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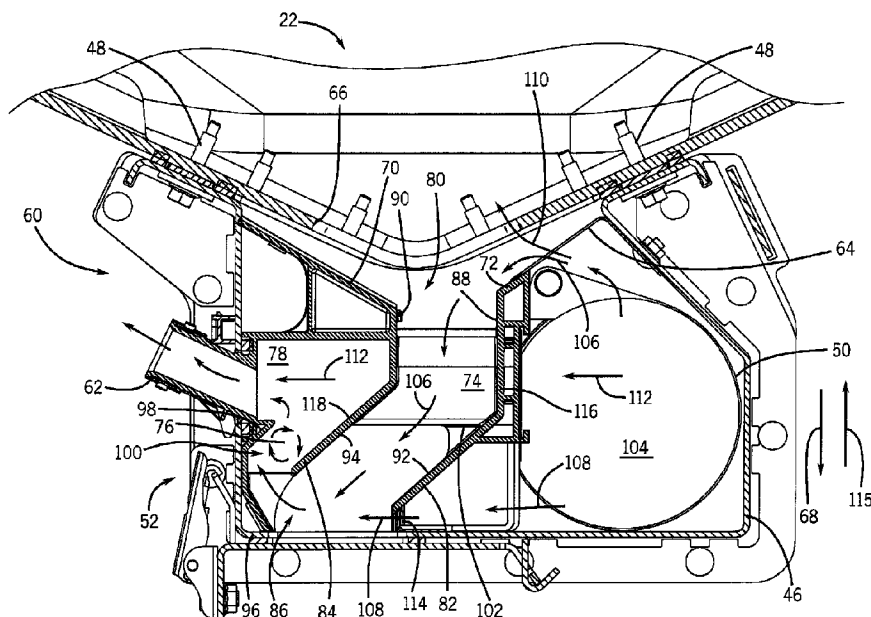
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(54) Title: SEED INDUCTOR BOX FOR AN AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT HAVING MULTIPLE AIR PATHS



(57) **Abrégé/Abstract:**

An agricultural implement has a tank, an inductor box to receive particulate material from the tank, the inductor box comprising a particulate material supply chamber to convey the particulate material with an airflow from an air supply chamber that flows via a first airflow path and a second airflow path. The particulate material supply chamber comprises an inlet to receive the particulate material from the tank that is then conveyed out of the particulate material supply chamber through an outlet. The first airflow path directs air to the inlet of the particulate material supply chamber where the first airflow path causes the air to engage the particulate material to urge the particulate material in a downward direction. The second airflow path directs air to the outlet to convey the particulate material out of the particulate material supply chamber. The airflow paths reduce updrafts and backflow.

ABSTRACT

An agricultural implement has a tank, an inductor box to receive particulate material from the tank, the inductor box comprising a particulate material supply chamber to convey the particulate material with an airflow from an air supply chamber that flows via a first airflow path and a second airflow path. The particulate material supply chamber comprises an inlet to receive the particulate material from the tank that is then conveyed out of the particulate material supply chamber through an outlet. The first airflow path directs air to the inlet of the particulate material supply chamber where the first airflow path causes the air to engage the particulate material to urge the particulate material in a downward direction. The second airflow path directs air to the outlet to convey the particulate material out of the particulate material supply chamber. The airflow paths reduce updrafts and backflow.

SEED INDUCTOR BOX FOR AN AGRICULTURAL IMPLEMENT HAVING MULTIPLE AIR PATHS

BACKGROUND

[0001] The invention relates generally to ground working equipment, such as agricultural equipment, and more specifically, to an inductor box for a pneumatic distribution system of an agricultural implement.

[0002] Generally, planting implements (e.g., planters) are towed behind a tractor or other work vehicle via a mounting bracket secured to a rigid frame of the implement. These planting implements typically include multiple row units distributed across the width of the implement. Each row unit is configured to deposit seeds at a desired depth beneath the soil surface, thereby establishing rows of planted seeds. For example, each row unit may include a ground engaging tool or opener (e.g., an opener disc) that forms a seeding path for seed deposition into the soil. In certain configurations, a gauge wheel is positioned a vertical distance above the opener to establish a desired trench depth for seed deposition into the soil. As the implement travels across a field, the opener excavates a trench into the soil, and seeds are deposited into the trench. In certain row units, the opener is followed by a packer wheel that packs the soil on top of the deposited seeds.

[0003] Certain planting implements include a remote seed tank, and a pneumatic distribution system configured to convey seeds from the tank to each row unit. For example, the pneumatic distribution system may include an inductor box positioned beneath the seed tank. The inductor box is configured to receive seeds from the tank, to fluidize the seeds into an air/seed mixture, and to distribute the air/seed mixture to the row units via a network of pneumatic hoses/conduits. Each row unit, in turn, receives the seeds from the pneumatic hoses/conduits, and directs the seeds to a metering system. The metering system is configured to provide a flow of seeds to a seed tube for deposition into the soil. By operating the metering system at a particular speed, a desired seed spacing may be established as the implement traverses a field.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION

[0004] In one embodiment, a particulate material delivery system for an agricultural implement including, an inductor box configured to receive particulate material from a tank, the inductor box including, an inductor segment comprising a particulate material supply chamber configured to guide the particulate material toward a fluidization chamber, and an air supply chamber configured to receive airflow from an airflow supply, wherein the inductor box is configured to direct the airflow from the air supply chamber to the particulate material supply chamber through a first airflow path and through a second airflow path remote from the first air path

[0005] In another embodiment, a particulate material delivery system for an agricultural implement including, an inductor box configured to receive particulate material, the inductor box including a housing, and an inductor segment disposed within the housing and comprising a particulate material supply chamber, the particulate material supply chamber configured to convey the particulate material with an airflow from a first airflow path and from a second airflow path, wherein the first and second airflow paths are remote from one another.

[0006] In a further embodiment, a particulate material delivery system for an agricultural implement including, an inductor segment comprising a particulate material supply chamber configured to receive and direct a particulate material from a particulate material tank, an upper airflow path configured to direct airflow from an airflow supply through a first screen from the air supply chamber, and into the particulate material supply chamber; and a lower airflow path configured to direct the airflow from the airflow supply through a second screen, and into the particulate material supply chamber.

DRAWINGS

[0007] These and other features, aspects, and advantages of the present invention will become better understood when the following detailed description is read with reference to the accompanying drawings in which like characters represent like parts throughout the drawings, wherein:

[0008] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an embodiment of an agricultural implement configured to deposit particulate material into a soil surface;

[0009] FIG. 2 is a perspective view of an embodiment of a particulate material tank coupled to an inductor box;

[0010] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of an embodiment of an inductor box; and

[0011] FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional side view of an embodiment of an inductor box.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0012] One or more specific embodiments of the present invention will be described below. In an effort to provide a concise description of these embodiments, all features of an actual implementation may not be described in the specification. It should be appreciated that in the development of any such actual implementation, as in any engineering or design project, numerous implementation-specific decisions must be made to achieve the developers' specific goals, such as compliance with system-related and business-related constraints, which may vary from one implementation to another. Moreover, it should be appreciated that such a development effort might be complex and time consuming, but would nevertheless be a routine undertaking of design, fabrication, and manufacture for those of ordinary skill having the benefit of this disclosure.

[0013] When introducing elements of various embodiments of the present invention, the articles "a," "an," "the," and "said" 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.

[0014] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an embodiment of an agricultural implement 10 configured to deposit particulate material into a soil surface. In the illustrated embodiment, the implement 10 is configured to be towed along a direction of travel 12 by a work vehicle, such as a tractor or other prime mover. The work vehicle may be coupled to the implement 10 by a hitch assembly 14. As illustrated, the hitch assembly 14 is coupled to a main frame assembly 16 of the implement 10 to facilitate towing of the implement 10 in the direction of travel 12. In the illustrated embodiment, the frame assembly 16 is coupled to a tool bar 18 that supports multiple row units 20. Each row unit 20 is configured to deposit particulate material (e.g., seeds) at a desired depth beneath the soil surface, thereby establishing rows of planted seeds. The implement 10 also includes particulate material tanks 22, and a pneumatic distribution system 24 configured to convey particulate material from the tanks to the row units 20. In certain embodiments, the pneumatic distribution system includes an inductor box positioned beneath each particulate material tank 22. Each inductor box is configured to receive particulate material from a respective tank, to fluidize the particulate material into an air-particulate material mixture, and to distribute the air-particulate material mixture to the row units 20 via a network of pneumatic hoses/conduits (i.e., the pneumatic distribution system 24).

[0015] In certain embodiments, each row unit 20 includes a residue manager, an opening assembly, a particulate material tube, closing discs, and a press wheel. The residue manager includes a rotating wheel having multiple tillage points or fingers that break up crop residue, thereby preparing the soil for particulate material deposition. The opening assembly includes a gauge wheel and an opener disc. The gauge wheel may be positioned a vertical distance above the opener disc to establish a desired trench depth for particulate material deposition into the soil. As the row unit travels across a field, the opener disc excavates a trench into the soil for particulate material deposition. The particulate material tube, which may be positioned behind the opening assembly, directs a particulate material from a metering system into the excavated trench. The closing discs then direct the excavated soil into the trench to

cover the planted particulate material. Finally, the press wheel packs the soil on top of the particulate material with a desired pressure.

[0016] While the illustrated implement 10 includes 24 row units 20, it should be appreciated that alternative implements may include more or fewer row units 20. For example, certain implements 10 may include 6, 8, 12, 16, 24, 32, or 36 row units, or more. In addition, the spacing between row units may be particularly selected based on the type of crop being planting. For example, the row units may be spaced 30 inches from one another for planting corn, and 15 inches from one another for planting soy beans.

[0017] As mentioned above, the pneumatic distribution system 24 includes an inductor box configured to receive particulate material (e.g., seeds) from a respective tank. Depending on the desired application, the pneumatic distribution system may distribute a wide variety of seeds (e.g., light seeds, heavy seeds, large seeds, small seeds, etc). The inductor box fluidizes the particulate material from a tank 22 into an air-particulate material mixture, for distribution to the row units 20 through a network of pneumatic hoses/conduits. More specifically, the inductor box includes multiple air pathways for directing airflow through the inductor box. As discussed in detail below the multiple air pathways enable the inductor box to fluidize light particulate material, to reduce updrafts, and to reduce backflow. As a result, the multiple pathways reduce maintenance costs/duration, increase reliability, and improve fluidization of different particulate material.

[0018] FIG. 2 is a perspective view of an embodiment of a particulate material tank 22 coupled to an inductor box 40. The particulate material tank 22 includes an opening 38 for receiving particulate material (e.g., seeds, etc.) for storage in the tank. The tank 22 secures the particulate material inside using a lid 42 that selectively covers the opening 38. The lid 42 securely attaches to the tank 22 with multiple fasteners 44. On the opposite side of the tank 22 from the lid is the inductor box 40. The inductor box 40 attaches to the bottom of tank 22 and receives gravity fed particulate material for fluidization. The inductor box 40 includes a housing 46 that is coupled to the tank 22 with bolts 48. Moreover, the inductor box 40 includes an air

supply port 50, and multiple inductor segments 52. It is through the air supply port 50 that the inductor box 40 receives airflow from an air supply (e.g., a fan, a blower, etc.). The airflow from the air supply enables the inductor box 40 to fluidize the particulate material and to pressurize the tank 22. In some embodiments, the multiple inductor segments may not be surrounded by a housing 46. Instead, the multiple inductor segments 52 may be coupled together and to the tank 22. Furthermore, each of the inductor segments 52 may separately couple to an airflow supply or to an airflow supply manifold, instead of receiving airflow from an airflow supply chamber coupled to the air supply port 50. The tank 22 may be made of a flexible material that expands when pressurized with airflow from the air supply. As will be explained in greater detail below, the inductor box 40 directs airflow from the air supply through a series of air pathways to the inductor segments 52, and into the tank 22. The inductor segments 52 fluidize the particulate material with the airflow for delivery to the row units 20.

[0019] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of an embodiment of an inductor box 40. As illustrated, the inductor box 40 includes multiple inductor segments 52 disposed within a chamber 60 formed by the inductor box housing 46. In the illustrated embodiment, there are eight inductor segments 52. However, other embodiments may include a different number of inductor segments 52 (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, or more). As mentioned above, the particulate material enters the inductor segments 52 from the tank where the particulate material is fluidized (i.e., mixed with air). Once the particulate material is fluidized, the air-particulate material mixture exits the inductor box 40 through particulate material delivery ports 62 in the inductor segments 52. The inductor box 40 includes a first screen 64 that is coupled to the inductor segments 52 and the housing 46. As will be explained in more detail below, the first screen 64 is disposed within an upper airflow path that facilitates light particulate material fluidization, reduces updrafts, and reduces backflow.

[0020] FIG. 4 is a cross-sectional side view of an embodiment of an inductor box 40 coupled to the tank 22. As illustrated, the inductor box 40 is coupled to the tank 22 with bolts 48. The inductor box 40 surrounds a particulate material outlet(s) 66 of the tank 22, thereby enabling particulate material to exit the tank 22 and enter the

inductor box 40. More specifically, as the particulate material exits the tank 22, in direction 68, the particulate material enters the inductor segment(s) 52. As explained above, the inductor box 40 includes an inductor segment 52 disposed within the inductor box chamber 60. The top of the inductor segment 52 includes two surfaces 70 and 72. The surfaces 70 and 72 may be angled to facilitate flow of particulate material into the inductor segment 52. As particulate material travels through the inductor segment 52, the particulate material passes through a series of chambers before exiting through the particulate material delivery port 62. The chambers in the inductor segment 52 include a particulate material supply chamber 74, a fluidization chamber 76, and a particulate material delivery chamber 78. The angled surfaces 70 and 72 channel the particulate material from the tank 22 into the particulate material supply chamber 74 through a particulate material supply chamber inlet 80. The particulate material supply chamber 74 guides the particulate material from the particulate material supply chamber inlet 80 to the particulate material supply chamber outlet 86 via a first wall 82 and a second wall 84. As illustrated, the walls 82 and 84 may include respective vertical portions 88 and 90, as well as respective angled portions 92 and 94. As the particulate material flows through the particulate material supply chamber 74, the angled portions 92 and 94 of the walls 82 and 84 direct the particulate material toward the particulate material supply chamber outlet 86 at a base 96 of the inductor box 40. Airflow from the air supply then conveys the particulate material through the particulate material supply chamber outlet 86 and into the fluidization chamber 76. The fluidization chamber 76 includes a first wall 98 and shares the second wall 84 of the particulate material supply chamber 74. If the air flow through the fluidization chamber is sufficient, the particulate material will fluidize and a vortex flow is created due to the geometry of the fluidization chamber 76. The vortex 100 separates and mixes the particulate material with the airflow before the particulate material flows to the particulate material delivery chamber 78. If the air flow through the fluidization chamber is sufficient the particulate material is conveyed out of the fluidization chamber 76 and into the particulate material delivery chamber 78. In the particulate material delivery chamber 78, airflow from the fluidization chamber combines with airflow from a bypass channel 102 to convey the

particulate material out of the particulate material delivery chamber 78, through the particulate material delivery port 62, and to the row units 20.

[0021] As explained above, the inductor box 40 includes the air supply port 50 for receiving airflow from an air supply that pressurizes the tank 22 and conveys particulate material through the inductor segment 52. The airflow from the air supply passes through the air supply port 50 and enters an air supply chamber 104. The air supply chamber 104 extends through the inductor box 40 in a generally perpendicular direction to the flow path through the inductor segments 52, thereby supplying each inductor segment 52 with the airflow.

[0022] The air supply chamber 104 divides the airflow from the air supply into four airflow paths numbered 106, 108, 110, and 112. The first airflow path 106 passes through the first screen 64 and enters the particulate material supply chamber 74. As illustrated, the first screen 64 enables airflow to exit the air supply chamber 104, while simultaneously blocking particulate material from entering the air supply chamber 104, thus reducing maintenance costs and/or the duration of maintenance operations. As the airflow through the first airflow path 106 enters the particulate material supply chamber 74, the airflow engages the particulate material and urges the particulate material in direction 68. For example, when using light particulate material (e.g., sunflower seeds, sweet corn seeds), the airflow through airflow path 106 reduces blockage of the particulate material supply chamber 74 by providing additional force (in addition to gravity) to move the particulate material through the particulate material supply chamber 74. While the airflow through the first airflow path 106 facilitates urging the particulate material in the direction 68 through the particulate material supply chamber 74, the airflow through the second airflow path 108 conveys the particulate material out of the particulate material supply chamber 74 and into the fluidization chamber 76. The airflow through the second airflow path 108 flows through a second screen 114. The second screen 114 is coupled to the first wall 82 and the base 96 of the inductor box 40. The second screen 114, like the first screen 64, blocks the particulate material from entering the air supply chamber 104. Thus, the first screen 64 and the second screen 114 reduce maintenance costs/duration by blocking particulate material flow into the air supply chamber 104.

[0023] A third airflow path 110 flows through the first screen 64 and into the tank 22. The airflow in the third airflow path 110 pressurizes and expands the tank 22. However, in some embodiments, the lid 42 may not create a fluid tight seal with the tank 22. Accordingly, airflow in the third airflow path 110 may provide continuous airflow into the tank 22 to replace pressurized air lost through leaks in the lid 42. As a result, airflow from the first airflow path 106 is able to flow through the particulate material supply chamber 74, and the airflow in the second airflow path 108 is able to convey the particulate material into the fluidization chamber 76. In other words, the airflow in the third airflow path 110 pressurizes the tank 22, thus equalizing pressure within the system. As a result, backdrafts (i.e., airflow) from the second airflow path 108 into the tank 22 are substantially reduced or eliminated in direction 115. Moreover, the airflow through the third airflow path reduces or eliminates backflowing airflow through the inductor segment 52 when the air supply shuts down. As explained above, the airflow through the third airflow path 110 pressurizes and expands the tank 22. When the air supply shuts down the pressurized air from the tank 22 travels through the path of least resistance to escape the tank 22. In the present embodiment, airflow venting from the tank 22 passes through the first screen 64 and into the air supply chamber 104. As a result, the possibility of pressurized air in the tank 22 backflowing through the inductor segment 52 with particulate material, is substantially reduced in three ways. First, airflow through the first screen 64 may reduce or eliminate pressurized airflow from escaping through the second screen 114 and into the air supply chamber 104. Second, airflow through the first screen 64 may reduce or eliminate pressurized airflow carrying particulate material from passing through the particulate material supply chamber 74, the fluidization chamber 76, and the particulate material delivery chamber 78, before escaping through the air bypass channel 102 into the air supply chamber 104. Third, airflow through the first screen 64 may reduce or eliminate pressurized air from passing through the inductor segment 52 and exiting through the particulate material delivery port 62. Accordingly, the third airflow path 110 enables pressurized air to escape the tank 22, thus substantially reducing or eliminating fluidized particulate material from flowing through the inductor segment(s) 52.

[0024] The airflow in the fourth airflow path 112 flows from the air supply chamber 104 through the air bypass channel 102 and into the particulate material delivery chamber 78. The air bypass channel 102 is disposed within the particulate material supply chamber 74 and extends between the first particulate material supply chamber wall 82 and the second particulate material supply chamber wall 84. The walls 82 and 84 include respective apertures 116 and 118 that enable the airflow of the fourth airflow path 112 to pass through the air bypass channel 102. The air bypass channel 102 is oriented in a generally crosswise direction to the particulate material supply chamber inlet 80 and in a generally parallel direction to the particulate material supply chamber outlet 86. Moreover, the air bypass channel 102 is positioned above the fluidization chamber 76, thereby enabling the airflow from the fourth airflow path 112 to urge the particulate material exiting the fluidization chamber 76 into the particulate material delivery port 62 for delivery to the row units 20.

[0025] While only certain features of the invention have been illustrated and described herein, many modifications and changes will occur to those skilled in the art. It is, therefore, to be understood that the appended claims are intended to cover all such modifications and changes as fall within the true spirit of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. An agricultural implement comprising:
 - a tank;
 - a particulate material delivery system including:
 - an inductor box configured to receive particulate material from the tank, the inductor box comprising:
 - a housing; and
 - an air supply chamber disposed within the housing;
 - an inductor segment disposed within the housing and comprising a particulate material supply chamber, the particulate material supply chamber configured to convey the particulate material with an airflow from an air supply chamber that flows via a first airflow path and a second airflow path;
 - wherein the particulate material supply chamber comprises an inlet and an outlet, wherein the inlet is configured to receive particulate material from the tank that is then conveyed out of the particulate material supply chamber through the outlet;
 - wherein the first airflow path directs air to the inlet of the particulate material supply chamber where the first airflow path causes the air to engage the particulate material to urge the particulate material in a downward direction;
 - wherein the second airflow path directs air to the outlet of the particulate material supply chamber to convey the particulate material out of the particulate material supply chamber.
2. The agricultural implement of claim 1, wherein the particulate material supply chamber comprises vertical wall portions and angled wall portions.
3. The agricultural implement of claim 1 or claim 2 wherein the particulate material comprises seeds.
4. The agricultural implement of claim 2, wherein one of the angled wall portions defines a fluidization chamber in which a vortex is created.

5. The agricultural implement of any one of claim 1 to 4 comprising a bypass channel directing air from the air supply chamber to a particulate material delivery port.
6. The agricultural implement of claim 5 wherein the bypass channel is horizontal.
7. The agricultural implement of any one of claims 1 to 6 wherein the air supply chamber also re-pressurizes the tank.
8. The agricultural implement of any one of claims 1 to 7 wherein the second airflow path is horizontal.

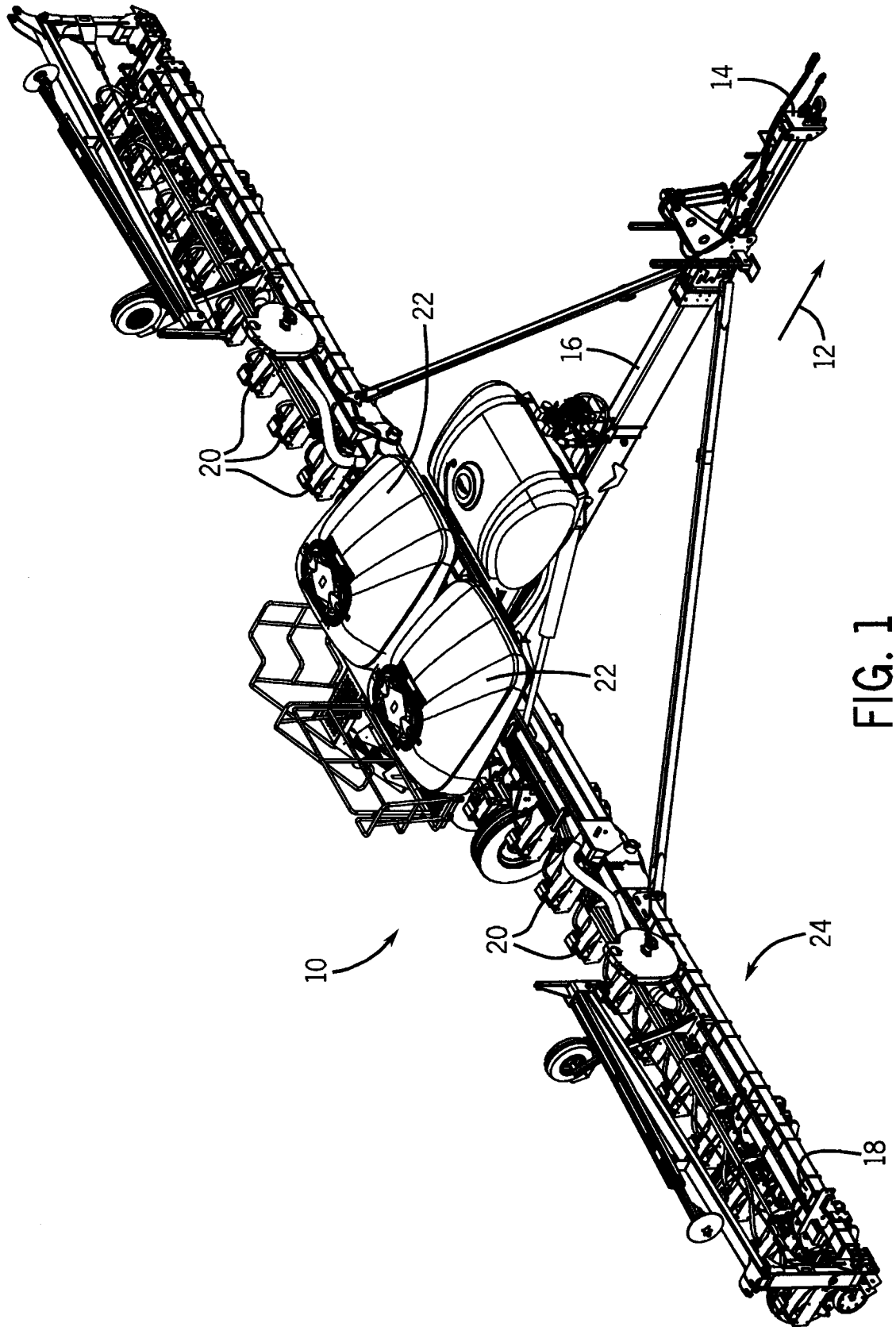


FIG. 1

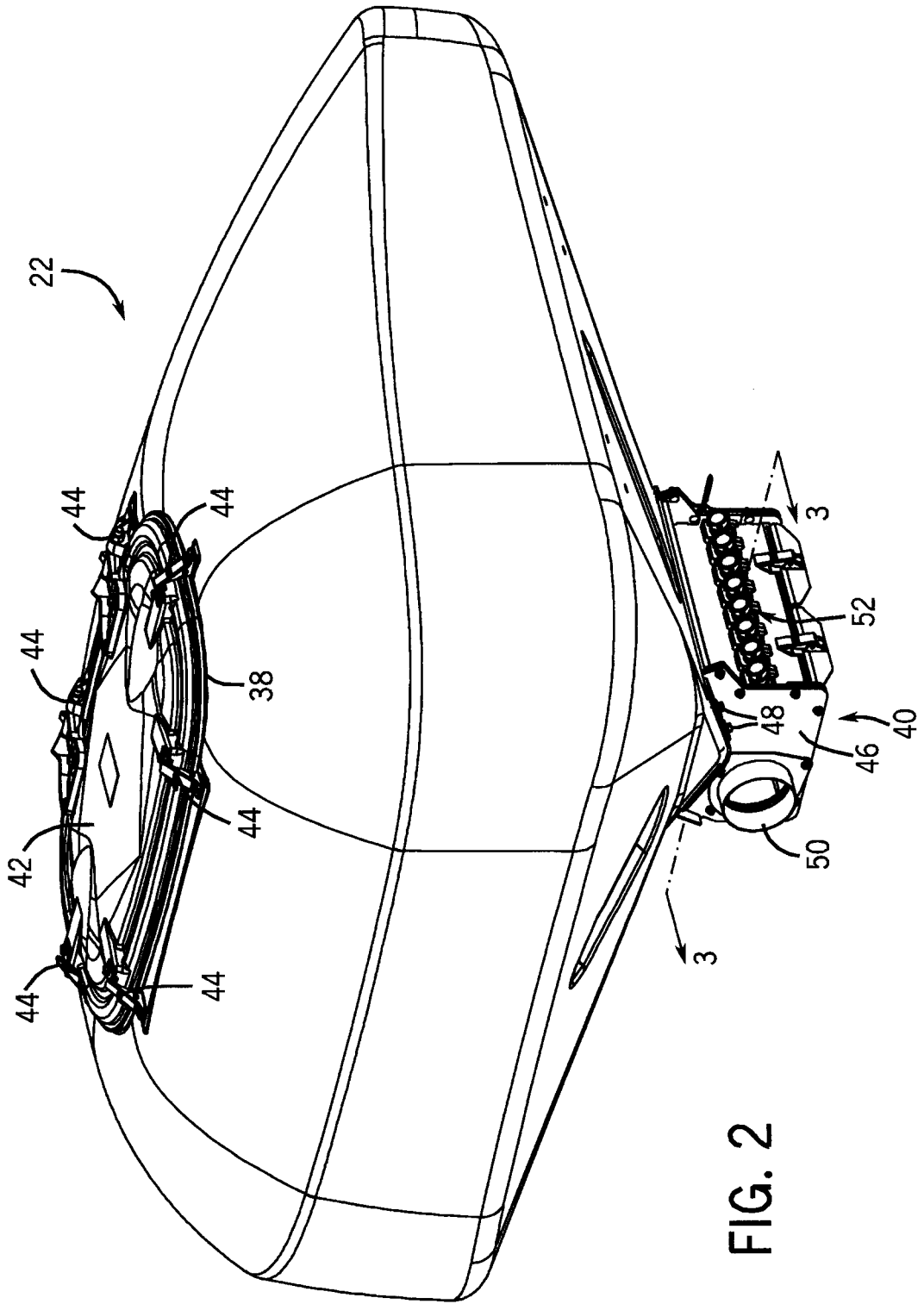


FIG. 2

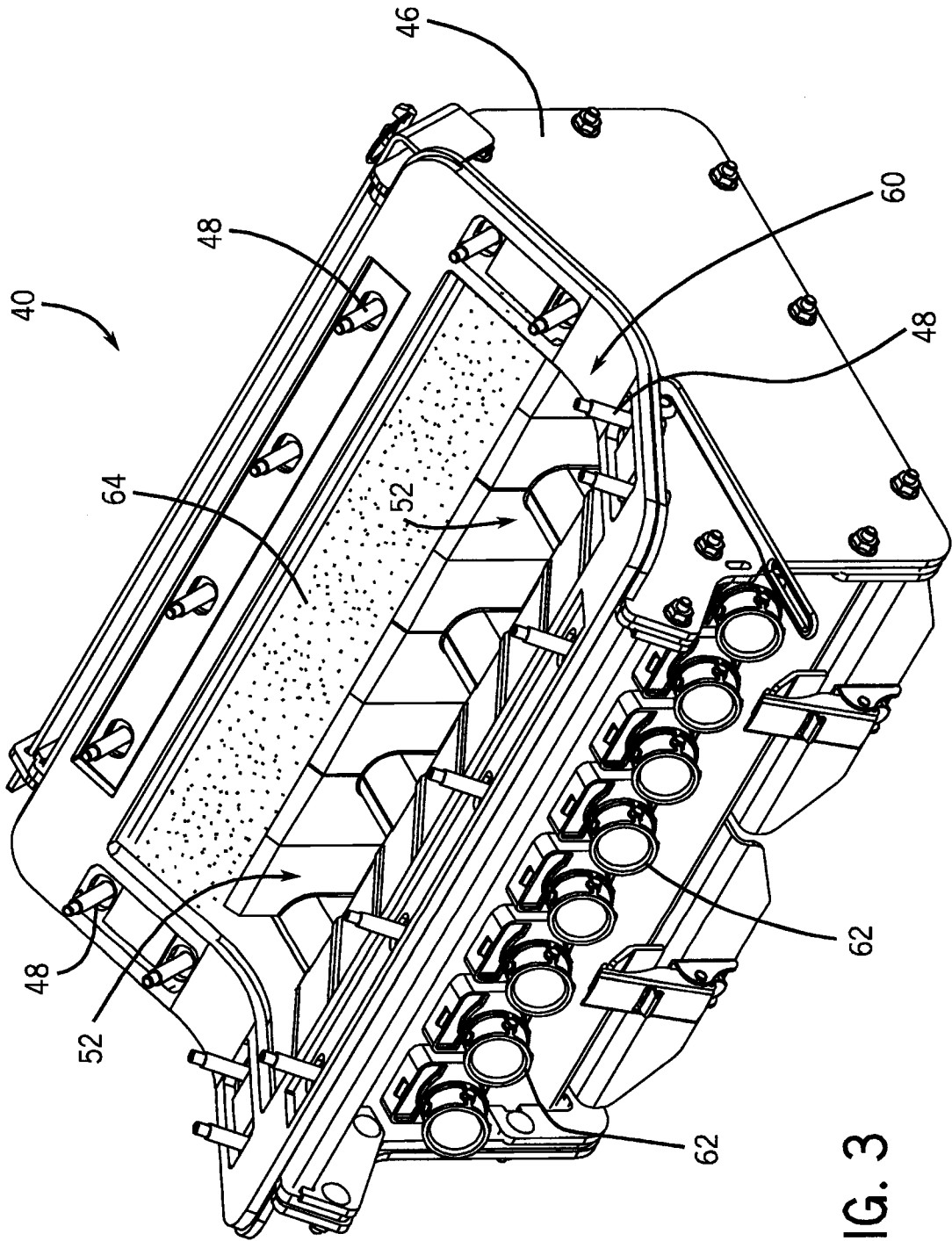


FIG. 3

