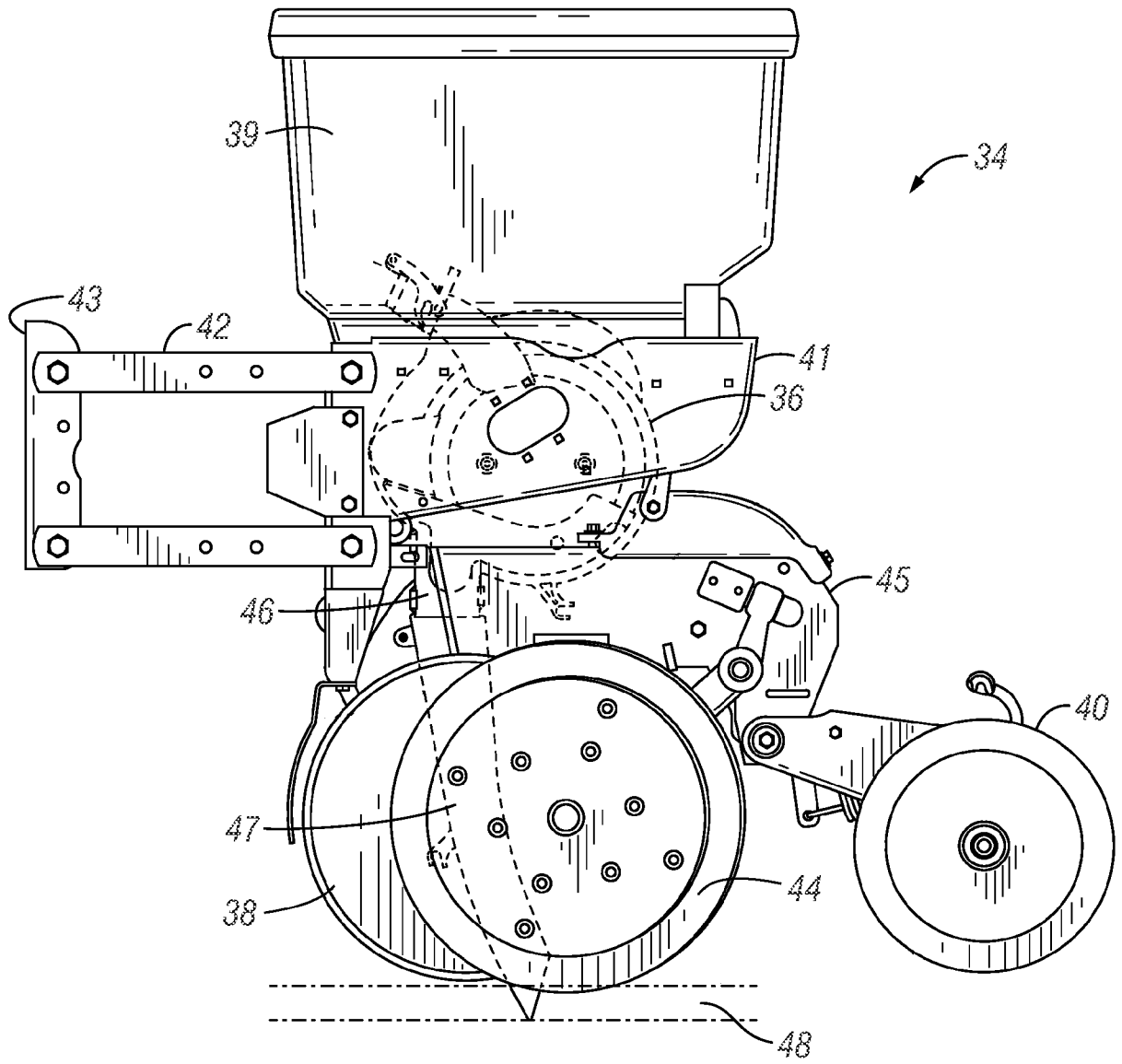


FIG. 3

4/15

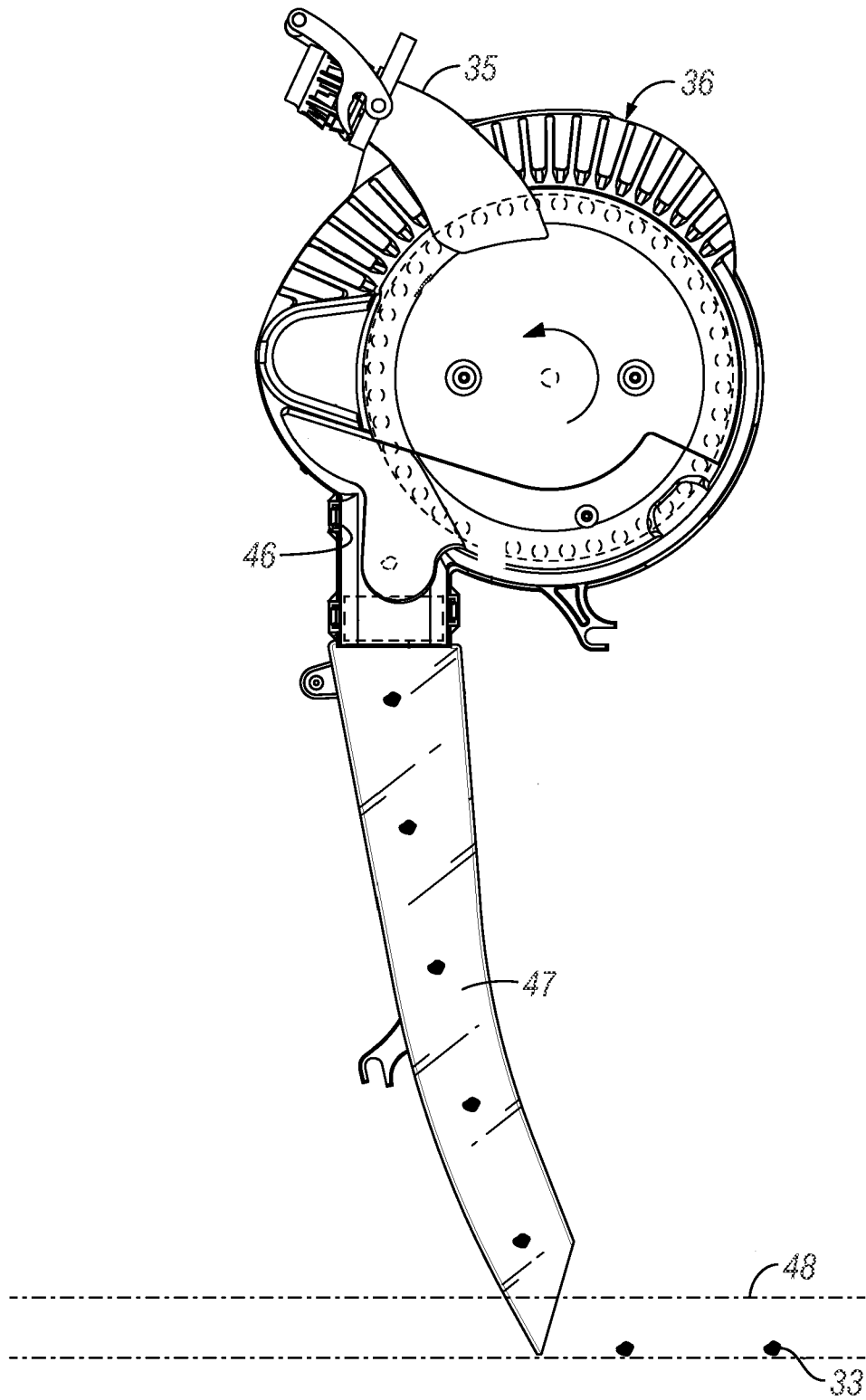


FIG. 4

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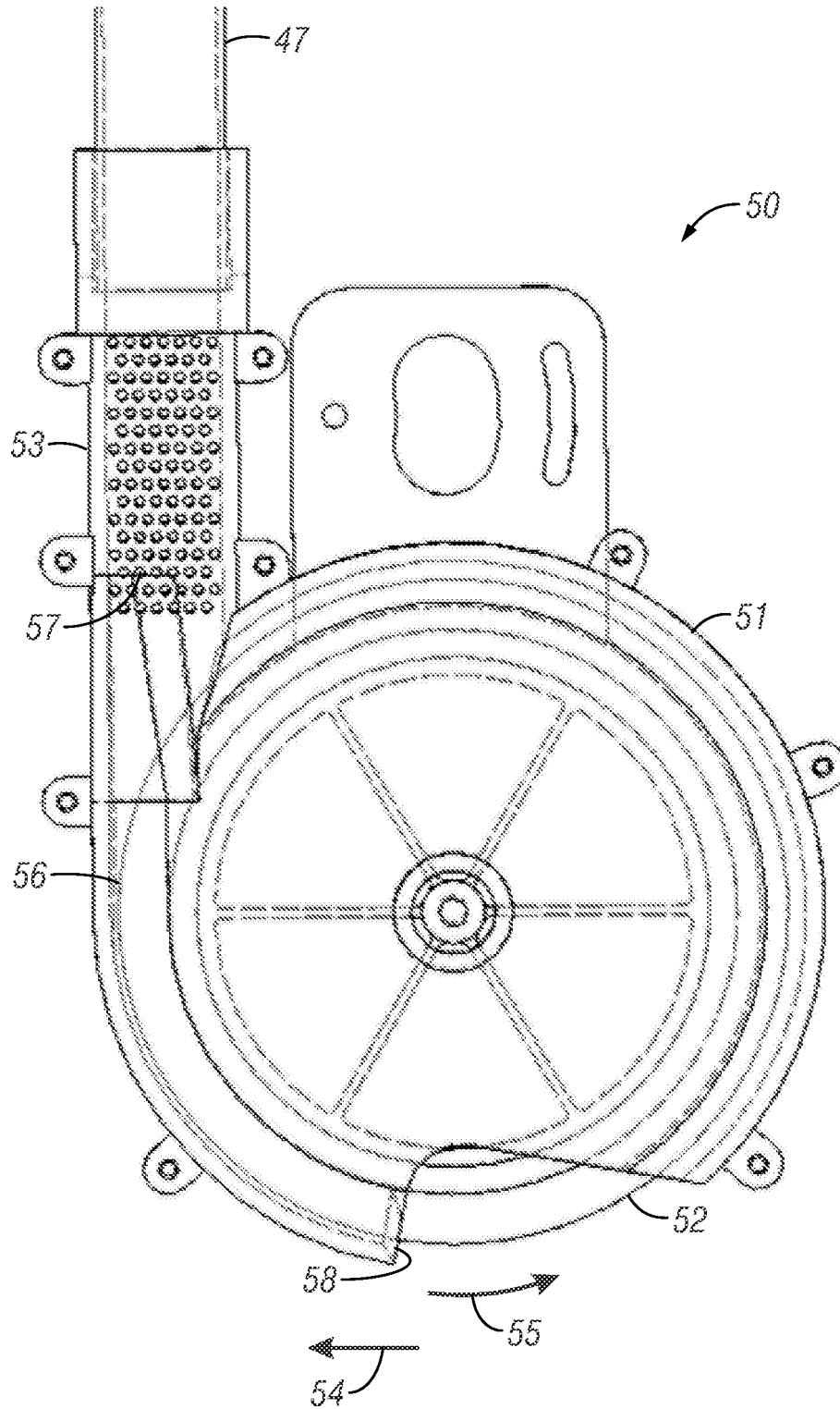


FIG. 5

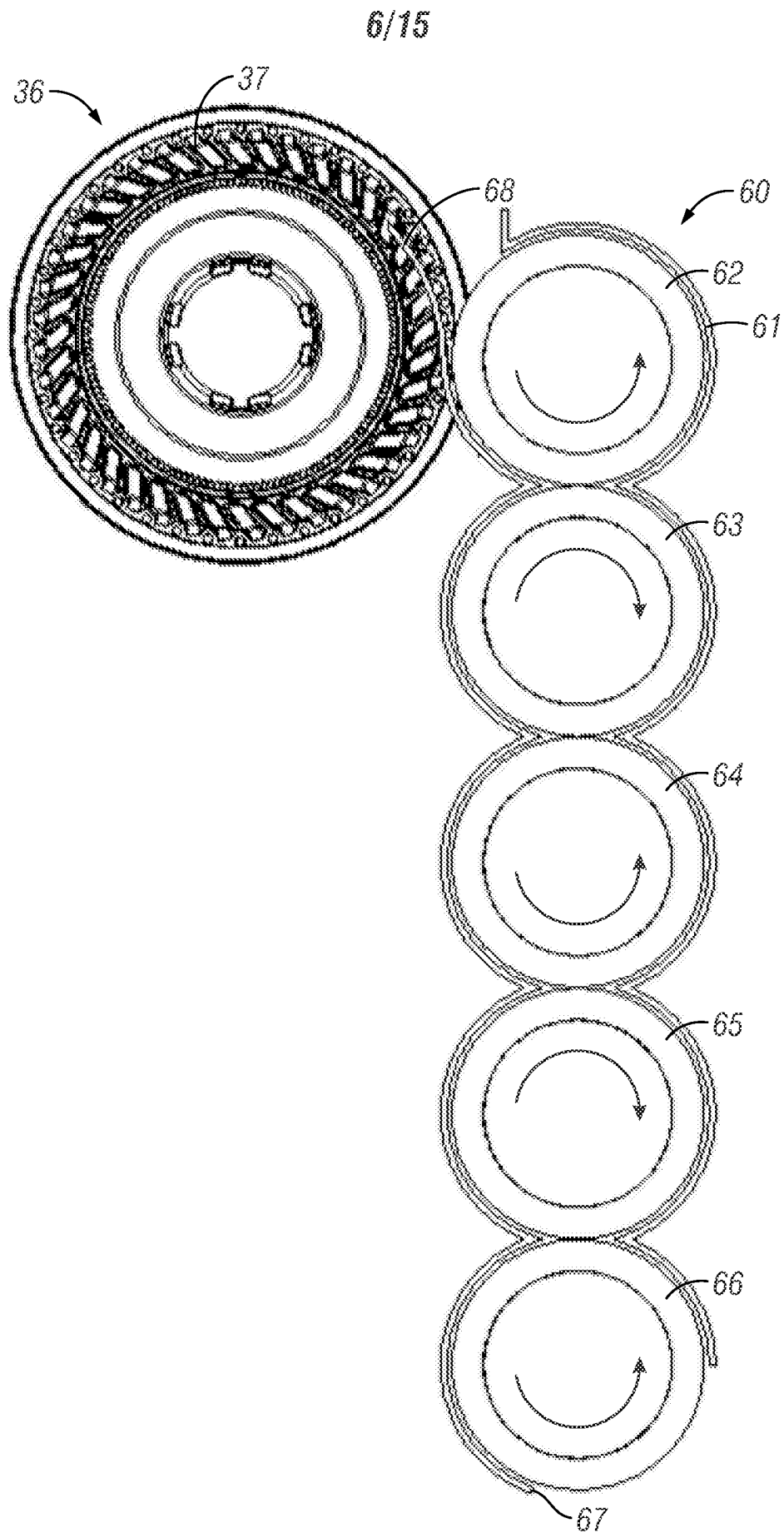


FIG. 6

7/15

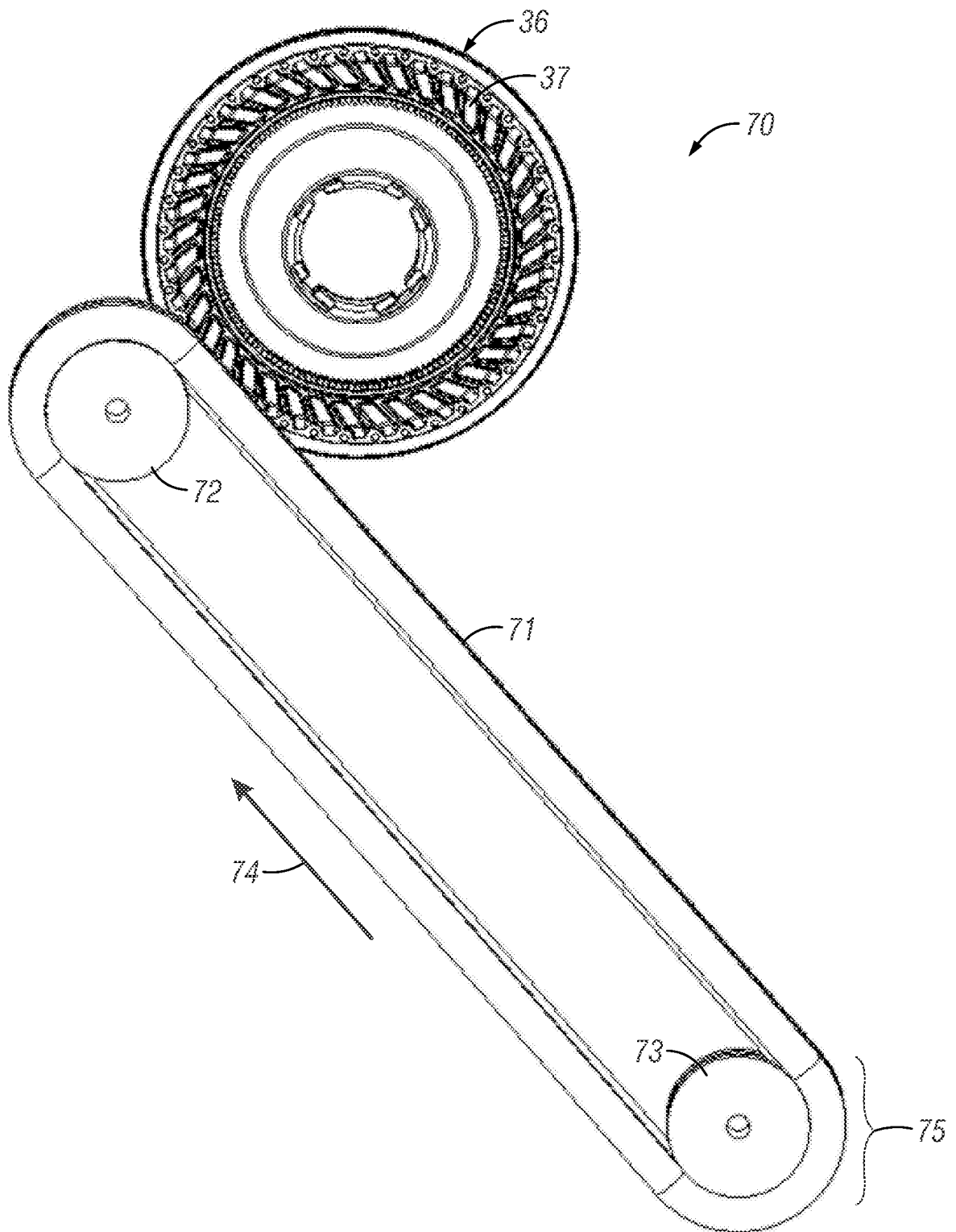


FIG. 7

8/15

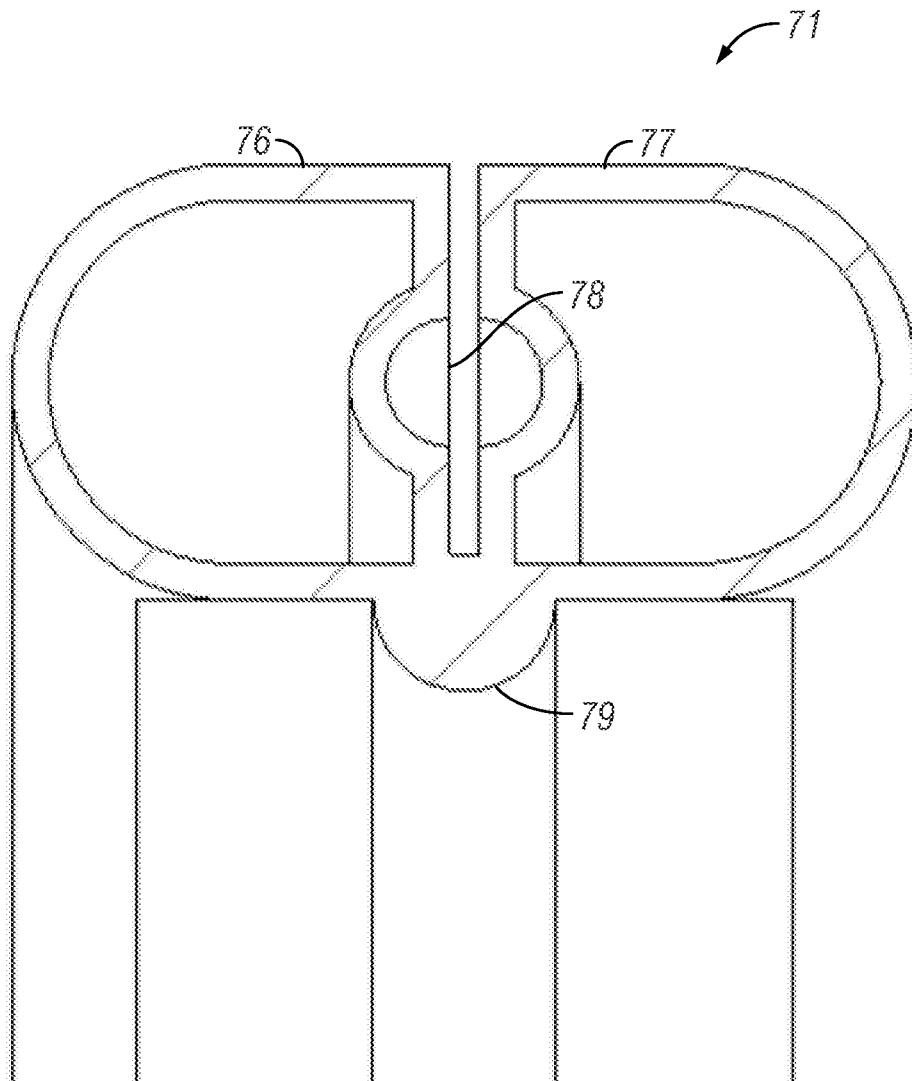


FIG. 8

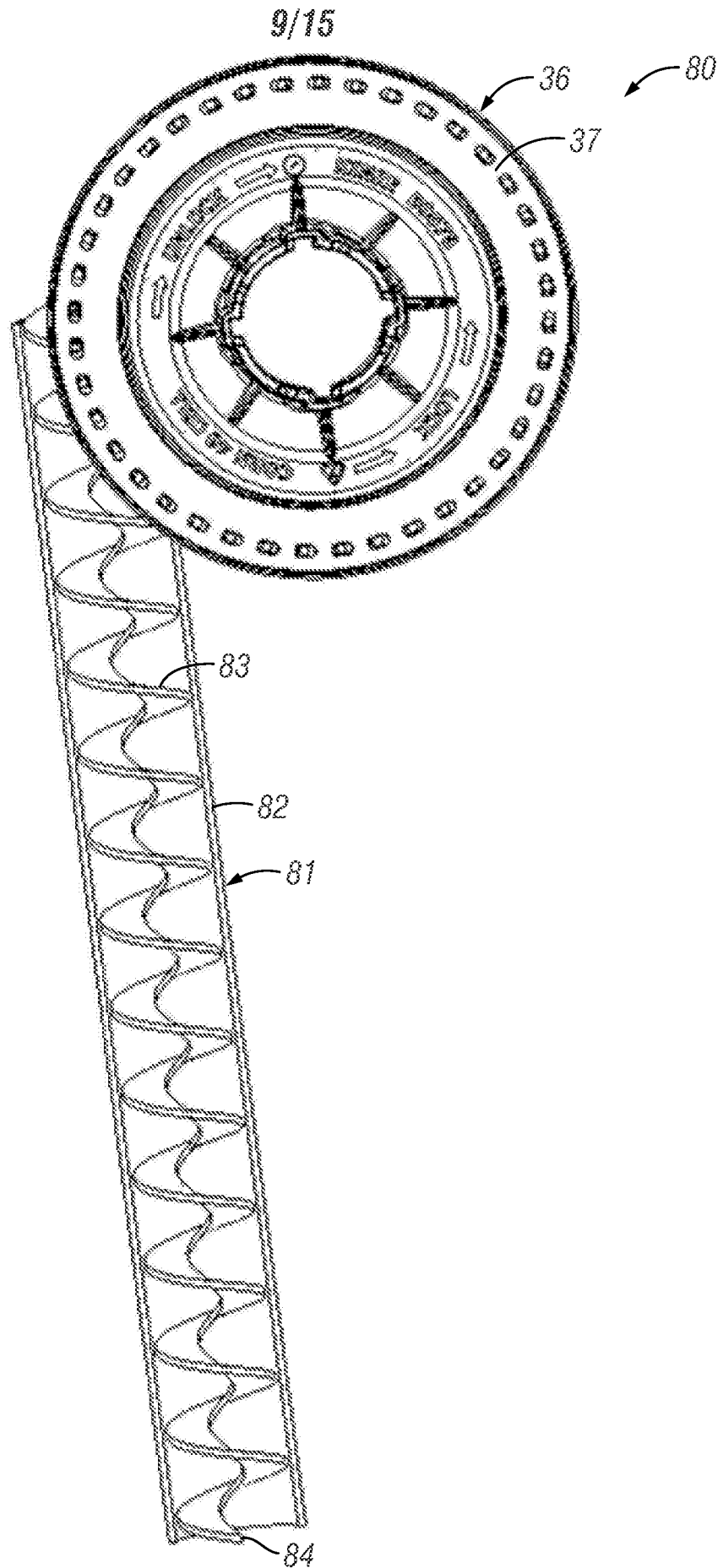


FIG. 9

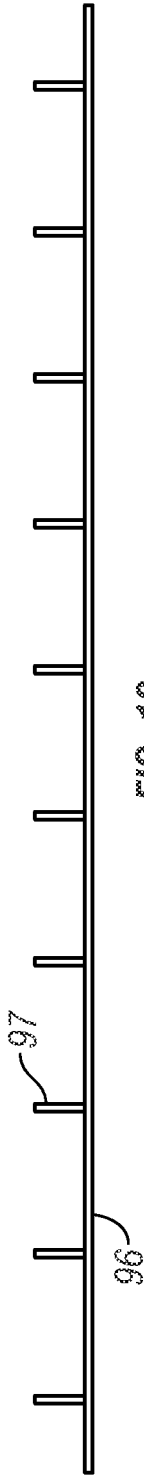


FIG. 10

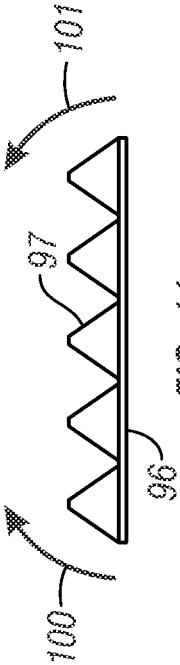


FIG. 11

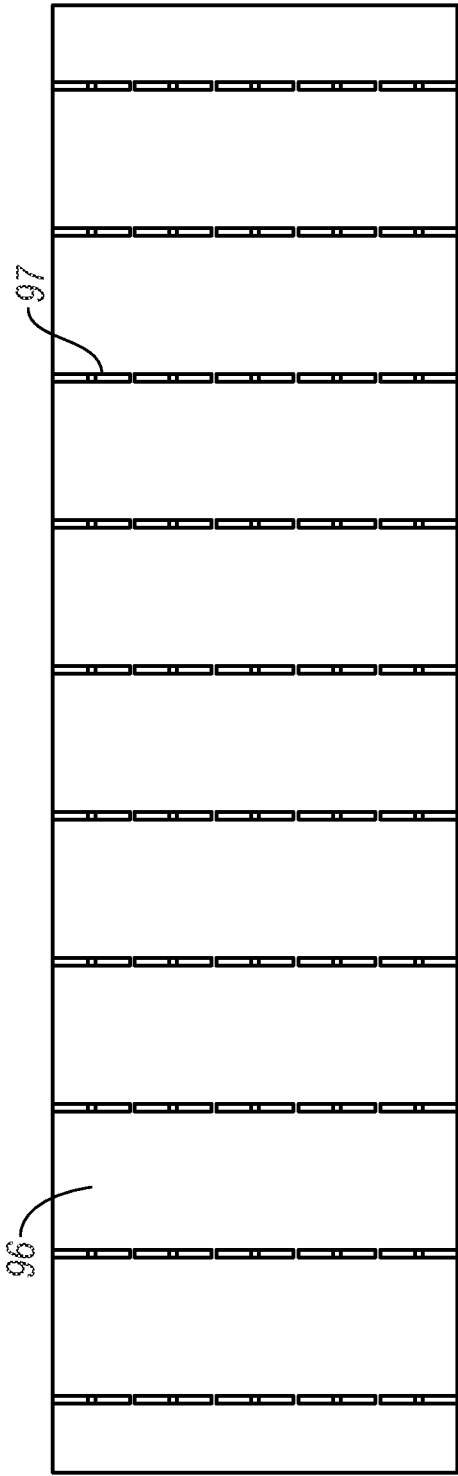


FIG. 12

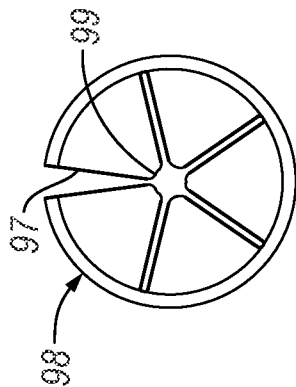


FIG. 13

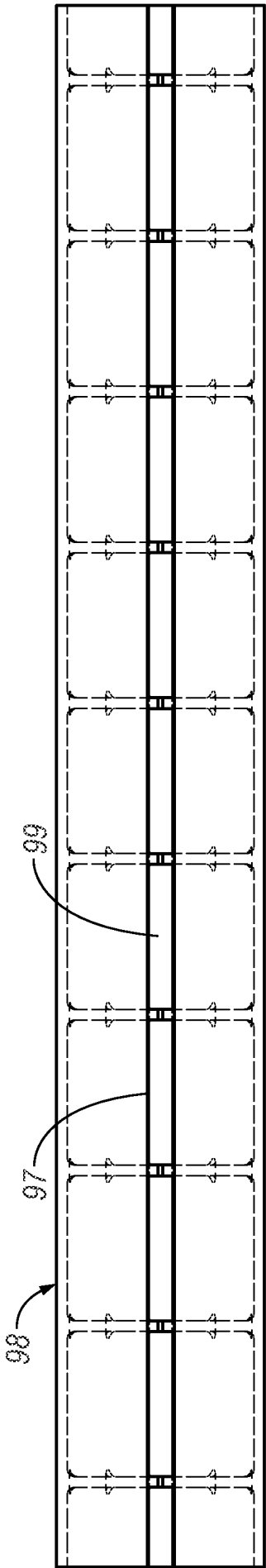


FIG. 14

12/15

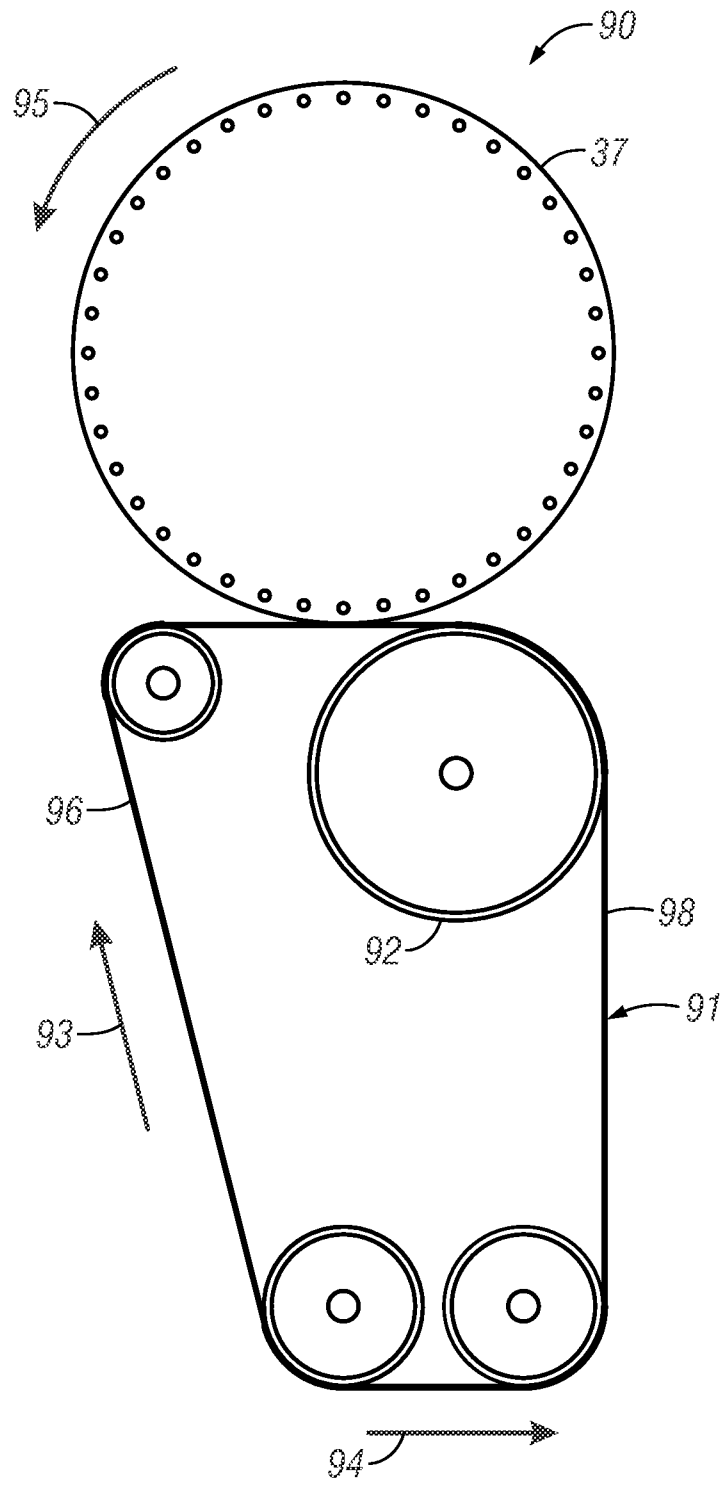


FIG. 15

13/15

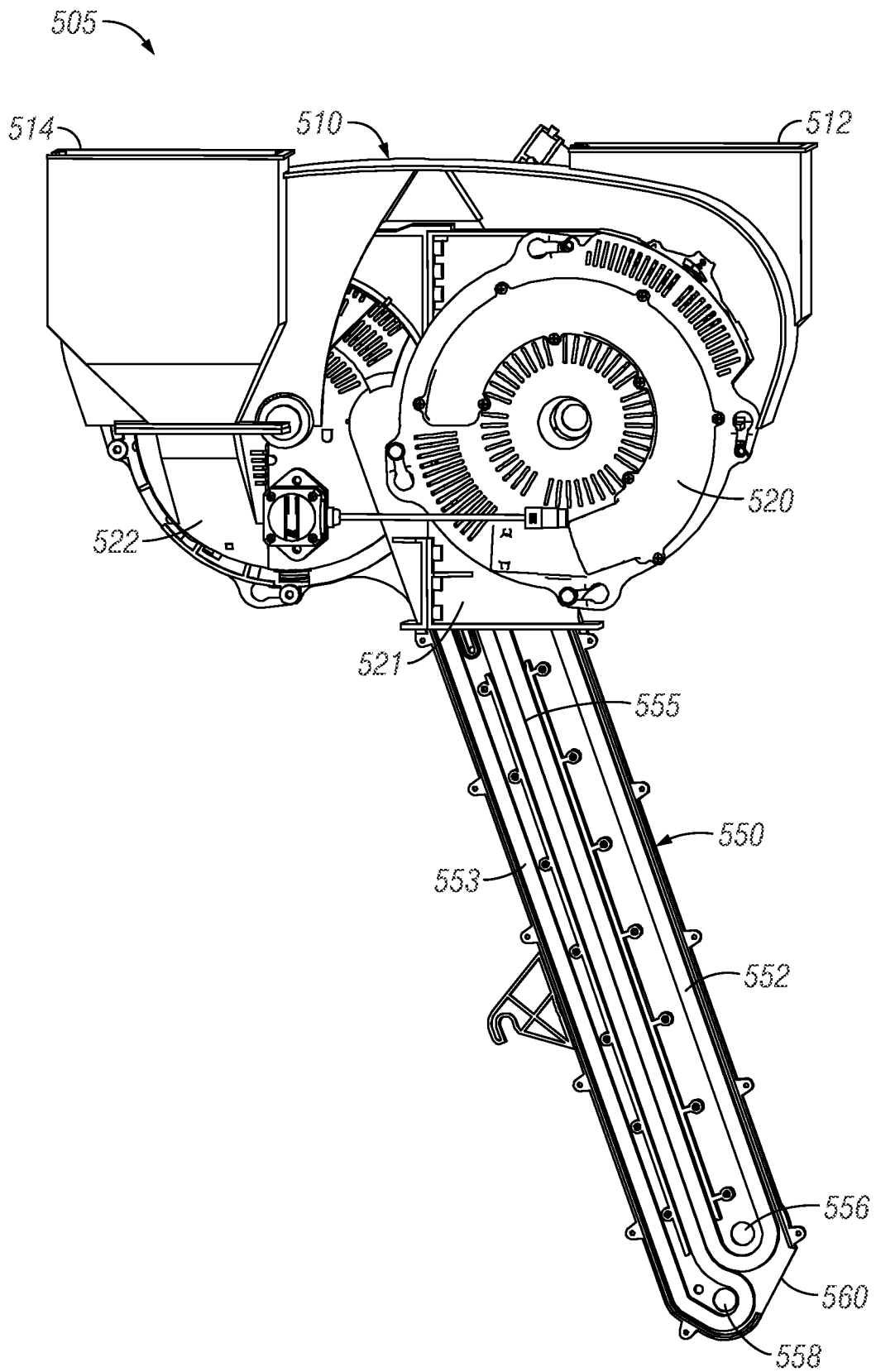


FIG. 16

14/15

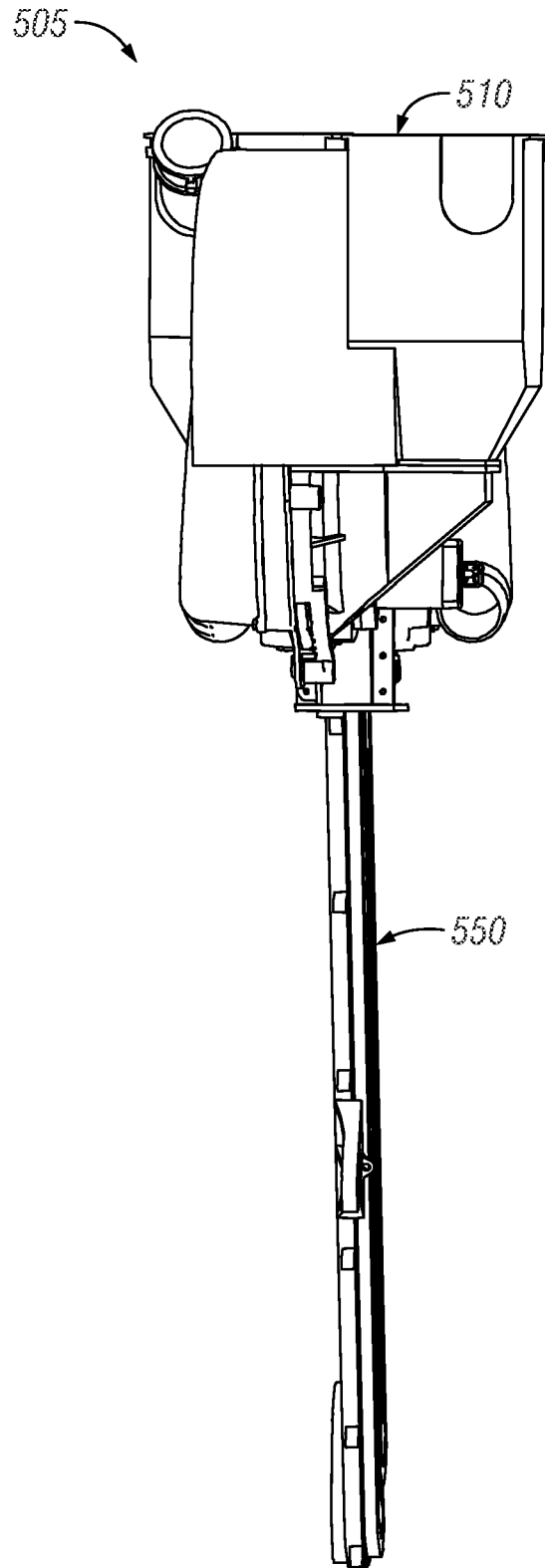


FIG. 17

15/15

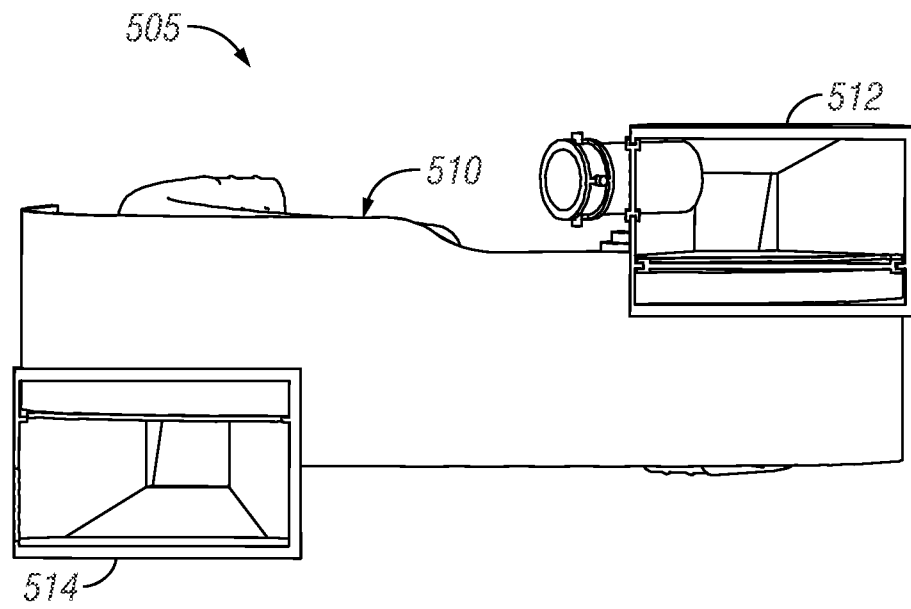


FIG. 18

