

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))*

AIR SEEDER DOWNFORCE CONTROL

BACKGROUND

[0001] Certain air seeders have seeding tools and fertilizing tools. The seeding tools deposit seeds in the seed furrows opened by the seeding tools and the fertilizing tools may place the fertilizer between the seed rows in addition to or in place of fertilizer placed with the seed. The seeding tools and fertilizer tools can each have variable applied downforce by the action of an actuator, such as a hydraulic cylinder, a pneumatic cylinder, or an electronic actuator. There is a need to manage the total applied downforce in order to maintain an acceptable seed planting depth.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0002] FIG. 1 is a partial perspective view of an embodiment of a prior art air seeder with separate seed tools and fertilizer tools mounted on a frame.

[0003] FIG. 2 is a schematic side elevation view of the air seeder of FIG. 1.

[0004] FIG. 3 is a front elevation view of the air seeder of FIG. 1.

[0005] FIG. 4 is a schematic illustration of the control system for managing the downforce applied to each of the seed assemblies and fertilizer assemblies.

DESCRIPTION

[0006] Air seeders having variable applied downforce seeding and fertilizing tools are known in the art. One such prior art air seeder having variable applied downforce seeding and fertilizing tools is disclosed in U.S. Patent Publication No. 2007/0245938 (“the ‘938 Publication”), the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. The Mid Row Bander™ from Bourgault Industries, Ltd., is a commercial embodiment of the air seeder disclosed in the ‘938 Publication. Another example of a prior art air seeder having variable applied downforce seeding and fertilizing tools is disclosed in U.S. Patent Publication No. US2005/0045080 (“the ‘080 Publication”), the disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety. A

commercial embodiment of the air seeder disclosed in the '080 Publication is the Separate Fertilizer Placement Air Drill 1895 from Deere and Company.

[0007] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a section of an air seeder implement 200. As described in the '938 Publication, the implement 200 includes a frame 215 comprising front, middle, and rear lateral frame members 215F, 215M, and 215R. The frame 215 is mounted on wheels (not shown) for travel over the ground in an operating travel direction P. Seed assemblies 250 are placed at substantially regular intervals along the middle and rear frame members 215M, 215R so that the seed furrows created are substantially parallel at approximately regular intervals. The fertilizer assemblies 220 are spaced at regular intervals along the front frame member 215F so that the fertilizer furrows opened by the knives 232 of the fertilizer assemblies 220 are positioned substantially mid-way between adjacent pairs of seed furrows created by the seed assemblies 250 as best shown in the front elevation view of FIG. 2.

[0008] The knives 232 of the fertilizer assemblies 220 engage the ground along a front line substantially perpendicular to the operating travel direction and about directly under the front frame member 215F, while the first set of seed assemblies 250F are mounted on the middle frame member 215M and engage the ground along a middle line rearward of the front frame member 215F and the knives 232, generally under the rear frame member 215R. The seed assemblies 250R mounted on the rear frame member 215R engage the ground along a rear line rearward of the rear frame member 215R. Ample spacing is thus provided for each ground engaging element, fertilizer knives 232 and seed knives 258.

[0009] The seed assemblies 250 comprise a trailing arm 254 pivotally connected at a front end thereof to the frame 215 about substantially horizontal and parallel front arm axes AA and AA' oriented substantially perpendicular to the operating travel direction P. A seed furrow opener, illustrated as a seed knife 258, is attached to the trailing arm 254 and is operative to create a seed furrow when a bottom end thereof is engaged in the ground. A seed feed 260 is mounted to the rearward side of the seed knife 258. A packer wheel 272 is rotatably attached rearward of the seed knife 258 and is oriented to roll substantially along the seed furrow.

[0010] A parallel linkage 202 comprises upper and lower links 203, 204, each pivotally attached at forward ends thereof about axes AA and AA' respectively. Rear ends of the links 203, 204 are

pivotally attached to the forward ends of a packer bracket 266 about axes BB and BB' respectively. The axes AA, AA', BB, and BB' are oriented such that the upper and lower links 203, 204 are parallel as they move up and down.

[0011] Packer wheel arm 268 is pivotally attached at a front end thereof to the packer bracket 266 about axis BB', and packer wheel 272 is rotatably attached to the rear end of the packer wheel arm 268. Seed shank 256 is pivotally attached at a mid-portion thereof to the packer bracket 266. Seed knife 258 is attached to a bottom end of the seed shank 256. During field operations, a first port 206 of the hydraulic cylinder 264 is connected via a valve 84 to an active hydraulic source 80, such that the hydraulic cylinder 264 acts as a trailing arm actuator and exerts a substantially constant bias force BF on the top end of the seed shank 256, causing same to pivot about the axis BB' and bear against a stop on the packer bracket 266 such that the bias force is transferred to the packer bracket 266 and parallel linkage 202 which are pushed downward to force the bottom end of the knife 258 in the ground and create the seed furrow. Seed is provided to the seed feed 260 and is deposited into the seed furrow created by the seed knife 258.

[0012] A packer adjustment brace 270 is attached to the packer wheel arm 268 and engages a slot in the packer bracket 266. The brace 270 is moved along the slot to set the vertical position of the seed knife 258 with respect to the packer wheel 272 at the required location to provide a desired depth D2 of the seed furrow and then the brace 270 is locked to the packer bracket 266. The bias force BF pushes the packer wheel 272 against the ground 205.

[0013] To move the knife 258 up and out of engagement with the ground, the active hydraulic source 80 is connected to a second port 207 on the hydraulic cylinder 264 to retract the hydraulic cylinder 264 and pivot the top end of the seed shank 256 toward the hydraulic cylinder 264 and cause a recess in the seed shank 256 to bear against a pin providing the axis BB at which point further retraction of the hydraulic cylinder 264 raises the parallel linkage 202 of the trailing arm 254, and the packer wheel arm 268 to the transport position.

[0014] Each fertilizer assembly 220 comprises a mounting bracket 224 attached to the frame 215. The mounting bracket 224 is connected to an elongate member 228 through a height adjustable connection 226. By using the height adjustable connection 226, the distance between

the bottom of the fertilizer knife 232 and the frame 215 can be varied to set the depth D1 of the fertilizer furrow. A fertilizer knife shank 230 is pivotally connected to the lower end of the elongate member 228 with a shank pin 229, and a fertilizer knife 232 is attached to the fertilizer knife shank 230 and is biased downward by a hydraulic cylinder 236.

[0015] The hydraulic cylinder 236 is connected via a valve 85 to the active hydraulic source 80 at a first port 211 thereof and exerts a downward force on the fertilizer knife 232 by exerting an upward bias force BF on the front end of the knife shank 230 forward of the shank pin 229. The bias force BF is sufficient to maintain the fertilizer knife 232 at an operating position at the maximum downward position during normal operations, thereby maintaining the fertilizer knife 232 at a substantially constant vertical position with respect to the frame 215, such that as the frame 215 moves across a field, the depth of the fertilizer furrow D1 is maintained more or less consistent, as the frame 215 will move up and down on the wheels of the implement following the ground, as is well known in the art. When the fertilizer knife 232 contacts an obstruction, such as a rock or the like, the knife will trip and move upward against the bias force of the hydraulic cylinder 236 to clear the obstruction, and then move to the operating position again. Fertilizer is provided to the fertilizer feed 238 and is deposited into the fertilizer furrow created by the fertilizer knife 232.

[0016] Because the frame 215 is fixed in vertical relationship to the wheels carrying the frame, the seed knives 258 and packer wheels 272 are raised from the operating position shown in FIG. 2 to the transport position (not shown) by the hydraulic cylinder 264, while the frame stays at a constant vertical position with respect to the ground. Similarly, the active hydraulic source 80 is connected to a second port 212 on the hydraulic cylinder 236 to extend the hydraulic cylinder 236 and move the fertilizer knives 232 upward to the raised transport position.

[0017] While the air seeder 200 of the '938 Publication as described above and as illustrated in FIGs. 1-3, may serve its intended purpose, it is recognized that the depth placement of fertilizer is not as critical as the depth placement of the seed. Accordingly, by managing the total applied downforce or downpressure of all the seeding assemblies 250 and the fertilizing assemblies 220 across the implement 200, the more critical seed planting depth can be ensured by increasing the downforce applied to the seeding assemblies 250 as necessary to maintain the proper seed

planting depth while correspondingly reducing the applied downforce of the fertilizer assemblies 220.

[0018] One method of managing the total applied downforce of the implement to ensure acceptable seed planting depth may be to determine a total downforce FT of the implement 200 by summing the downforce applied to each of the seed assemblies 250 (the “Seed Assembly Applied Force” or “SAAF”) and the downforce applied to each of the fertilizer assemblies 220 (the “Fertilizer Assembly Applied Force” or “FAAF”). The total downforce FT is then compared to a maximum downforce FM. The maximum downforce FM may be the total weight of air seeder 200 or it can be an amount set by the operator, which is less than the total weight of air seeder 200. If the total downforce FT is greater than the maximum downforce FM, the FAAF applied to each of the fertilizer assemblies 220 is reduced by a proportional amount of the total downforce FT until the total downforce FT is less than the maximum downforce FM. This allows each of the seed assemblies 250 to maintain the necessary SAAF to keep the depth of seed planting at an acceptable level. In one embodiment, the total of the FAAF is less than the total of the SAAF.

[0019] Although the embodiment of the air seeder 200 is described and illustrated with hydraulic actuators to provide the variable applied downforce, it should be appreciated that any device capable of applying a variable downforce can be used in place of the hydraulic cylinders, including but not limited to, pneumatic cylinders or electronic linear actuators.

[0020] FIG. 4 is a schematic embodiment of a control system 300 for controlling the SAAS and FAAF, such as the PackMaster™ control system from Bourgault Industries, Ltd. The control system 300 includes a load cell 302 installed on axle 303 (FIG. 2) where packer wheel 272 is mounted to packer wheel arm 268. The load cell 302 is in electrical communication with a monitor 310. The monitor 310 may be mounted within the cab of the tractor (not shown) pulling the air seeder implement 200 through the field. The monitor 310 may include a central processing unit (“CPU”), memory and a graphical user interface (“GUI”) allowing the user to view and enter data into the monitor. An example of a suitable monitor is disclosed in U.S. Patent No. 8,386,137 which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

[0021] Monitor 310 is in communication with the valve 84 to control pressure in hydraulic cylinder 264 to adjust the SAAF applied by cylinder 264 based on a selected value entered into the monitor 310 by an operator. An amplifier 304 and an analog/digital converter 306 may be disposed between the load sensor 302 and the monitor 310. To control the FAAF, the monitor 310 is in communication with the valve 85 to control the pressure in hydraulic cylinder 236. Knowing the amount of pressure applied to cylinder 264 to adjust SAAF, pressure in hydraulic cylinder 236 is maintained at an amount equal to or less than hydraulic cylinder 264.

[0022] In another embodiment, seed assembly 250 may be replaced with a disc opener unit (such as that referenced as element “(20)” in U.S. Patent Publication Nos. US20110313575 and US20110313572, both of which are incorporated herein by reference in their entireties (“the ‘575 and ‘572 Publications”). In such an embodiment, load cell “(78)” as disclosed in the ‘575 and 572 Publications is used in place of load cell 302 in the control system 300.

[0023] Various modifications to the disclosed embodiments of the apparatus and the general principles and features of the system and methods described herein will be readily apparent to those of skill in the art. Thus, the scope of the appended claims are not to be limited to the embodiments of the apparatus, system and methods described herein and illustrated in the drawing figures.

CLAIMS

1. A method of controlling downforce on an air seeder, said air seeder comprising:
a frame;
a plurality of seed assemblies disposed on said frame for planting seeds in a plurality of seed rows, each of said plurality of seed assemblies having a seed assembly actuator to adjustably apply a seed assembly downforce; and
a plurality of fertilizer assemblies disposed on said frame and disposed to place fertilizer between said seed rows, each of said plurality of fertilizer assemblies having a fertilizer assembly actuator to adjustably apply a fertilizer assembly downforce;
said method comprising:
summing said seed assembly downforce of all of said plurality of seed assemblies and said fertilizer assembly downforce of all of said plurality of fertilizer assemblies to determine a total applied downforce;
comparing said total applied downforce to a maximum downforce; and
reducing said total applied downforce when said total applied downforce is equal to or greater than said maximum downforce.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein said maximum downforce is a weight of said air seeder.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein said maximum downforce is a selected amount.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein a sum of said fertilizer assembly downforce of all of said plurality of fertilizer assemblies is less than a sum of said seed assembly downforce of all of said plurality of seed assemblies.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein said fertilizer assembly downforce of each of said plurality of fertilizer assemblies is less than said seed assembly downforce of each of said plurality of seed assemblies.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein said step of reducing said total applied downforce includes reducing said fertilizer assembly downforce of all of said plurality of fertilizer assemblies while maintaining said seed assembly downforce of all of said plurality of seed assemblies.

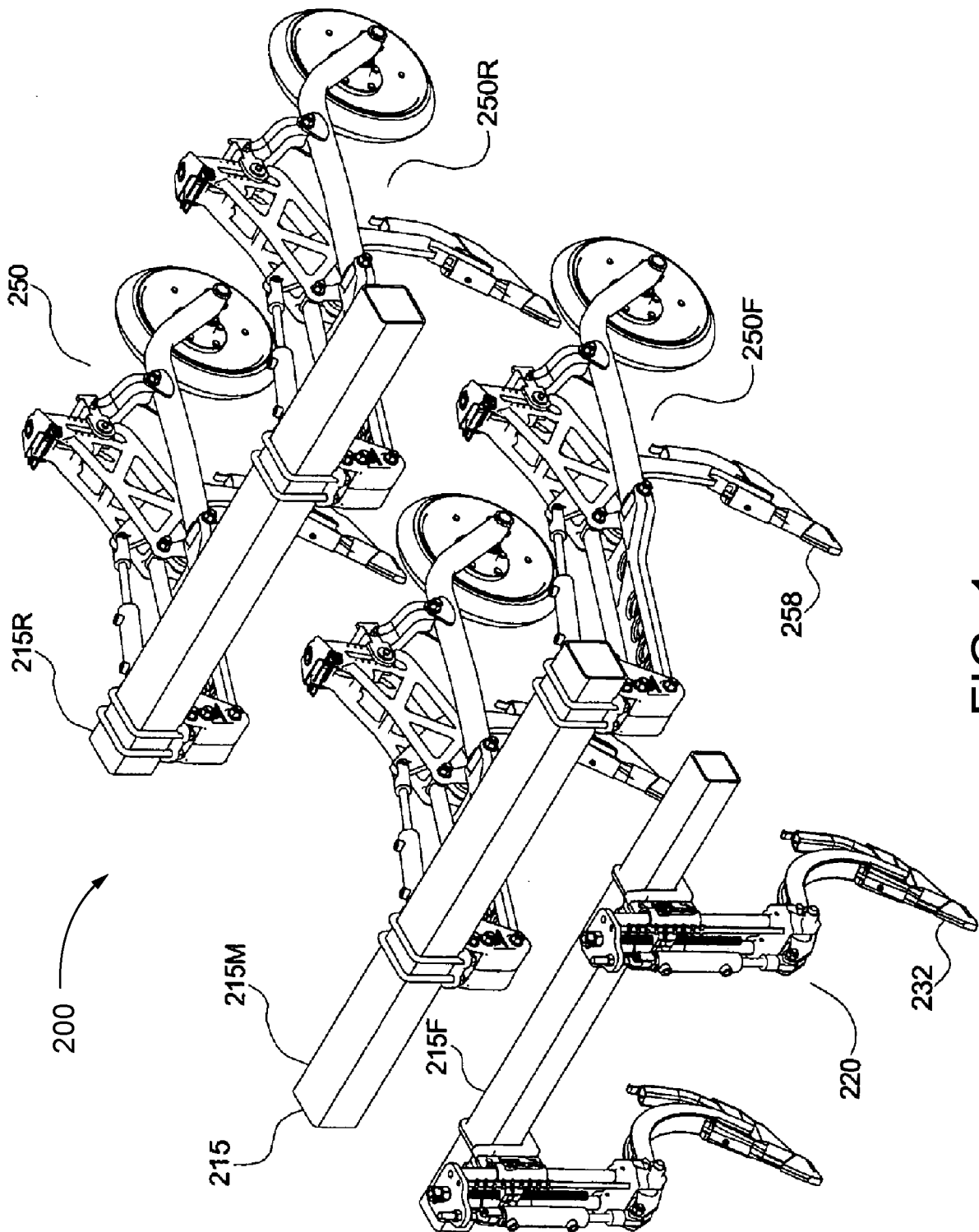


FIG. 1

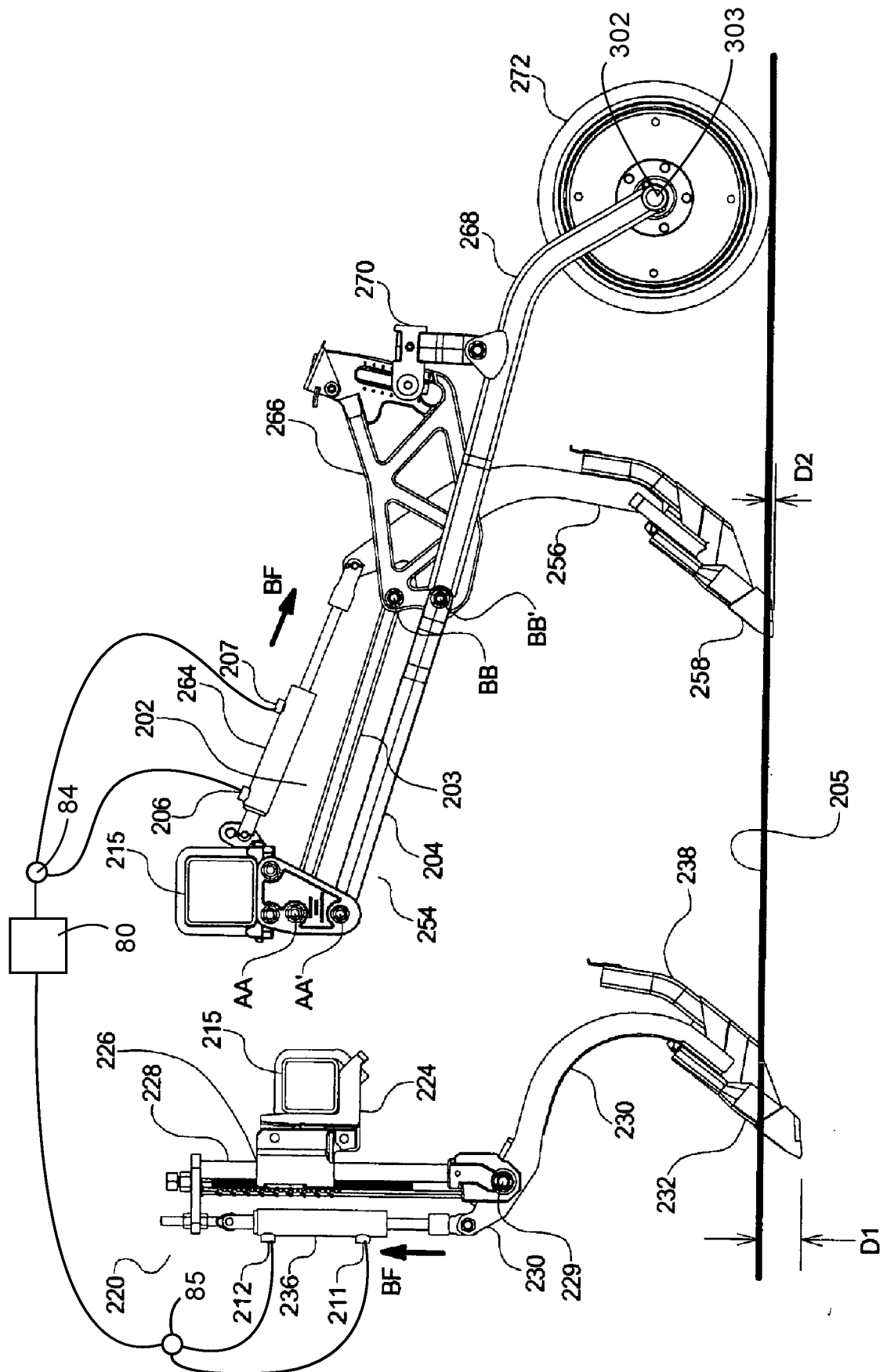


FIG. 2

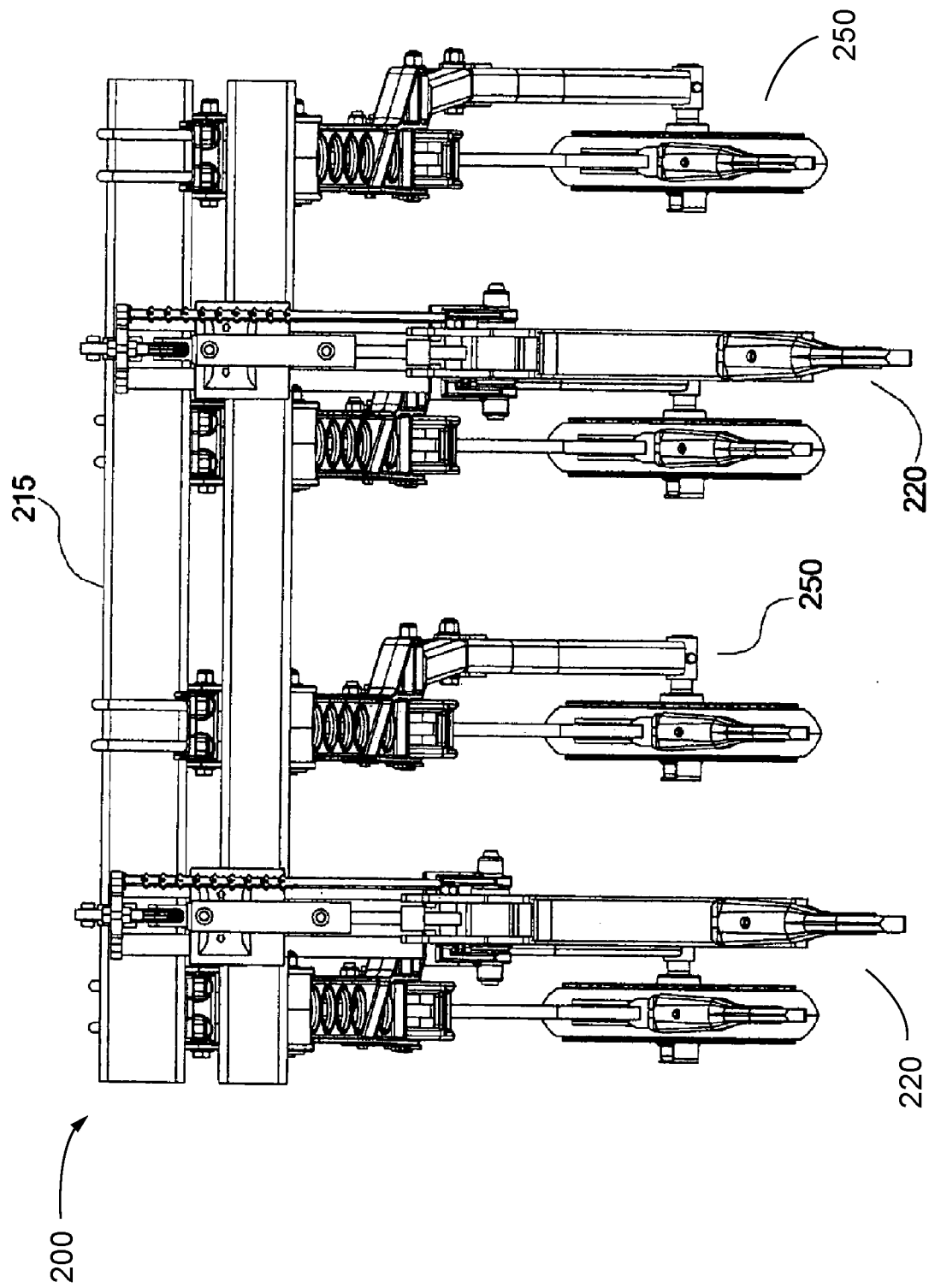


FIG. 3

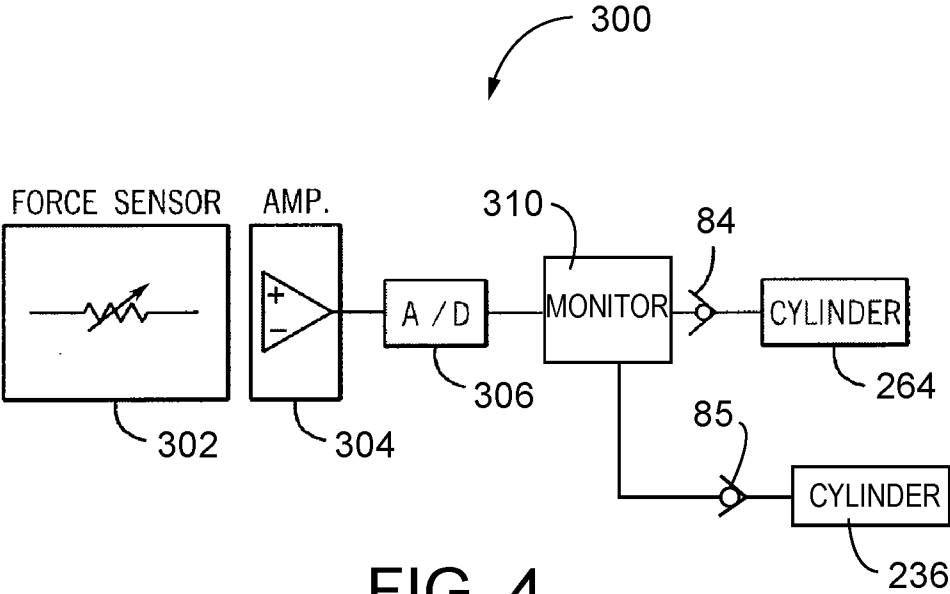


FIG. 4

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US2018/040813

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(8) - A01C 7/20; A01B 13/08; A01B 63/00; A01B 63/111; A01B 63/114; A01B 63/22 (2018.01)

CPC - A01C 7/205; A01B 13/08; A01B 63/008; A01B 63/111; A01C 5/06; A01C 7/18 (2018.08)

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

See Search History document

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

USPC - 111/134; 111/926; 172/2; 172/4; 172/663; 701/50 (keyword delimited)

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

See Search History document

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 2011/0313575 A1 (KOWALCHUK et al) 22 December 2011 (22.12.2011) entire document	1-6
A	US 6,216,616 B1 (BOURGAULT) 17 April 2001 (17.04.2001) entire document	1-6
A	US 2017/0006758 A1 (CNH INDUSTRIAL AMERICA LLC) 12 January 2017 (12.01.2017) entire document	1-6
A	US 6,460,623 B1 (KNUSSMAN et al) 08 October 2002 (08.10.2002) entire document	1-6
A	US 2014/0214284 A1 (SAUDER et al) 31 July 2014 (31.07.2014) entire document	1-6

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

"A" document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance

"E" earlier application or patent but published on or after the international filing date

"L" document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)

"O" document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means

"P" document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed

"T" later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention

"X" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone

"Y" document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

22 August 2018

Date of mailing of the international search report

07 SEP 2018

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P.O. Box 1450, Alexandria, VA 22313-1450

Facsimile No. 571-273-8300

Authorized officer

Blaine R. Copenheaver

PCT Helpdesk: 571-272-4300

PCT OSP: 571-272-7774