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(54) **Packaging support and associated packaging method for pasta and other food products**

(57) A packaging support (1) for pasta and other food products, comprising a tray (2) provided with a plurality

of receptacles (3) whose dimensions are substantially complementary to the dimensions of at least one item of the type of product to be accommodated.

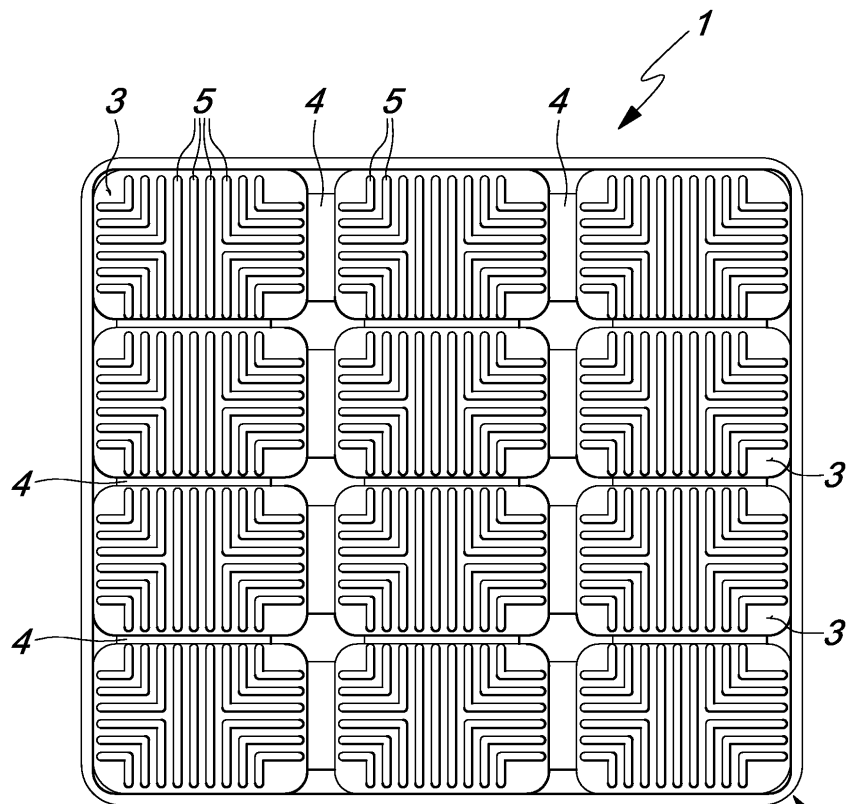


Fig. 1

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Description

[0001] The present invention relates to a packaging support and to the associated packaging method for pasta and other food products.

[0002] Some products, particularly fresh and frozen products, can be damaged slightly during transport when they are packaged loose (not individually) within traditional boxes.

[0003] Considering for example pastas with a stuffing (tortellini, ravioli and the like), the corners or some surfaces of the pasta may break, be deformed, or bear the impression of one of the surfaces of the package.

[0004] If the products to be packaged are particularly valuable (and therefore have high costs), it is absolutely necessary to ensure the integrity of the product.

[0005] The ideal solution would be the individual packaging of each item of food: this choice would entail such a high cost increase that it cannot be justified by buyers.

[0006] The aim of the present invention is to provide a packaging support which is simple to use and ensures protection of the products contained therein.

[0007] Another object of the present invention is to provide a packaging support which has low costs and is relatively simple to provide in practice and safe in application.

[0008] This aim and this and other objects which will become better apparent hereinafter are achieved by the present packaging support for pasta and other food products, characterized in that it comprises a tray provided with a plurality of receptacles whose dimensions are substantially complementary to the dimensions of at least one item of the type of product to be accommodated.

[0009] Further characteristics and advantages of the invention will become better apparent from the following detailed description of a preferred but not exclusive embodiment of a packaging support and of the associated packaging method for pasta and other food products, illustrated by way of non-limiting example in the accompanying drawings, wherein:

Figure 1 is a front view of a first possible embodiment of a packaging support according to the invention;
 Figure 2 is a side view of a first possible embodiment of a packaging support according to the invention;
 Figure 3 is a front view of a second possible embodiment of a packaging support according to the invention;
 Figure 4 is a side view of a second possible embodiment of a packaging support according to the invention;
 Figure 5 is a front view of a third possible embodiment of a packaging support according to the invention;
 Figure 6 is a side view of a third possible embodiment of a packaging support according to the invention.

[0010] With reference to the figures, the reference nu-

meral 1 generally designates a packaging support and the corresponding method for packaging pasta and other food products.

[0011] The support 1 comprises a tray 2 provided with a plurality of receptacles 3 whose dimensions are substantially complementary to the dimensions of at least one item of the type of product to be accommodated: in the specific case, each receptacle 3 has shapes and dimensions (width, length and depth) which depend on the format of the individual food product (for example stuffed pasta) and also on the number of products that are to be accommodated within each receptacle 3.

[0012] The receptacles 3 are mutually distributed in order to affect the entire surface of the tray 2 by being very close to each other: in this manner, it is possible to minimize the unused area of the tray 2, utilizing fully its extension and therefore minimizing the space occupation of the packaging.

[0013] The receptacles 3 are mutually separated by means of a plurality of bands 4 which protrude from substantially facing border surfaces of the tray 2: the bands 4, in addition to mutually separating the various laterally adjacent and proximate receptacles 3, are intended to stiffen the tray 2 (in practice constituting ribs), further enhancing the value of the support 1 with respect to standard ones.

[0014] The support 1 can be made of a material of a substantially polymeric type and is obtained generally by molding: the choice of the material and the production technology ensure maximum hygiene of the support 1, since it will be adapted to accommodate food products.

[0015] According to a preferred embodiment, aimed at ensuring maximum protection of each individual product present in the package, each receptacle 3 constitutes a compartment for a single item of the product to be packaged: in this manner, it is not possible for one product to come into contact with another one, becoming damaged in the impact, for example during transport.

[0016] As an alternative, when the products being packaged are not excessively delicate, each receptacle 3 can constitute a compartment for accommodating two items of the product to be packaged, arranged side-by-side and with their most delicate portions substantially separated.

[0017] In order to maintain the quality of the product at the maximum possible levels even during packaging and during subsequent transport, the bottom of each receptacle 3 can have a plurality of slots 5 which are substantially mutually proximate. The slots 5 are adapted to ensure the free circulation of air below the products accommodated in each receptacle 3, in practice preventing accumulations of moisture which might entail degradation (albeit minimal) of the quality of the product.

[0018] The packaging method for pasta and other food products which uses the support 1 consists in arranging at least one individual food product in each individual receptacle 3 which is shaped complementarily thereto until all the receptacles 3 are filled. At this point it is nec-

essary to insert the packaging support 1, which has a product accommodated in each of its seats 3, within an appropriately provided outer enclosure.

[0019] In particular, the outer enclosure can be a box made of a material such as cardboard or can be made of a substantially polymeric material.

[0020] It has thus been shown that the invention achieves the intended aim and objects.

[0021] The invention thus conceived is susceptible of numerous modifications and variations, all of which are within the scope of the appended claims.

[0022] All the details may further be replaced with other technically equivalent elements.

[0023] In the exemplary embodiments shown, individual characteristics, given in relation to specific examples, may actually be interchanged with other different characteristics that exist in other exemplary embodiments.

[0024] Moreover, it is noted that anything found to be already known during the patenting process is understood not to be claimed and to be the subject of a disclaimer.

[0025] In practice, the materials used, as well as the shapes and dimensions, may be any according to requirements without thereby abandoning the scope of the protection of the appended claims.

[0026] The disclosures in Italian Patent Application No. BO2006A000136 from which this application claims priority are incorporated herein by reference.

[0027] Where technical features mentioned in any claim are followed by reference signs, those reference signs have been included for the sole purpose of increasing the intelligibility of the claims and accordingly such reference signs do not have any limiting effect on the interpretation of each element identified by way of example by such reference signs.

Claims

1. A packaging support for pasta and other food products, **characterized in that** it comprises a tray (2) provided with a plurality of receptacles (3) whose dimensions are substantially complementary to the dimensions of at least one item of the type of product to be accommodated.

2. The support according to claim 1, **characterized in that** said receptacles (3) are mutually distributed in order to affect the entire surface of said tray (2).

3. The support according to claim 1, **characterized in that** said receptacles (3) are mutually separated by means of a plurality of bands (4) which protrude from substantially facing opposite border surfaces of said tray (2).

4. The support according to claim 1, **characterized in that** it is made of a material of a substantially poly-

meric type.

5. The support according to claim 1, **characterized in that** it is obtained by molding.

6. The support according to claim 1, **characterized in that** each receptacle (3) constitutes a compartment for accommodating a single item of the product to be packaged.

7. The support according to claim 1, **characterized in that** each receptacle (3) constitutes a compartment for accommodating two items of the product to be packaged, which are arranged side-by-side and whose more delicate portions are substantially separated.

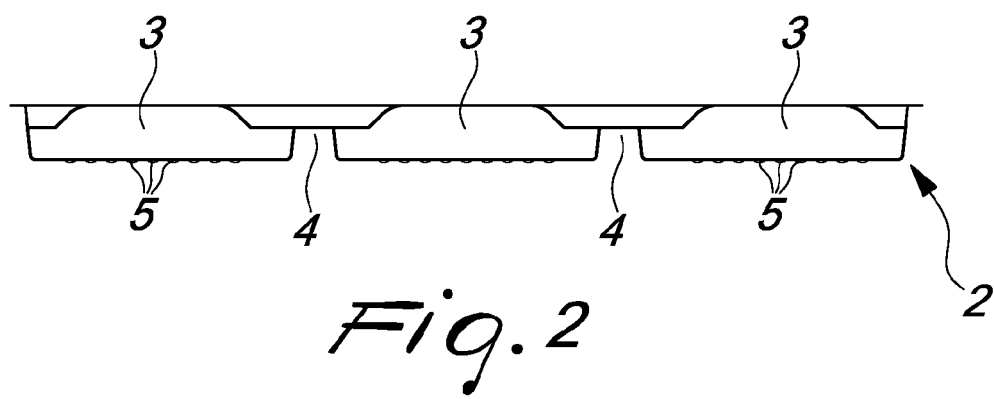
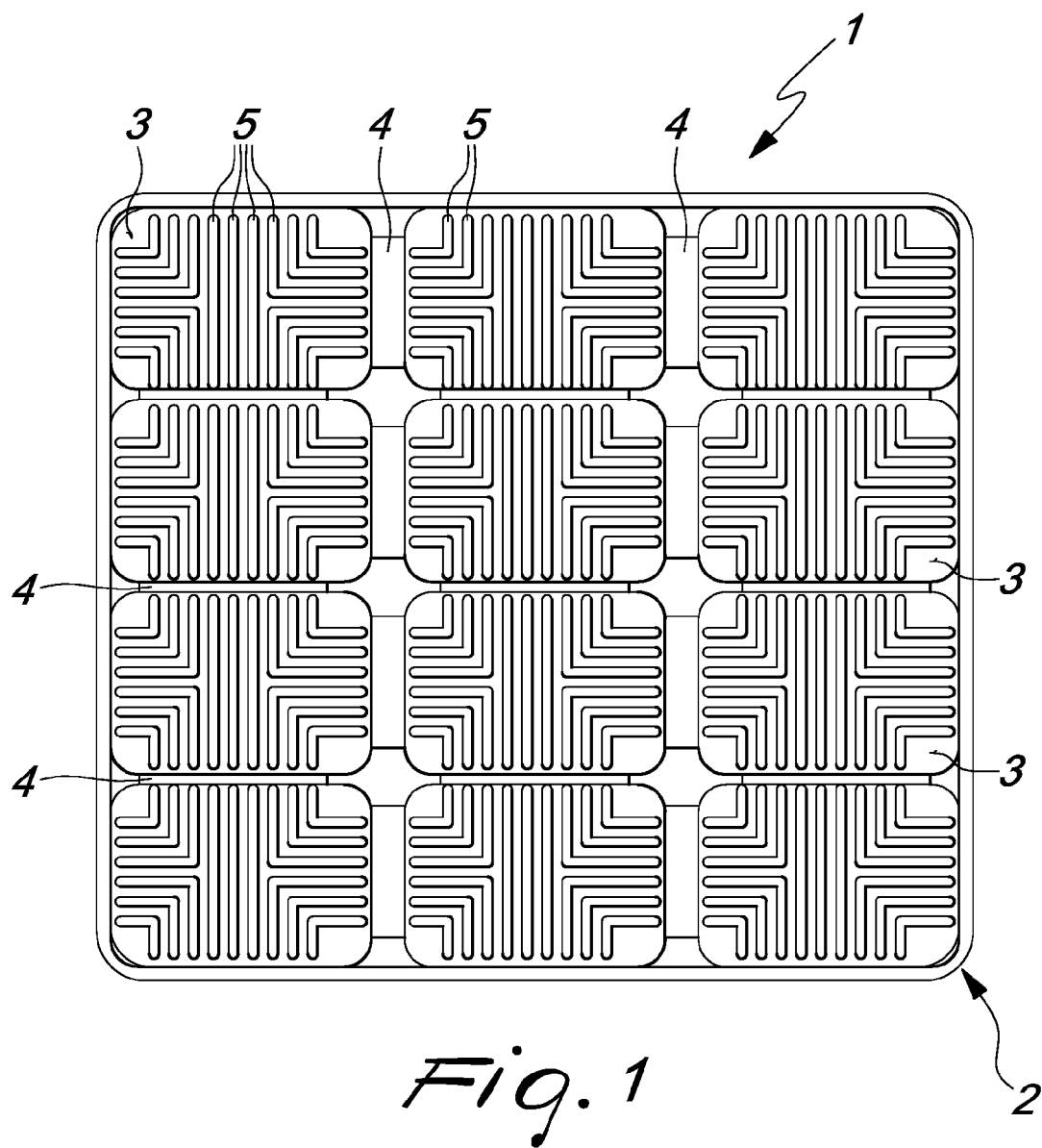
8. The support according to claim 1, **characterized in that** the bottom of each receptacle (3) has a plurality of slots (5) which are substantially mutually proximate, said slots (5) being adapted to ensure the free circulation of air below the products accommodated in each seat (3).

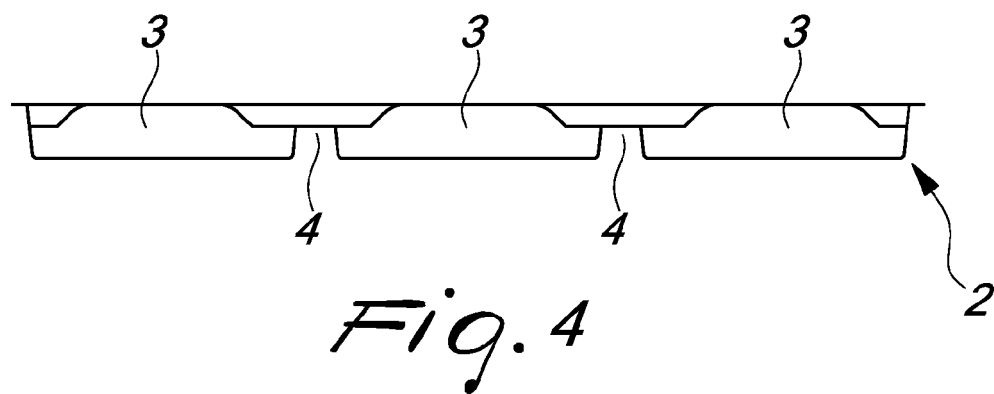
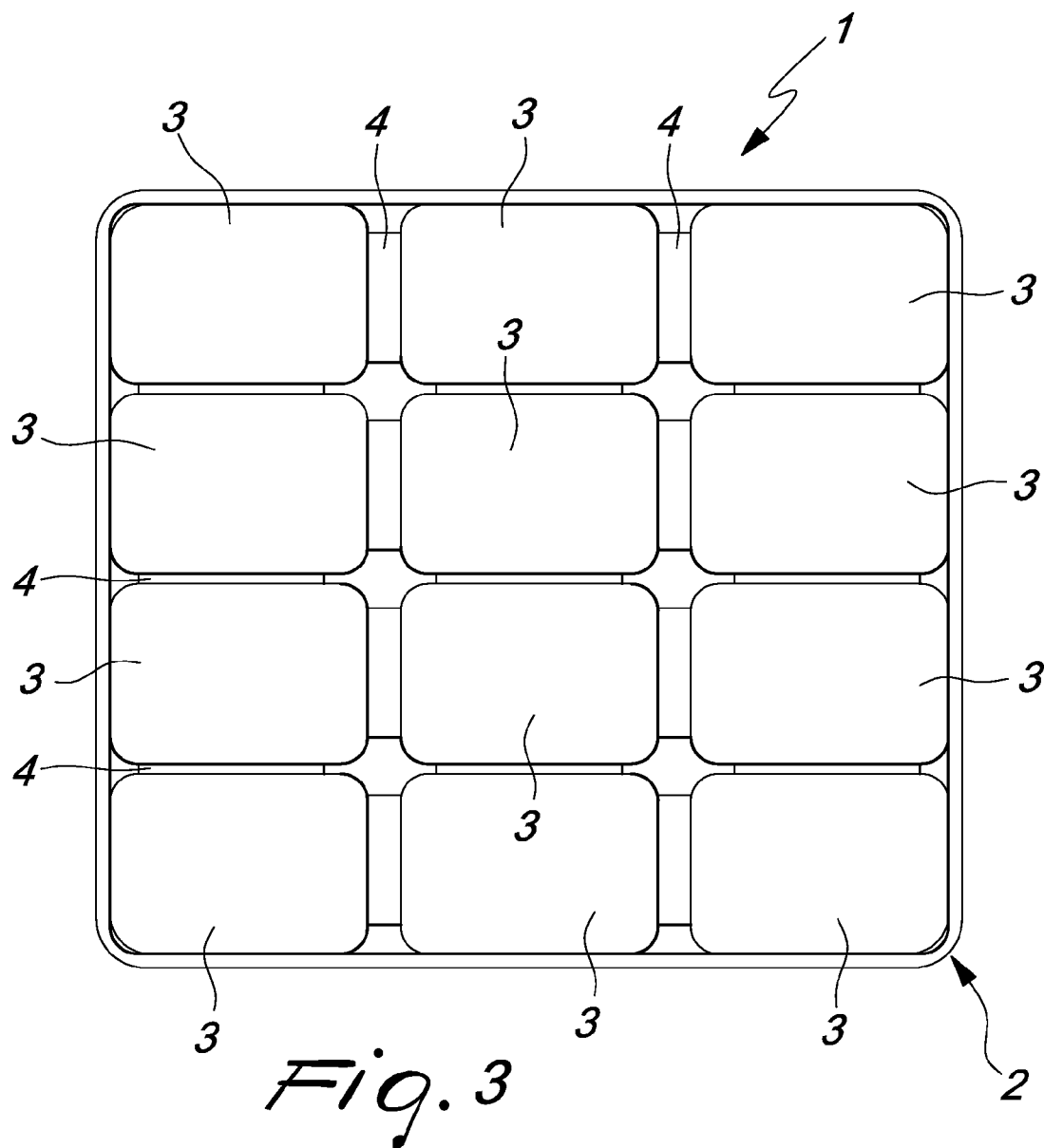
9. A method for packaging pasta and other food products, using a packaging support according to one or more of the preceding claims, comprising the steps of:

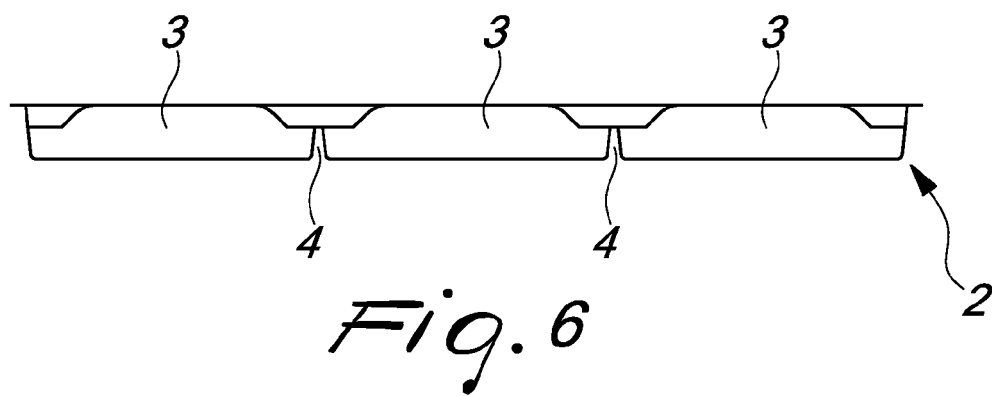
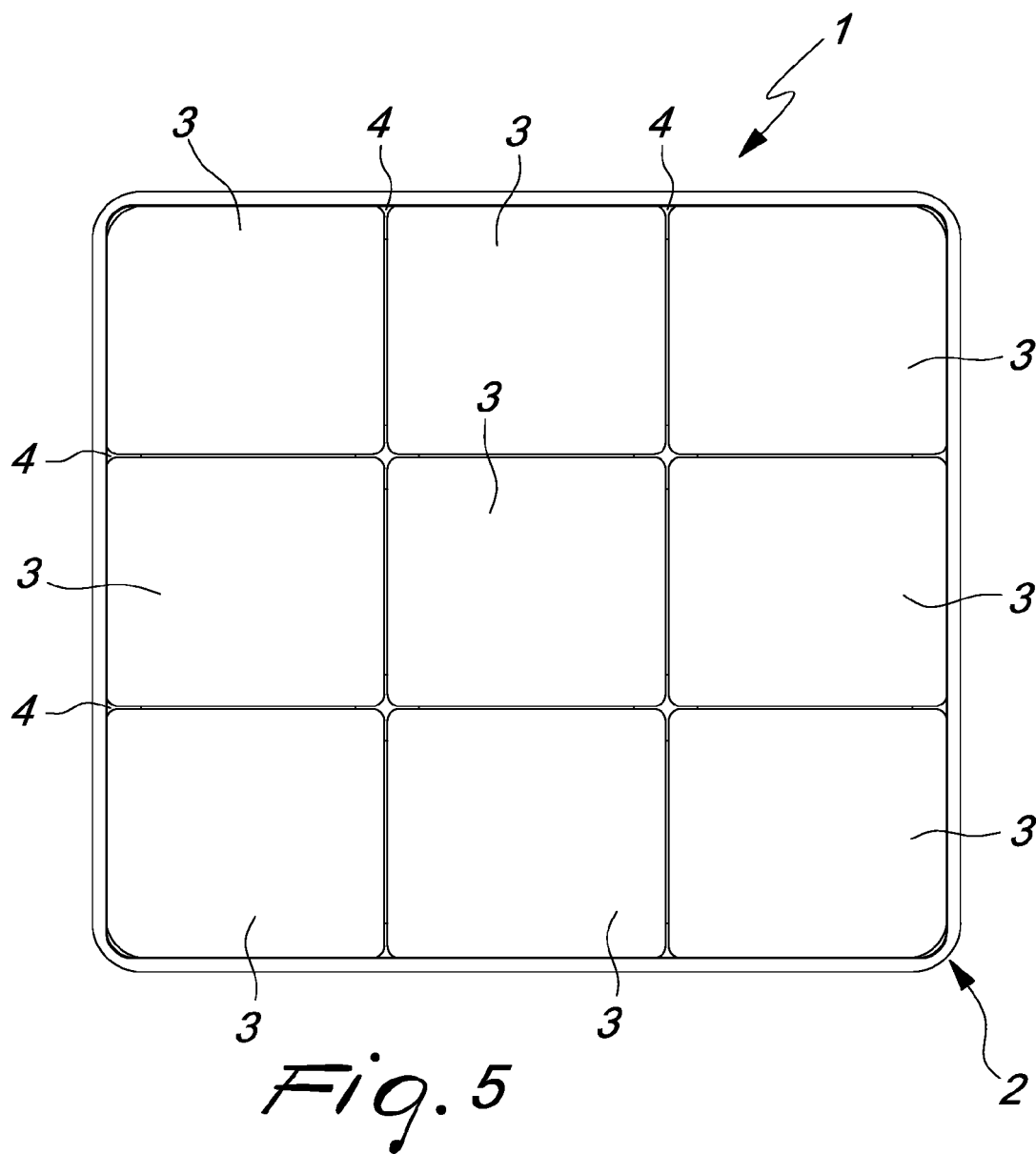
- arranging at least one individual food product in each individual receptacle (3) shaped complementarily thereto of said packaging support (1) until all the receptacles (3) are filled,
- inserting the packaging support (1), with one product accommodated in each of its receptacles (3), within an appropriate outer enclosure.

10. The method according to claim 9, **characterized in that** said outer enclosure is a box made of a material such as cardboard.

11. The method according to claim 6, **characterized in that** said outer enclosure is made of a substantially polymeric material.









European Patent
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Application Number
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The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search The Hague		Date of completion of the search 8 June 2007	Examiner SERRANO GALARRAGA, J
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

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**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
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