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Process and apparatus for manufacturing confectionery products

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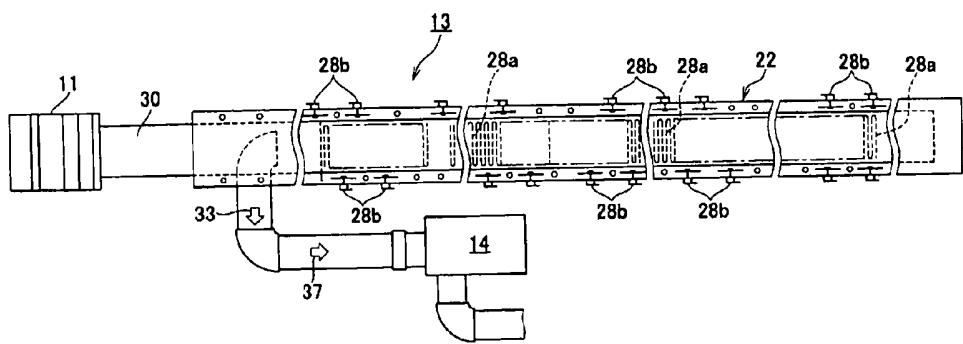
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ABSTRACT

In order to provide a process and an apparatus for manufacturing confectionery products made from 5 cereals, in particular thin ones having uniform shapes, which solve disadvantages in transporting such products, it is characterized in that a first and a second drying steps are arranged prior to cut-out baking raw material dough pieces in manufacturing thin confectionery products 10 made from cereals and having uniform shapes, in which in the first drying step, drying is conducted by a step of transporting the raw material dough pieces aligned on transporting conveyor belts under a hot blast atmosphere inside a first drying compartment, a maturing step in a 15 cooling state is arranged following a completion of the first drying step, and in the second drying step, drying is conducted by a step of transporting the raw material dough pieces in their mixed state under a hot air atmosphere inside rotary drums in an axial direction in a 20 second drying compartment.

Fig.4



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COMPLETE SPECIFICATION

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Applicant(s):

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Invention Title:

Process and apparatus for manufacturing confectionery products

The following statement is a full description of this invention,
including the best method for performing it known to me/us:

PROCESS AND APPARATUS FOR MANUFACTURING CONFECTIONERY
PRODUCTS

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FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to a process and an apparatus for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereal and having uniform shapes which are represented by, for example, Japanese rice crackers, and 10 in particular those suitable in use for a manufacture of thin confectionery products.

BACKGROUND ART

Conventionally, a manufacture of rice confectionery 15 products represented by Japanese rice crackers comprises steps as follows: compounding and kneading pulverized raw material rice (non-glutinous and glutinous rice) under vapor (the step may also be called "steaming and kneading"); rolling the products using a rolling roller in 20 a variety of thicknesses; and cutting the rolled products into a variety of uniform shapes using a shape cutting roller. Thereafter, the cut-out rice confectionery dough pieces are dried and water content thereof is adjusted by being arranged in lines on a transporting conveyor belt 25 and being transported inside a drying compartment under a hot blast atmosphere, before they go through a step of baking inside a baking apparatus. However, a maturing step is normally arranged prior to baking inside the baking apparatus, so that differences in water content 30 between the interior and exterior of a single rice confectionery dough piece dried using the drying

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apparatus, and varied water content between each of the rice confectionery dough pieces, which arises from drying the products arranged in lines on the transporting conveyor belts under a hot blast inside a hot blast drying 5 compartment, are adjusted so as to equalize the overall water content.

The maturing step for adjusting and equalizing the water content in each of the rice confectionery dough pieces is considered as an important step in that a crack 10 and a curved profile during baking can be prevented. Conventionally, the maturing step has been realized by putting the rice confectionery dough dried by hot blast inside the drying compartment into containers, cardboard boxes and the like, and leaving them for several hours to 15 more than 10 hours or dozens of hours, so that the water content between the interior and the exterior of a single rice confectionery dough piece and between each of the rice confectionery dough pieces are adjusted for an overall equalization of the water content.

20 Rice confectionery dough pieces are classified according to their thicknesses into thin (0.5 to 1.5 mm thick), middle-sized (1.5 to 3.0 mm thick) and thick (of thickness over 3.0 mm) pieces, and average durations of maturing for respective (rice confectionery) dough pieces 25 are listed on the following table:

[Table 1]

	Least "maturing" duration	Optimal "maturing" duration
1) Thin pieces	2 hrs	12 hrs (half a day)
2) Middle-sized pieces	6 hrs	24 hrs (one day)
3) Thick pieces	10 hrs	48 hrs (two days)

Least maturing duration on the above Table 1 refers to a duration under which a manufacture of rice crackers 5 is barely possible and optimal maturing duration is normally applied for improving the maintenance of quality in the rice crackers.

This conventional and commonly known maturing step comprises the following steps: (first) releasing rice 10 confectionery dough dried by hot blast in a drying compartment using a releasing conveyor; (second) dividing the dough into pieces and packing them into containers, cardboard boxes and the like; and (third) leaving them for several hours to more than 10 hours or dozens of hours. 15 Therefore, it is problematic that the step requires labor and the maturing duration, as well as labor and time for picking up the rice confectionery dough pieces after the maturing step from the containers, the cardboard boxes and the like, and for arranging them in lines on a 20 transporting wire mesh conveyor belt of a baking apparatus.

Therefore, the applicant of the present invention has proposed a process and an apparatus for manufacturing rice confectionery products, wherein the required labor and

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time accompanying the maturing step can be remarkably reduced. A commonly known document in this regard is JP Laid-Open Patent Application No. 2002-34460.

In a process for manufacturing rice confectionery products as disclosed in the Laid-Open Patent Application, a maturing step which is inserted between a drying step and a baking step of rice confectionery dough pieces is realized by adjusting the atmospheric temperature and the transfer speed of the rice confectionery dough pieces already subjected to the drying step, while transferring them to the baking step.

Furthermore, an apparatus for manufacturing the same comprises a hot blast drying compartment and a maturing compartment, which both are provided inside a drying compartment for the rice confectionery dough pieces.

The process and apparatus for manufacturing rice confectionery products are epoch-making in that the above-mentioned time and labor required for the conventional maturing step can be remarkably reduced, but, in case of thin rice confectionery dough pieces having a thickness of about 0.5 to 1.5 mm, a sufficient adjustment in water content cannot be achieved even by using the above-mentioned process and apparatus, so that there may occur, during baking, a crack, a curved profile or a skin formation wherein only the surface of a dough gets hard.

Such a problem is not limited to the rice confectionery products, but arises also in other kinds of thin confectionery pieces made from wheat, etc. during their manufacturing process.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Therefore, an object of the present invention is to provide a process and an apparatus for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereals, in particular 5 thin ones having uniform shapes, for solving the above-mentioned disadvantages in transporting such products.

To achieve the above-mentioned object, a process for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereals according to the present invention is characterized in 10 that the process comprises a first drying step and a second drying step which occur prior to baking cut-out raw material dough pieces when manufacturing thin confectionery products made from cereals and having uniform shapes, wherein in the first drying step, drying 15 is conducted during a step at which the dough pieces are arranged in lines on a transporting conveyor belt in a drying compartment and transported under a heated atmosphere, and the first drying step is followed by, after its completion, a maturing step in a cooling state, 20 and wherein in the second drying step, (another) drying is conducted by transporting the (raw material) dough pieces in a mixed state in an axial direction.

In this case, the present invention is characterized in that in the above-mentioned maturing step, a 25 transporting speed of the transporting conveyor belt is reduced after a cooling step.

The present invention is further characterized in that water content in the raw material dough pieces is adjusted into $12\% \pm 0.5$ at the time of completion of the 30 maturing step in the above-mentioned first drying step.

Moreover, the present invention is characterized in that water content in the raw material dough pieces is adjusted into 13 to 14% prior to the cooling step in the above-mentioned first drying step.

5 In addition, the present invention is characterized in that in the second drying step, the raw material dough pieces are transported in an unarranged state and in a mutually overlapped manner under a heated atmosphere while sequentially altering directions of delivery inside a
10 plurality of stages of rotary drums in an axial direction.

Additionally, the present invention is characterized in an apparatus for manufacturing thin confectionery products made from cereals and having uniform shapes, in that it has a first drying apparatus and a second drying
15 apparatus for adjusting water content of raw material dough between a shape cutting apparatus and a baking apparatus, in which the first drying apparatus divides a drying compartment via a partition wall into an upper level and a lower level, wherein in the upper level, a
20 plurality of stages of transporting conveyor belts is provided for transporting aligned raw material dough pieces, and wherein the lower level comprises a transporting conveyor belt for cooling the raw material dough pieces received from the upper level and a
25 transporting conveyor belt for receiving and maturing the cooled raw material dough pieces.

Still further, the present invention is characterized in an apparatus for manufacturing thin confectionery products made from cereals and having uniform shapes, in
30 that it has a first drying apparatus and a second drying apparatus for adjusting water content of raw material dough between a shape cutting apparatus and a baking

apparatus, in which the first drying apparatus divides a drying compartment via a partition wall into an upper level and a lower level, wherein in the upper level, a plurality of stages of transporting conveyor belts is 5 provided for transporting aligned raw material dough pieces, wherein the lower level comprises a transporting conveyor belt for cooling the raw material dough pieces received from the upper level and a transporting conveyor belt for receiving and maturing the cooled raw material 10 dough pieces, and in which the second drying apparatus is provided with a second drying compartment, a plurality of rotary drums each having an inlet and an outlet and being rotatably provided inside the second drying compartment, transporting belt bodies spirally provided inside the 15 rotary drums and a chute means for transporting the raw material dough pieces from the uppermost one to the lowest one of the plurality of rotary drums.

Still further, the present invention is characterized in that in an apparatus for manufacturing thin 20 confectionery products made from cereals and having uniform shapes, a second drying apparatus provided after a first drying apparatus is provided with a second drying compartment, a plurality of rotary drums each having an inlet and an outlet and being rotatably mounted in the 25 second drying compartment, transporting belt bodies provided in a shape of spiral stairs inside the rotary drums and a chute means for transporting the raw material dough pieces from the uppermost one to the lowest one of the plurality of rotary drums.

30 Still further, the present invention is characterized in that the rotary drums comprise transporting belt bodies in spiral shape having a circular cross-section,

stationary bars provided on their outer circumference and an outer circumference wall of a shape of wire mesh covering an outer circumference of the transporting belt bodies.

5 Still further, the present invention is characterized in that the rotary drums are controlled in their movement in an axial direction by a convex-concave fitting of driven rings mounted outside on the both side portions of the rotary drums and driving rollers for transmitting a 10 rotary driving force to the driven rings.

Still further, the present invention is characterized in that the rotary drums are rotatably supported by the driving rollers for supporting the driven rings on their both sides mounted outside on the both side portions of 15 the rotary drums and transmitting a rotary driving force to the driven rings.

Still further, the present invention is characterized in that the rotary drums are mounted in a plurality of stages and a driving motor is installed on each of the 20 rotary drums.

Still further, the present invention is characterized in that each side of the rotating rollers provided on both sides of each of the rotary drums is coaxially coupled via a rotary shaft, wherein rotary driving force is 25 transmitted via a driving force transmitting mechanism from one rotary shaft connected to the driving motor to the other rotary shaft so that all of the four rotating rollers can rotate at an identical speed.

According to the present invention, in particular 30 during the second drying step of raw material dough pieces, each of the raw material dough pieces is

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transported in a mixed state using the second drying apparatus inside the rotary drums put under hot blast atmosphere or heated atmosphere, so that the raw material dough pieces, even if they are thin, are equally adjusted
5 in water content between the interior and the exterior of a single dough piece or between each of the (raw material) dough pieces, so that a crack, a curved profile or a skin formation of a finished product can be prevented and a manufacture of confectionery products which are
10 satisfactorily yielded can be realized.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Fig. 1 is a block diagram for an explanation of the present invention;

15 Fig. 2 is a flow chart for an explanation of the steps for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereals according to the present invention;

Fig. 3 is a schematic elevation view showing a first drying apparatus for an embodiment of the present
20 invention;

Fig. 4 is a schematic plan view showing a first drying apparatus for an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 5 is an explanatory diagram for an explanation
25 of transportation of raw material dough pieces using transporting conveyor belts inside a first drying apparatus for an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 6 is a schematic side cross section showing the interior of a first drying apparatus for an embodiment of
30 the present invention;

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Fig. 7 is an explanatory diagram of a transporting conveyor belt of raw material dough pieces used in an embodiment of the present invention;

5 Fig. 8 is an explanatory diagram showing another example of the transporting conveyor belt of raw material dough pieces used in an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 9 is a view explaining a driving method of the transporting conveyor belt shown in Fig. 7;

10 Fig. 10 is a partial exploded view explaining engagement relationship between the transporting conveyor belt shown in Fig. 7 and roller teeth;

15 Fig. 11 is a schematic elevation view showing a second drying apparatus for an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 12 is a schematic left-side view showing a second drying apparatus for an embodiment of the present invention;

20 Fig. 13 is a schematic right-side view showing a second drying apparatus for an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 14 is an elevation view explaining a driving means of rotary drums of a second drying apparatus for an embodiment of the present invention;

25 Fig. 15 is a cross-sectional view of Fig. 14 along A-A;

Fig. 16 is a cross-sectional view of Fig. 14 along B-B;

30 Fig. 17 is a cross-sectional view of Fig. 14 along C-C;

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Fig. 18 is a rear view explaining a driving means of rotary drums of a second drying apparatus for an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 19 is an elevation view explaining a chute means 5 of a second drying apparatus for an embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 20 is a plan view explaining a chute means of a second drying apparatus for an embodiment of the present invention; and

10 Fig. 21 is a side view explaining a chute means of a second drying apparatus for an embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

15 Hereinafter, the present invention will be described with reference to the case where it is applied to thin rice confectionery products, but it is also applicable to, other than the rice confectionery products, confectionery products such as snacks made from cereals such as wheat 20 and having uniform shapes.

In the following, the best modes for an embodiment of the present invention will be described based on the accompanying drawings. Fig. 1 is a block diagram showing an apparatus for manufacturing confectionery products 25 according to the present invention, while Fig. 2 is a flow chart explaining a process for manufacturing the confectionery products. Reference is made, using the block diagram and the flow chart, to the case where thin rice confectionery products are manufactured. First, non-30 glutinous rice to be raw material sorted using a sorting machine is collected in a rice storage tank 1, and then

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the raw material rice in the rice storage tank 1 is transferred to a rice washing machine 2 so as to undergo a rice washing step 2a. The rice is then subjected to a draining step 3a via a draining apparatus 3, and after 5 that, it is transferred to a preliminary maturing tank 4. After a preliminary maturing step 4a, wherein the raw material rice sufficiently absorbs moisture (to 28 to 34% in water content) in the preliminary maturing tank 4, it undergoes a crushing step 5a wherein it is crushed using a 10 crusher 5, and pulverized. Thereafter, the pulverized rice confectionery raw materials are subjected to a weighing step 6a wherein they are weighed using a weigh machine 6, and after that, they undergo a steaming/kneading step 7a, during which they are put into 15 a steaming/kneading machine 7 to be steamed and kneaded, so that contained starchy material is pregelatinized. Subsequently, the kneaded product of rice confectionery raw material is subjected to a cooling step 8a, during which it is cooled using a cooling apparatus 8 to lower a 20 temperature before a kneading step 9a, during which it is more carefully kneaded using a kneading machine 9 for equalizing the kneaded dough. The step is further followed by a rolling step 10a during which the kneaded product is delivered to a rolling roller 10 on which the 25 dough is rolled to a desired thickness having a belt-like form. Further, the product is cut out using a shape cutting apparatus 11 comprising a shape cutting roller during a shape cutting step 11a. Note that, cut-out wastes generated in the step are removed during a waste- 30 removing step 12a using a waste-removing means 12. These cut-out wastes are placed back to the kneading machine 9, and become raw material to be cut out again. The cut-out raw material dough pieces are arranged in lines on a

transporting conveyor belt 30 and delivered in this manner into a first drying apparatus 13, so that they are subjected to a first drying step 13a. While raw material dough pieces travel in lines on the transporting conveyor 5 belts 30 arranged at several stages inside a first drying compartment during the drying step 13a in the first drying apparatus 13, as will be described later, the (raw material) dough pieces are dried so that their water content is adjusted to 13 to 14 %. A maturing compartment 10 25 comprising a hot blast drying compartment 24, a cooling portion 26 and a maturing portion 27 as described below is located in the first drying compartment of the first drying apparatus 13. In the cooling portion 26 and the maturing portion 27 the raw material dough pieces undergo 15 a maturing step 25a, wherein their water content is further adjusted to approximately 12 % \pm 0.5, and thereafter they are released by a releasing conveyor 33 from the first drying apparatus 13 and then transported via a transporting conveyor belt 37 to a second drying 20 apparatus 14. The dough pieces undergo a second drying step 14a with the second drying apparatus 14, wherein their water content is further adjusted to approximately 11 % \pm 0.5. After that, the raw material dough pieces are subjected to an aligning step 15a, wherein they are 25 aligned by an aligner 15, and then the dough pieces are transported to a baking apparatus 16 of a following step. After the pieces are baked during a baking step 16a in the baking apparatus 16, they are seasoned during a following seasoning step 17a by a seasoning apparatus 17. The 30 pieces are then packaged during a packaging step 18a by a packaging apparatus 18, so that they are finished as products.

A duration necessary for steps from an initial infusion of raw material up to a finish of the products is approximately 3 hours, so that a preparation of the finished products can be realized within a remarkably 5 reduced duration in comparison to the conventionally taken one.

Figs. 3 to 7 show the first drying apparatus 13, respectively in a schematic view, and according to these drawings, more specifically as shown in Figs. 3 and 4, the 10 first drying apparatus 13 has a long and large first drying compartment 22 in a box shape, whose length is 80 to 200 m, wherein the circumference of a frame 20 is covered with isolation panels 21. The first drying compartment 22 has, though largely shortened in length in 15 the drawings, a length of approximately 115 m in the embodiment. In the first drying apparatus 13, a middle part in the longitudinal direction of the first drying compartment 22 is separated in the long side direction using an isolation panel 23 into two smaller compartments, 20 of which the upper serves as the hot blast drying compartment 24, and the lower as the maturing compartment 25. In the maturing compartment 25, in particular as shown in Fig. 6, the cooling portion 26 and the maturing portion 27 are provided without a partition using an 25 isolation panel. The maturing portion 27 may be provided along the whole length of the long and large first drying compartment 22, or provided along a part of its length. In the illustrated embodiment, the maturing portion 27 is constructed to have a slightly short length. What is 30 applicable to a length of a transporting conveyor inside the maturing compartment 25 also applies to the case of the cooling portion 26.

The hot blast drying compartment 24 further comprises inside thereof, as shown in Figs. 3 and 4, a large number of heaters 28a and a large number of hot blast stirring fans 28b which are installed substantially at same 5 intervals along substantially the whole length of the compartment, and four stages of transporting conveyor belts 30, 30... altogether corresponding to more than a half of its internal volume are suspended over the whole length of the first drying compartment 22. The respective 10 transporting conveyor belt 30 at each stage has driving rollers 31 and end rollers 32 at both end portions thereof, but only the transporting conveyor belt 30 at the uppermost stage is guided to the outside through an inlet 24a formed on one end portion of the hot blast drying 15 compartment 24 via a guiding roller 24b, so that it is suspended at a roller 34 installed on a lower side of a transporting conveyor belt of the shape cutting apparatus 11, to which an assembly is not limited.

The heaters 28a are, particularly as shown in Fig. 6, 20 steam tubes in which steam passes through, but are not limited to such tubes. Alternatively, electrical heaters, gas heaters, and the like may be used. The heaters 28a are installed on a part on a lower side of the transporting conveyor belt 30 with raw material dough 25 pieces being arranged on the belt, but a selection may be made according to need, whether they are installed on an upper side or both on the upper and lower sides of the belt. Moreover, an isolation panel 21 serving as a top panel of the first drying compartment 22 is provided with 30 exhaust holes 22a at appropriate intervals and substantially at the same intervals, while isolation panels 21 on both sides serving as side walls are provided with ventilation louvers 29a, 29b (ventilation windows

with sliding doors) and the hot blast stirring fans 28b which are located at opposed positions of each of the isolation panels 21, 21. The ventilation louvers 29a, 29b and the hot blast stirring fans 28b are installed 5 respectively at 40 points along the first drying compartment 22 which has a full length of about 115 m. Ventilation fans 43 are mounted at appropriate positions on one isolation panel 21 serving as a wall portion of the maturing compartment 25, while the isolation panel 21 10 being the opposite surface of the ventilation fans 43 is provided with ventilation louvers 44 (ventilation windows with sliding doors) for ventilation at appropriate positions. For the drying compartment of a size as above stated, about 20 of the ventilation fans 43 and about 20 15 of the ventilation louvers 44 are provided.

Inter-stage transporting means 35 of a commonly known assembly are provided on an outer circumference of driving rollers 31 (which are alternately arranged on left and right sides) of the respective transporting conveyor belts 20 30 for transporting raw material dough pieces from an upper stage of transporting conveyor belt 30 to a next stage of transporting conveyor belt 30. The inter-stage transporting means 35 may be, needless to say, provided on a side of an end roller 32. In order to transport the raw 25 material dough pieces from the upper stage of transporting conveyor belt 30 to the next stage of transporting conveyor belt 30, the inter-stage transporting means 35 is assembled such that, in particular as shown in Fig. 5, a transporting endless conveyor 36 made of, for example, 30 canvas of the inter-stage transporting means 35 is slightly pressure-contacted with the transporting conveyor belt 30 at a point where it is suspended on the driving roller 31, enabling in this manner to transport the raw

material dough pieces as being sandwiched between the transporting conveyor belt 30 and the transporting endless conveyor 36 to the next stage of transporting conveyor belt 30. And then, the releasing conveyor 33 extends, 5 especially as shown in Figs. 3 to 5, below a left end portion of the end roller 32 at a lowermost stage in the maturing compartment 25 of the first drying compartment 22, for releasing the raw material dough pieces from the first drying compartment 22.

10 Each of transporting conveyor belts 30 comprises, especially as shown in Figs. 6 and 7, a pair of left and right endless chains 19, 19 mounted apart on the opposed sides of the belt for sliding on guide rails 20a fixed on the frames 20, and a plurality of crossbars 39 located 15 between the endless chains 19, 19 at identical intervals. The respective transporting conveyor belt 30 is assembled by binding and attaching a stainless or galvanized wire mesh 40 using wires of the same material (not shown) to the crossbars 39, and metal stoppers 39a are mounted, each 20 at an appropriate position of each of the crossbars 39, for preventing a shift of the wire mesh 40 to either one side of the belt. Note that, the assembly of the transporting conveyor belts 30 is not particularly limited to that described above, but later-described transporting 25 wire mesh conveyor belts and the commonly known ones using canvas may also be used.

In particular, as a transporting conveyor belt 30 traveling inside the hot blast drying compartment 24, a transporting wire mesh conveyor belt 47 without chains and 30 crossbars as shown in Figs. 8 to 10 may also be used other than the one according to the above described embodiment. The transporting wire mesh conveyor belt 47 comprises,

especially as shown in Fig. 10, pairs of right-handed helical wire wraps 47a and left-handed helical wire wraps 47b made from stainless, galvanized wires or the like, each pair of the wraps being alternately interwoven using 5 curved wires 47c. The transporting wire mesh conveyor belt 47 is trained about a driving roller 48 having a plurality of teeth 48a and a driven roller 49 having a plurality of teeth 49a, so that the conveyor belt cyclically travels. Note that, the driving roller 48 and 10 the driven roller 49, and in particular the teeth 48a, 49a are subjected to a quenching treatment in advance, so that these components are free from wear caused by the heated transporting wire mesh conveyor belt 47. Moreover, the teeth 48a, 49a are arranged over the whole circumference 15 of the driving roller 48 and the driven roller 49 of the transporting wire mesh conveyor belt 47 in an axial direction thereof. Only a part of the teeth 48a, 49a is engaged with the transporting wire mesh conveyor belt 47. These teeth 48a, 49a are flat-topped and do not protrude 20 from an outer surface of the transporting wire mesh conveyor belt 47. Each of the teeth 48a, 49a engaged with the transporting wire mesh conveyor belt 47 is engaged with the curved wires 47c as particularly shown in Fig. 10, with its top surface lying under a portion of right- 25 handed helical wire wrap 47a or left-handed helical wire wrap 47b which is located over the curved wire 47c. Therefore, the teeth 48a, 49a are so adjusted that, when raw material dough pieces traveling on an upper surface of the transporting wire mesh conveyor belt 47 are 30 transported from an upper to a next stage of the transporting conveyor belt 30 using the inter-stage transporting means 35 as shown in particular in Fig. 5, the dough pieces are free from fear of scratch, crush or

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deformation caused by the teeth 48a, 49a. Further, as shown in Fig. 9, reference numerals 74 and 75 denote respectively loosening prevention members and guide rollers for the transporting wire mesh conveyor belt 47.

5 When transporting conveyor belts are constructed by transporting wire mesh conveyor belts as described above, an extension and loosening of the transporting wire mesh conveyor belt itself occurred during use can be prevented and a cyclical movement can be achieved even without
10 chains and crossbars which are used in an previous embodiment, so that there are advantages in that a transporting conveyor belt can be produced with a reduced cost, in addition to preventing a lubricant to be applied to chains from smearing (raw material) dough pieces.

15 Hereinafter, reference is made to the case that raw material dough pieces are dried using the first drying apparatus 13 (the step may also be referred to as water content adjustment). Thin raw material dough pieces (1 mm thick) e.g. made from non-glutinous rice and cut out
20 during the shape cutting step 11a using the shape cutting apparatus 11 are arranged in lines and transported on the transporting conveyor belt 30. These dough pieces are carried into the hot blast compartment 24 of the first drying compartment 22 of the first drying apparatus 13
25 through the inlet 24a, so that the pieces are subjected to the first drying step 13a, as described above. In the first drying step 13a, while the raw material dough pieces travel on the transporting conveyor belts 30 provided at four stages for about 48 minutes (12 minutes per one
30 stage), they are dried under a hot blast atmosphere of about 70 to 80 °C generated by the heaters 28a and the hot blast stirring fans 28b, and their water content is

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adjusted by drying them so that it becomes about 13 to 14% at the end of the lowermost (stage of) transporting conveyor belt 30. It is stated in the foregoing that, in transporting the dough pieces from the upper to the lower 5 of the transporting conveyor belts 30, they are transported in a state of being aligned using the inter-stage transporting means 35. The transporting conveyor belts 30 according to the present embodiment are provided at four stages, but the number of the stages is not 10 particularly limited thereto. Moreover, a temperature inside the hot blast compartment 24 is about 70 to 80 °C in this embodiment as above stated, but even the temperature is not limited to the above-stated one, but an optimal temperature is selected according to the material, 15 size, and thickness etc. of the raw material dough. Additionally, the temperature inside the hot blast compartment 24 is adjusted as appropriate by the exhaust holes 22a, the ventilation fan 43 and the ventilation louvers 29a, 29b via a temperature measurement means such 20 as a thermostat which is not shown.

In this manner, the raw material dough pieces having arrived at the end of the lowermost (stage of) transporting conveyor belt 30 finish the first drying step 13a and subsequently undergo the maturing step 25a. In 25 the maturing step 25a, the raw material dough pieces are arranged in lines and thus transported via the inter-stage transporting means 35 onto a transporting conveyor belt 45 of the cooling portion 26 of the maturing compartment 25 located below separated by the isolation panel 23. There 30 is no heater inside the maturing compartment 25, and here a temperature is adjusted by the ventilation fan 43 and the ventilation louvers 44 for cooling. A duration required for this step is about 12 minutes. After this

cooling step, the raw material dough pieces are transported in an unarranged state without using the inter-stage transporting means 35 to a lowermost (stage of) transporting conveyor belt 46 of the maturing portion 5 27, and subjected to a water adjustment by maturing which requires a duration of about 30 to 35 minutes. By this maturing step 25a, the water content of the raw material dough is adjusted to $12 \pm 0.5 \%$. Note that, a travel speed of the transporting conveyor belt 46 for conducting 10 the maturing step 25a inside the maturing compartment 25 is slower, and is reduced to one third at the maximum, as compared to that of the transporting conveyor belts 30 in the hot blast compartment 24 and that of the transporting conveyor belt 45 in the maturing compartment 25, and 15 therefore during this step, the dough pieces travel slowly, so that they are matured in an unarranged state. Since the raw material dough pieces are unarranged while transported on the transporting conveyor belt 46 and their travel speed is slower than that on the upper (stage of) 20 transporting conveyor belt 45, an equalization of water content among respective raw material dough pieces is achieved, while they are transported by being overlapped with each other.

In particular as shown in Figs. 4 and 5, the raw 25 material dough pieces reached an end of the transporting conveyor belt 46 for the maturing portion 27 inside the maturing compartment 25 are released via the releasing conveyor 33 from the first drying apparatus 13, and further, as shown in Fig. 4, travel through the 30 transporting conveyor belt 37 to the second drying apparatus 14.

Figs. 11 to 21 schematically show a structure of the second drying apparatus 14, and according to the drawings, a reference numeral 50 denotes a second drying compartment composing the second drying apparatus 14. The second 5 drying compartment 50 is assembled by surrounding a machine frame 50a with isolation walls 50b coated with, for example, glass wool, etc., and as per its size, for instance, 5 m long, 3.5 m high and 2 m wide respectively as measured approximately. Further, on its upper portion, 10 a plurality of exhaust dampers 50d for controlling temperature is installed. First to fourth rotary drums 51(, 52, 53,)to 54, respectively having an approximately ø90 caliber, are so installed that they are arranged in a zigzag shape as seen from one side. Each of the first to 15 fourth rotary drums 51, 52, 53, 54 has a basically identical inner structure, and in their interiors, respective first to fourth transporting band bodies 70, 71, 72, 73 having spiral shapes are installed. Outer circumference walls 51c, 52c, 53c, 54c covering respective 20 outer circumferences of the first to fourth transporting band bodies 70, 71, 72, 73 are provided.

The outer circumference walls 51c, 52c, 53c, 54c are e.g. made from stainless steel (SUS) which shows a high thermal conductivity. The outer circumference walls 51c, 25 52c, 53c, 54c may be provided with a large number of punch holes or may use a heat resistant resin. Moreover, they may also be stainless wire meshes. Note that if the outer circumference walls 51c, 52c, 53c, 54c of the respective first to fourth rotary drums 51(, 52, 53,)to 54 30 are provided with punch holes or structured with a wire mesh, waste collecting portions for receiving wastes falling off the raw material dough are preferably disposed at lower stages of the respective first to fourth rotary

drums 51(, 52, 53,)to 54, or on an upper portion of a heating means.

Next, a feeding opening 50c is arranged on the isolation wall 50b at one side portion of the second 5 drying compartment 50, in such a manner that it is opposed to a receiving opening 51a mounted on one side end portion of an uppermost (stage of) first rotary drum 51. Moreover, a hopper 56 is installed so as to face the receiving opening 51a via the feeding opening 50c. 10 Transporting conveyor belts 57, 58 are further provided for transporting raw material dough after the first drying step and the maturing step to the hopper 56. Further, a delivery opening 54b is mounted on a side portion of a lowermost (stage of) fourth rotary drum 54, and a 15 transporting conveyor belt 60 is installed below the delivery opening 54b. At the lowermost portion of the second drying compartment 50, a heating means 61 comprising e.g. an aerofin heater is installed in a horizontal direction. Note that, a reference numeral 80 20 represents a hot air stirring fan.

Each of the first to fourth rotary drums 51(, 52, 53,)to 54 is rotatably installed using first to fourth driving rollers 76, 77, 78, 79, which amount to four and are installed in right and left pairs in an inner machine 25 frame 62 provided in the second drying compartment 50, as well as a driving means 91 including a driving motor 90 comprising e.g. an inverter-controlled geared motor. Furthermore, the respective first to fourth rotary drums 51(, 52, 53,)to 54 are provided with receiving openings 30 51a, 52a, 53a, 54a on one-side portions, as well as delivery openings 51b, 52b, 53b, 54b on the other side portions, both openings being alternately located. The

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receiving opening 51a has substantially a shape of truncated cone, while the other receiving openings 52a, 53a, 54a are simply circular holes. Additionally, the delivery openings 51b, 52b, 53b are holes cut on the 5 respective outer circumferences of the first to third rotary drums 51, 52, 53, while the delivery opening 54b is shaped by cutting an end surface of the fourth rotary drum 54.

The delivery opening 51b on the upper (stage of) 10 first rotary drum 51 is structured so as to deliver the raw material dough via a first chute means 65 to the receiving opening 52a of the second rotary drum 52 at a stage located immediately below in an obliquely downward direction. Further, the second rotary drum 52 is 15 structured so as to deliver the raw material dough via a second chute means 66 to the third rotary drum 53 at a stage located below in an obliquely downward direction. And then, the third rotary drum 53 is structured so as to deliver the raw material dough via a third chute means 67 20 to a lowermost (stage of) fourth rotary drum 54. The respective first to third chute means 65, 66, 67 comprise hopper portions 65a, 66a, 67a abutting on the respective delivery openings 51b, 52b, 53b, and chute portions 65b, 66b, 67b in a shape substantially of truncated cone fitted 25 into the respective receiving openings 52a, 53a, 54a, as well as gutter portions 65c, 66c, 67c connecting respectively the hopper portions 65a, 66a, 67a and the chute portions 65b, 66b, 67b.

Each of the driving means 91 for rotating the 30 respective first to fourth rotary drums 51 to 54 is identical in its assembly, so detailed reference is made to the driving means for only one rotary drum, e.g. the

third rotary drum 53. As shown in particular in Figs. 14 and 18, the third rotary drum 53 has driven rings 63, 64, each having a pentagonal cross section and mounted on outer circumferences on both sides, which applies also to 5 the remaining first, second and fourth rotary drums 51, 52, 54. The driven rings 63, 64 are so assembled that they are rotatably supported respectively by four driving rollers, i.e. first to fourth driving rollers 76, 77, 78, 79 attached to the inner machine fame 62. At this time, 10 chevron convex portions 63a, 64a on outer circumferences of the respective driven rings 63, 64 and concave grooves 76a, 77a, 78a, 79a provided on outer circumferences of the respective first to fourth driving rollers 76, 77, 78, 79 are fitted with each other.

15 Each of the first to fourth driving rollers 76, 77, 78, 79 is mounted to a first and a second rotary shafts 68, 69 axially supported via bearing members 92, 92 on the inner machine frame 62 so as to be rotatable, and of these the first rotary shaft 68 receives, in particular as shown 20 in Fig. 14, a rotary driving force of the driving motor 90, which is transmitted via a driving pulley 94 and a driving belt 95, as well as a driven pulley 96 mounted to the rotary shaft 68.

The other second rotary shaft 69 receives, as shown 25 in particular in Figs. 14 to 17, a rotary driving force which is transmitted via a rotary driving force transmitting means 105 from the first rotary shaft 68. More specifically, the rotary driving force is transmitted from a first intermediary pulley 97 mounted on a 30 substantially central portion of the first rotary shaft 68 via a driving belt 98 to a second intermediary pulley 99 mounted on a rotary shaft 93 axially supported on bearing

members 92a, 92a mounted on a lower portion of the inner machine frame 62. The force is further transmitted to the second rotary shaft 69, via a third intermediary pulley 100 coaxially mounted on the second intermediary pulley 99, as well as a fourth intermediary pulley 102 mounted via a driving belt 101 on the second rotary shaft 69. Note that, the driving belts are preferably V-belts, but timing belts, chains, etc. may be used as necessary. As per assembly of driving means 91 of the remaining rotary drums, i.e. first, second, and fourth rotary drums 51, 52, 54, description is omitted, since driving means thereof have an assembly identical to that of the driving means 91, as above stated.

It is a requirement for preventing an axial movement and enabling a stabilized rotation at a fixed position at the time of rotation of the third rotary drum 53 that, as above stated, the respective driven rings 63, 64 of the third rotary drum 53 and the respective driving rollers 76, 77, 78, 79 are fixed at the convex portions 63a, 64a and the concave grooves 76a, 77a, 78a, 79a with each other. This applies also to the remaining rotary drums, i.e. first, second, and fourth rotary drums 51, 52, 54. As per convex portions of the respective driven rings 63, 64 of the above-mentioned respective first to fourth rotary drums 51(, 52, 53,)to 54 and concave portions of the respective driving rollers, respective shapes may also be contrary to the above-stated ones.

Moreover, if the respective first to fourth rotary drums 51(, 52, 53,)to 54 are so assembled that they are supported from the both sides using the respective first to fourth driving rollers 76(, 77, 78,)to 79, even without a rotary shaft passing through each of the first to fourth

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rotary drums 51(, 52, 53,)to 54 in an axial direction, the first to fourth rotary drums 51(, 52, 53,)to 54 can be stably rotated.

Note that, although not illustrated, a selection of 5 providing an inclination on each of the first to fourth rotary drums 51(, 52, 53,)to 54 toward a delivery direction of the raw material dough pieces can be arbitrarily made, as well as of providing an adjusting means which can adjust an inclination angle.

10 Reference will be made in the following to a second drying step of the raw material dough pieces using the second drying apparatus 14. As above stated, the raw material dough pieces after the first drying step and the maturing step inside the first drying apparatus 13, with 15 their water content being adjusted to 12% \pm 0.5, then undergo a second drying step 14a using the second drying apparatus 14. First, the raw material dough pieces are transported from the hopper 56 via the transporting conveyor belts 57, 58 into the uppermost (stage of) first 20 rotary drum 51 through its receiving opening 51a. The interior of the second drying compartment 50 of the second drying apparatus 14 is heated by the heating means 61 to a temperature required for water content adjustment during the step (50 to 70 °C), prior to receiving the raw 25 material dough pieces. The respective first to fourth rotary drums 51(, 52, 53,)to 54 rotate in the heated atmosphere obtained in this manner at 1.33 rpm. As stated above, the raw material dough pieces transported into the uppermost (stage of) first rotary drum 51 are heated via 30 the first transporting band body 70 in the first rotary drum 51 in an unarranged state and in a mutually overlapped manner and further delivered in approximately 7

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minutes toward the delivery opening 51b, from which they pass through the first chute means 65 and are further transported through the receiving opening 52b of the second rotary drum 52 at the next stage into the second 5 rotary drum 52. These dough pieces are then traveled by the second transporting band body 71 inside the second rotary drum 52 while being heated and pass through the second chute means 66 starting from the delivery opening 52b, so that they are delivered through the receiving 10 opening 53a into the third rotary drum 53 at the third stage. They further travel via the third transporting band body 72 inside the third rotary drum 53 while being heated toward the delivery opening 53b, so that they are delivered through the receiving opening 54a into the 15 fourth rotary drum 54 at the fourth stage via. the third chute means 67. The dough pieces travel while being heated via the fourth transporting band body 73 inside the fourth rotary drum 54 and are transported out of the delivery opening 54b, so that they are transported onto 20 the transporting conveyor belt 60. It takes totally about 30 minutes for an overall second drying step.

In this manner, the raw material dough pieces transported to the uppermost (stage of) first rotary drum 51 of the second drying apparatus 14 with water content 25 adjusted to $12 \pm 0.5 \%$, of which the water content is further adjusted during the second drying step to $11 \pm 0.5 \%$, are delivered out of the delivery opening 54b of the fourth rotary drum 54 and further travel, as shown in Fig. 1, via the transporting conveyor belt 60 toward the 30 aligner 15, and after being aligned in the aligner 15, they are further transported to the baking apparatus 16 at the next step.

Thin confectionery products made from cereals and having uniform shapes can be manufactured with high quality without any crack, curved profile, hard surface and the like at a satisfactory yield by using the above-5 described respective manufacturing apparatus and in particular using the first and the second drying steps.

The present invention can, as has been described in details in the foregoing, prevent a crack, a curved profile, a hard surface, and the like, and is thus 10 suitably used in a process and an apparatus for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereals, and in particular thin products.

In the claims which follow and in the preceding description of the invention, except where the context 15 requires otherwise due to express language or necessary implication, the word "comprise" or variations such as "comprises" or "comprising" is used in an inclusive sense, i.e. to specify the presence of the stated features but not to preclude the presence or addition of further 20 features in various embodiments of the invention.

It is to be understood that, if any prior art publication is referred to herein, such reference does not constitute an admission that the publication forms a part of the common general knowledge in the art, in Australia 25 or any other country.

THE CLAIMS DEFINING THE INVENTION ARE AS FOLLOWS:

1. A process for manufacturing thin confectionery products made from cereals and having uniform shapes, 5 said process comprising a first drying step and a second drying step which are conducted prior to baking cut-out raw material dough pieces ,

wherein during said first drying step, drying is conducted by a step of transporting said raw material 10 dough pieces arranged in lines on transporting conveyor belts under a hot blast atmosphere inside a first drying compartment;

wherein a maturing step under a cooling state is inserted following a completion of said first drying step; 15 and

wherein during said second drying step, drying is conducted by a step of transporting said raw material dough pieces in a mixed state in an axial direction under a hot air atmosphere inside rotary drums in a second 20 drying compartment.

2. The process for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereals according to Claim 1, wherein during said maturing step, a travel speed of the transporting conveyor belt is reduced after a cooling 25 step.

3. The process for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereals according to Claim 2, wherein water content of said raw material dough pieces is so adjusted that it becomes 12 % ± 0.5 at the time of 30 completion of said maturing step in said first drying step.

4. The process for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereals according to Claim 2, wherein the water content of said raw material dough pieces is so adjusted that it becomes 13 to 14 % prior to said cooling 5 step in said first drying step.

5. The process for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereals according to Claim 1, wherein during said second drying step, said raw material dough pieces are transported inside a plurality of stages of 10 rotary drums in an axial direction under a hot air or heated atmosphere in an unarranged state and in a mutually overlapped manner while sequentially altering directions of delivery.

6. An apparatus for manufacturing thin 15 confectionery products made from cereals and having uniform shapes, said apparatus comprising a first drying apparatus and a second drying apparatus provided between a shape cutting apparatus and a baking apparatus for adjusting water content of raw material dough pieces,

20 wherein said first drying apparatus divides a first drying compartment via a partition wall into a hot blast drying compartment at an upper level and a maturing compartment at a lower level,

wherein said upper level comprises transporting 25 conveyor belts provided at a plurality of stages for transporting the aligned raw material dough pieces; and

wherein said lower level comprises a transporting conveyor belt for cooling the raw material dough pieces received from said upper level, and a 30 transporting conveyor belt for receiving and maturing the cooled raw material dough pieces.

7. An apparatus for manufacturing thin confectionery products made from cereals and having uniform shapes, said apparatus comprising a first drying apparatus and a second drying apparatus provided between a 5 shape cutting apparatus and a baking apparatus for adjusting water content of raw material dough pieces,

wherein said first drying apparatus divides a first drying compartment via a partition wall into an upper level and a lower level,

10 wherein said upper level comprises transporting conveyor belts provided at a plurality of stages for transporting the raw material dough pieces arranged in lines under a hot air atmosphere; and

15 wherein said lower level comprises a transporting conveyor belt for cooling the raw material dough pieces received from said upper level, and a transporting conveyor belt for receiving and maturing the cooled raw material dough pieces; and

20 wherein said second drying apparatus comprises a second drying compartment under a hot air atmosphere at a temperature lower than a temperature in said first drying compartment of said first drying apparatus, a plurality of rotary drums each having an inlet and an outlet and being rotatably mounted in said second drying compartment, 25 transporting belt bodies provided in said rotary drums in the form of spiral stairs, and chute means for transporting the raw material dough pieces from the uppermost (stage) to the lowermost (stage) of said plurality of the rotary drums.

30 8. An apparatus for manufacturing thin confectionery products made from cereals and having

uniform shapes, said apparatus comprising a second drying apparatus comprising a second drying compartment provided after a first drying apparatus, a plurality of rotary drums each having an inlet and an outlet and being 5 rotatably mounted in said second drying compartment, transporting belt bodies provided in said rotary drums in the form of spiral stairs, and chute means for transporting the raw material dough pieces from the uppermost (stage) to the lowermost (stage) of said 10 plurality of the rotary drums.

9. The apparatus for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereals according to Claim 7, wherein said rotary drums comprise transporting belt bodies in spiral shape having a circular cross section as a whole, 15 stationary bars mounted in an axial direction on outer circumferences of said transporting belt bodies, outer circumference walls having a shape of wire mesh covering said outer circumferences of said transporting belt bodies, and driven rings mounted to said outer 20 circumference walls.

10. The apparatus for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereals according to Claim 7, wherein said rotary drums are controlled in an axial movement by a convex-concave fitting between driven rings mounted 25 outwards on both sides of said rotary drums and driving rollers for transmitting a rotary driving force to the driven rings.

11. The apparatus for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereals according to Claim 7, wherein 30 said rotary drums are rotatably supported by four of driving rollers for supporting at both sides driven rings

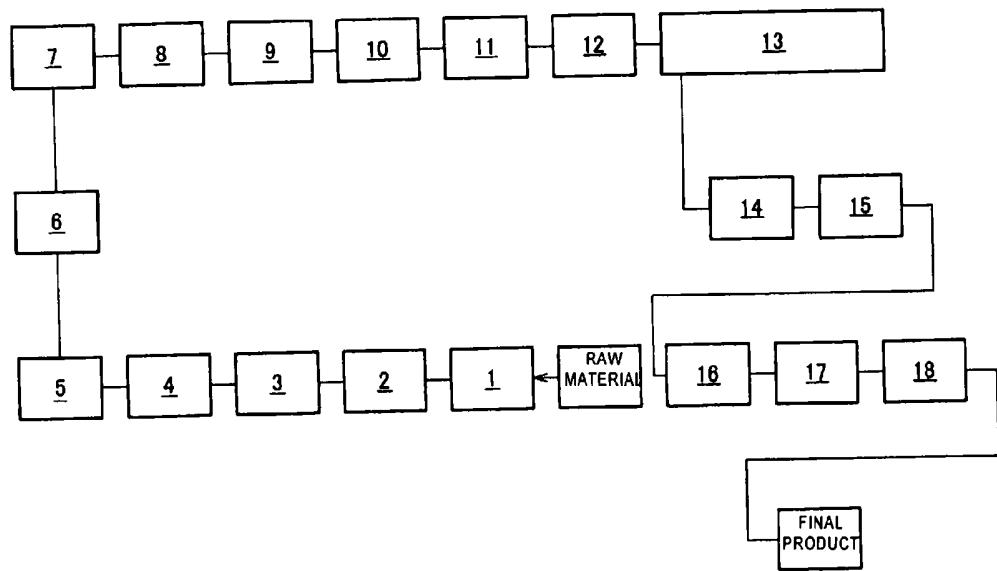
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mounted at least outwards on both sides of said rotary drums and transmitting a rotary driving force.

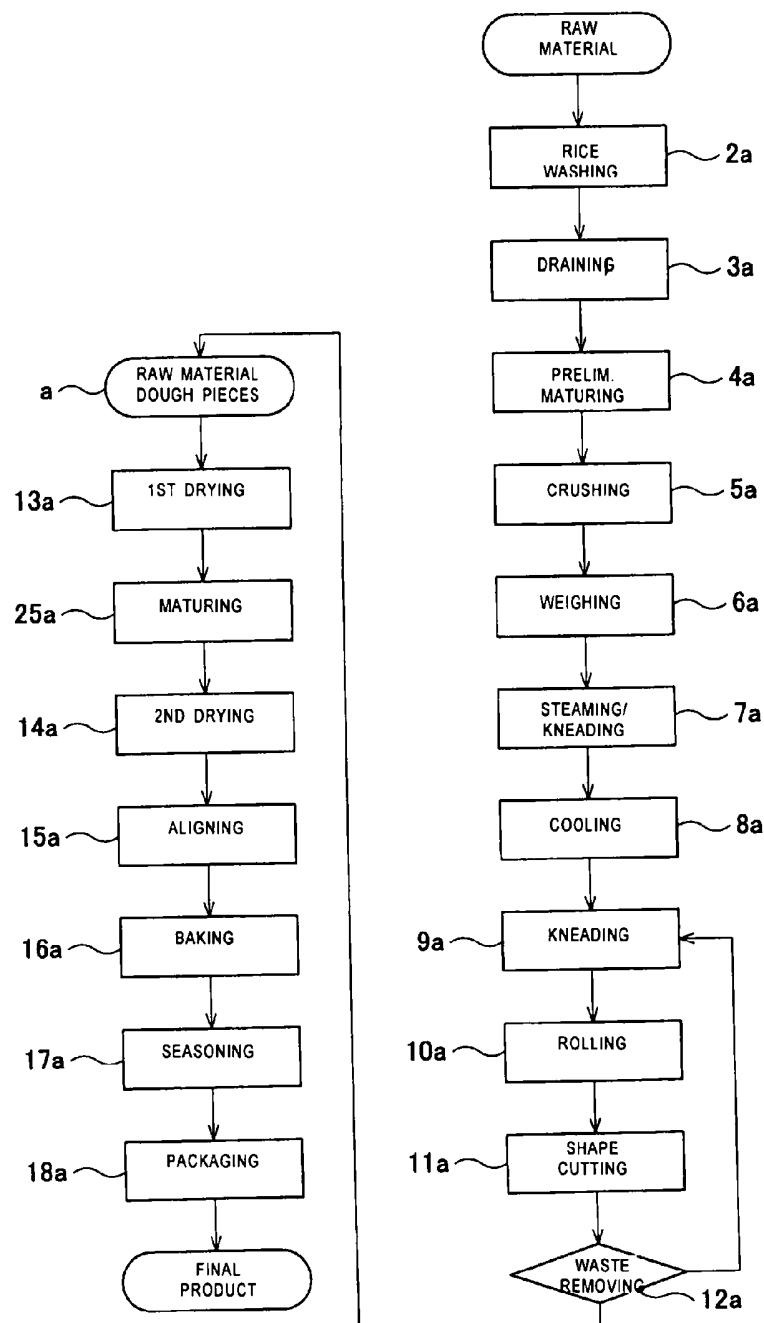
12. The apparatus for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereals according to Claim 7, wherein
5 said rotary drums are provided at a plurality of stages, and each of said rotary drums is provided with a driving motor.

13. The apparatus for manufacturing confectionery products made from cereals according to Claim 11, wherein
10 each side of said driving rollers provided in pairs on both sides of each of said rotary drums is coaxially coupled by a rotary shaft, and a rotary driving force is transmitted via a driving force transmitting means from a first rotary shaft on one side coupled to a driving motor
15 to a second rotary shaft on the other side, so that four of the driving rollers rotate at an identical speed.

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Fig.1



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Fig.2



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Fig.3

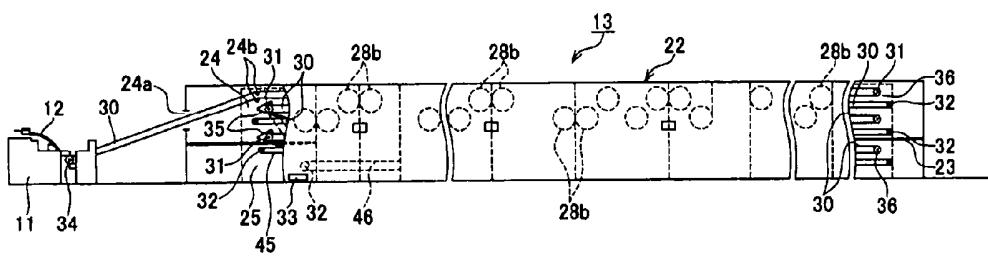
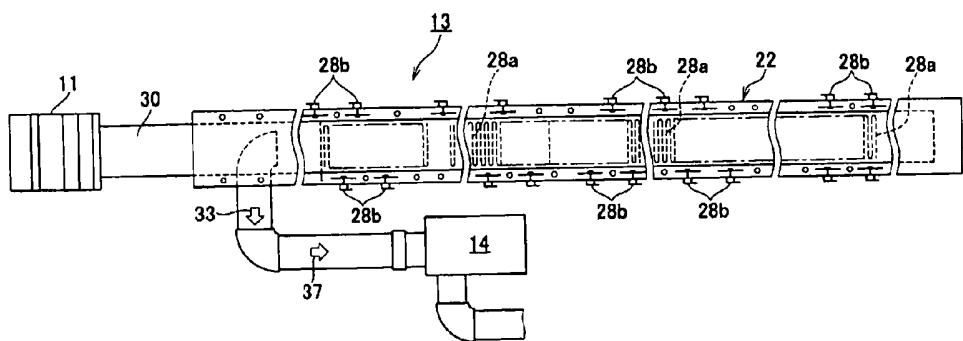
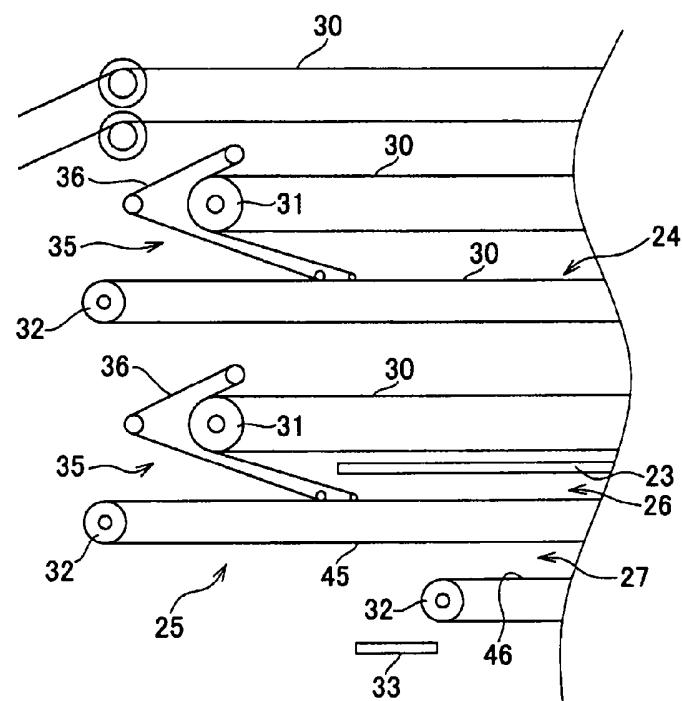


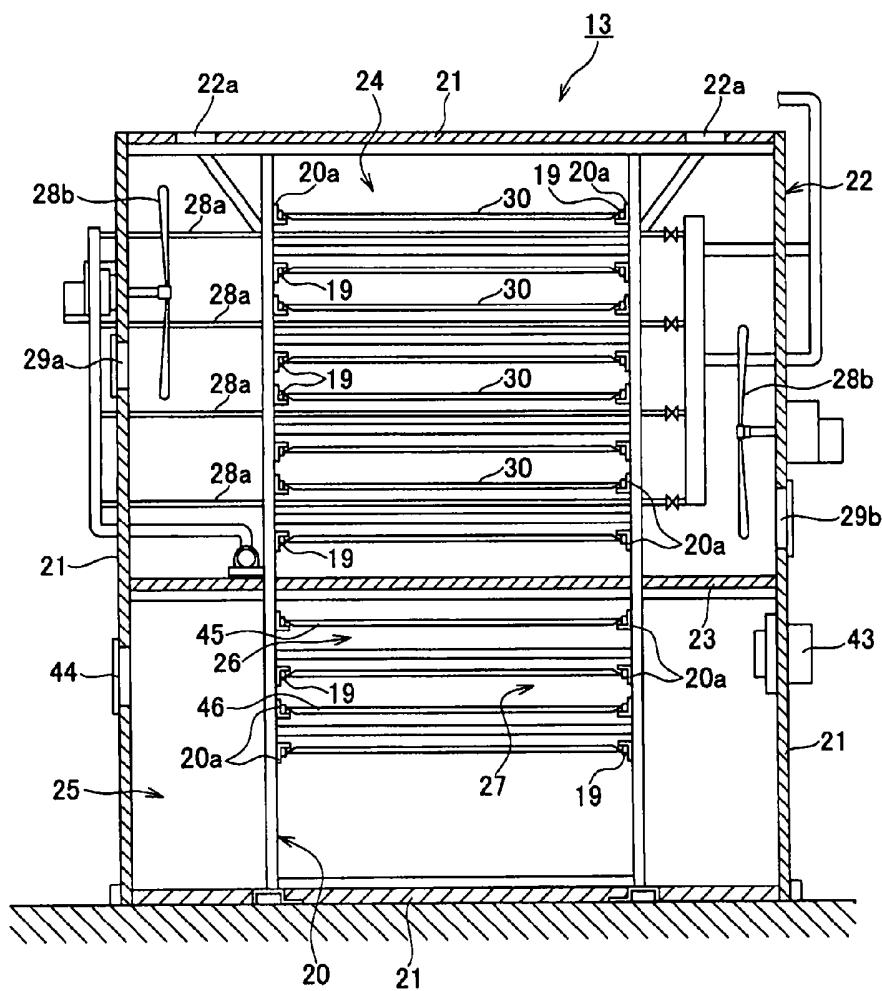
Fig.4



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Fig.5



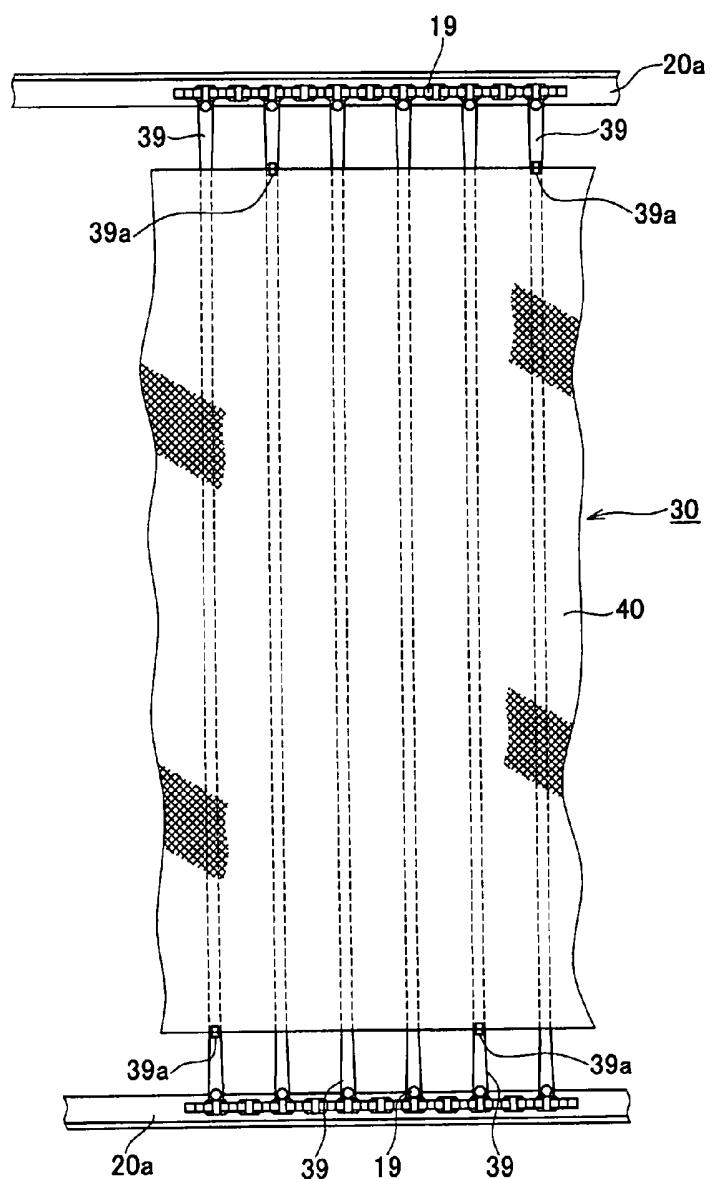
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Fig.6



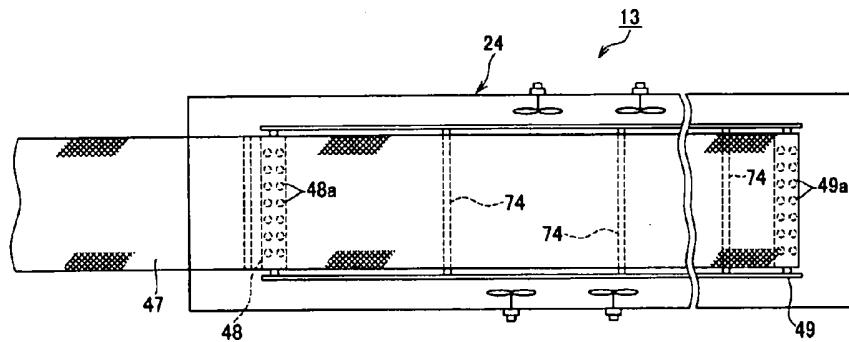
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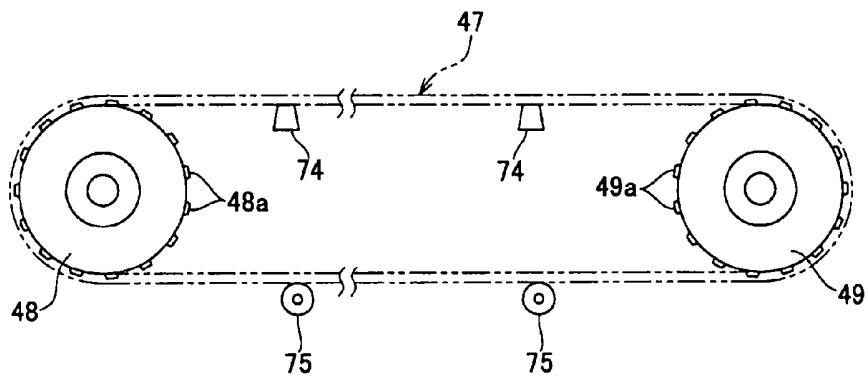
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Fig.7



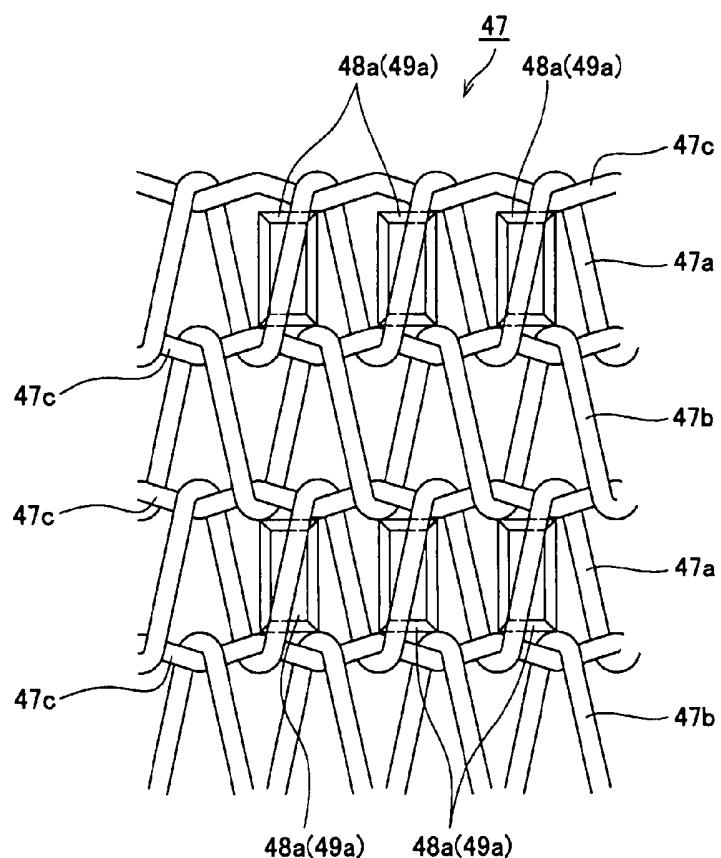
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Fig.8



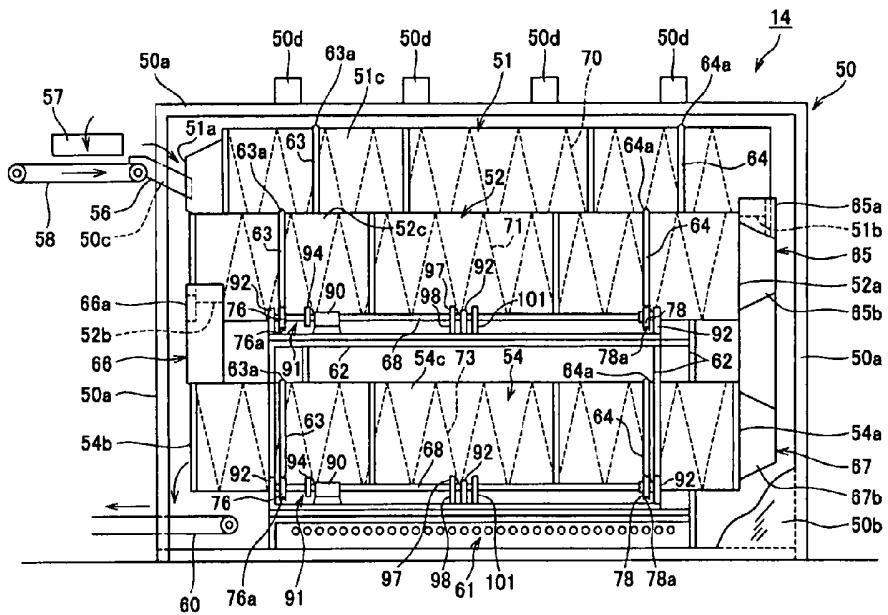
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Fig.9



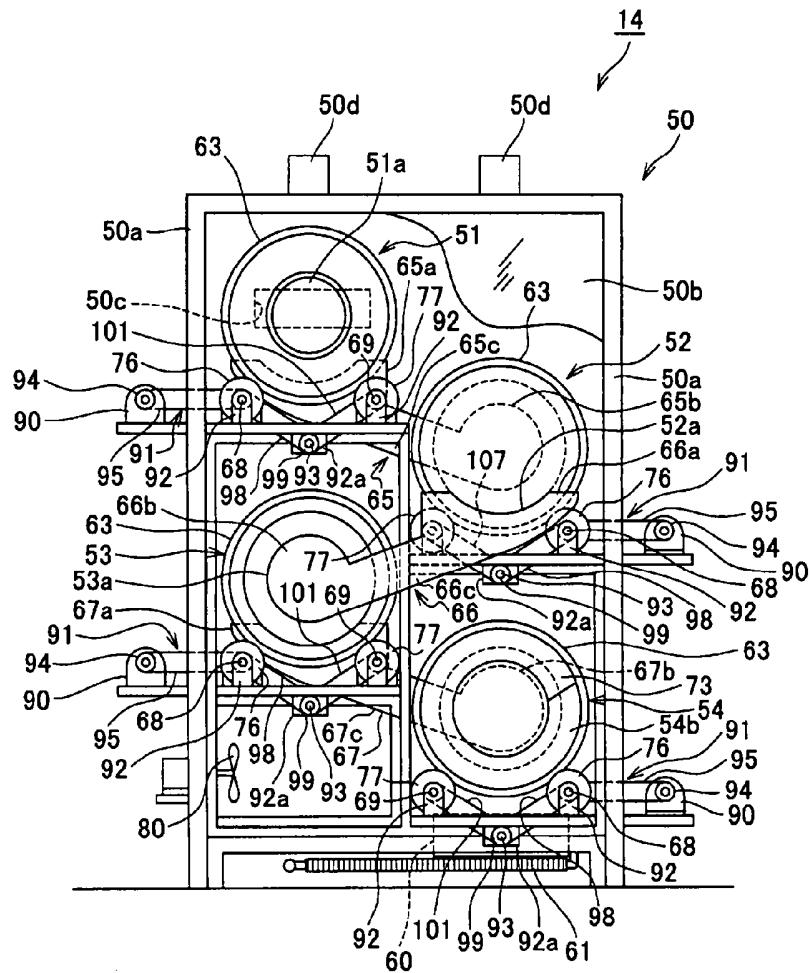
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Fig.10



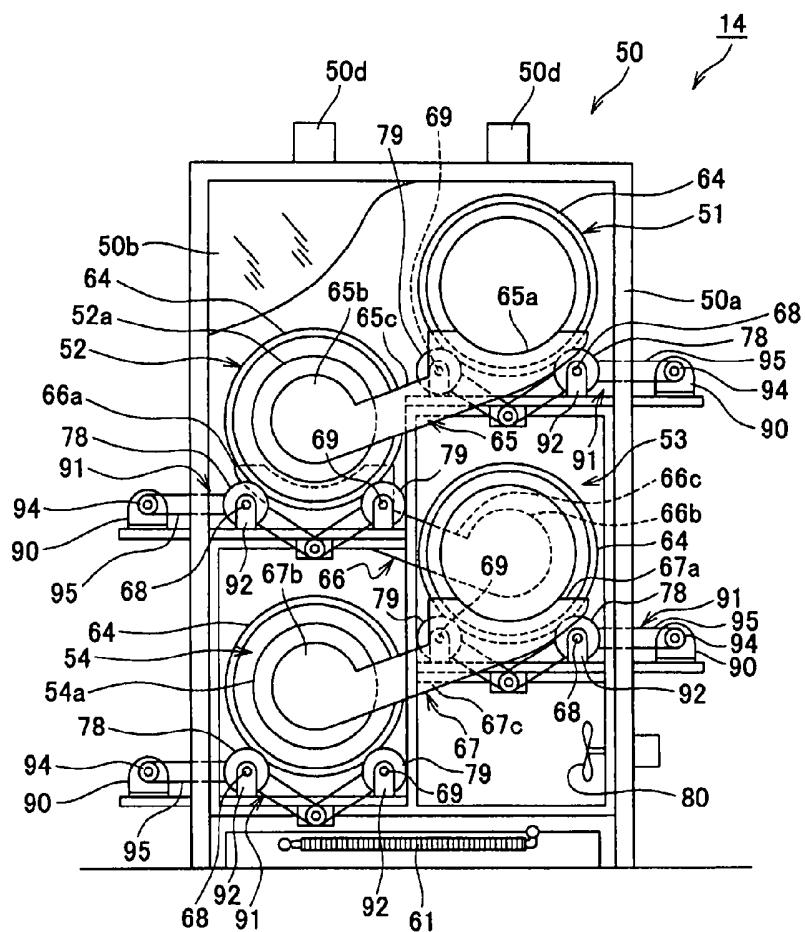
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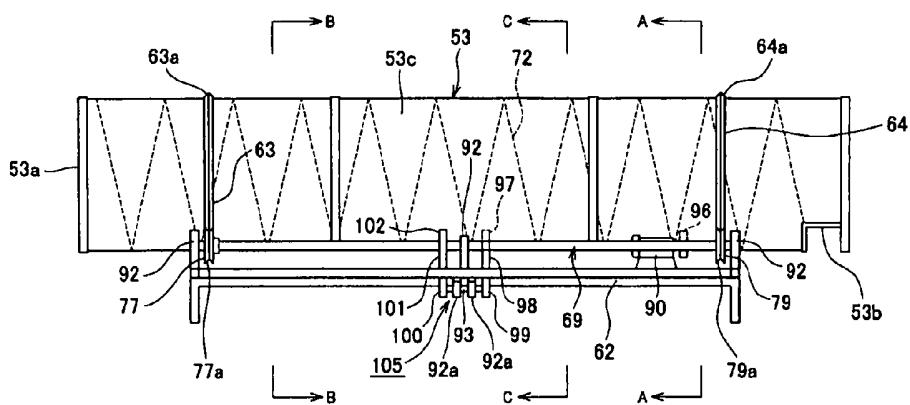
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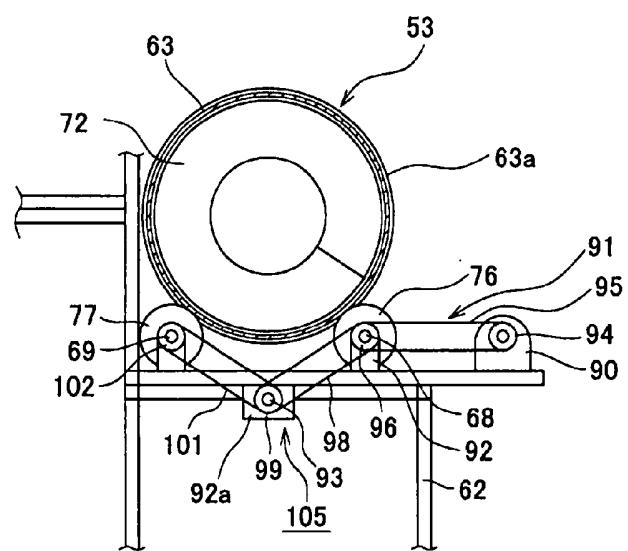
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Fig.13



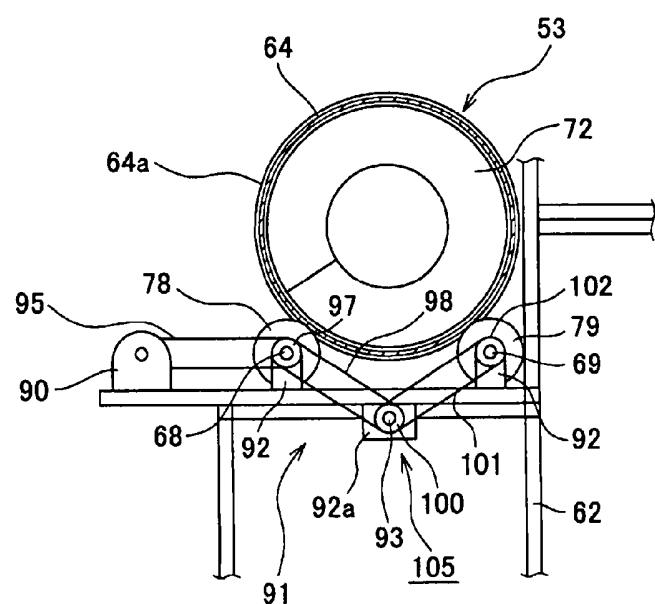
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Fig.14

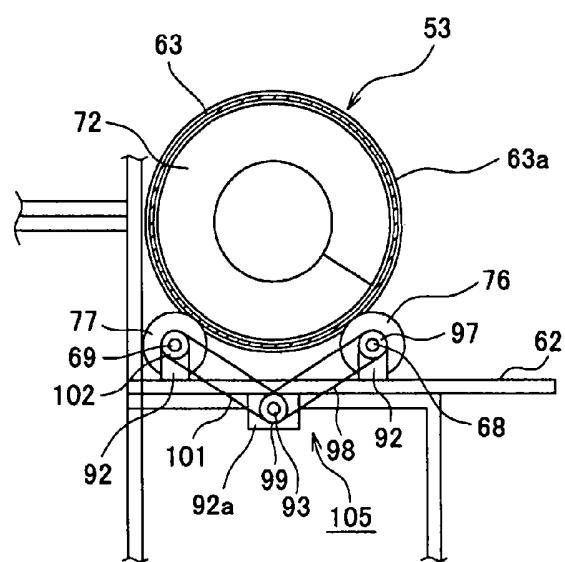


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Fig.15

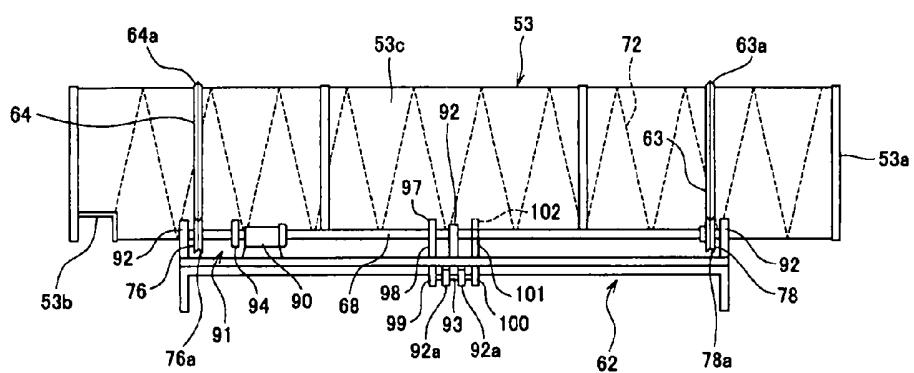


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Fig.16

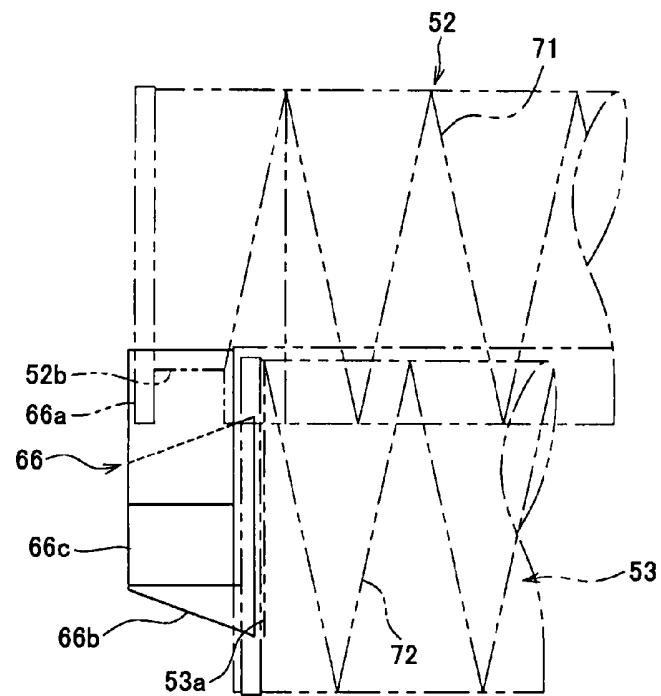




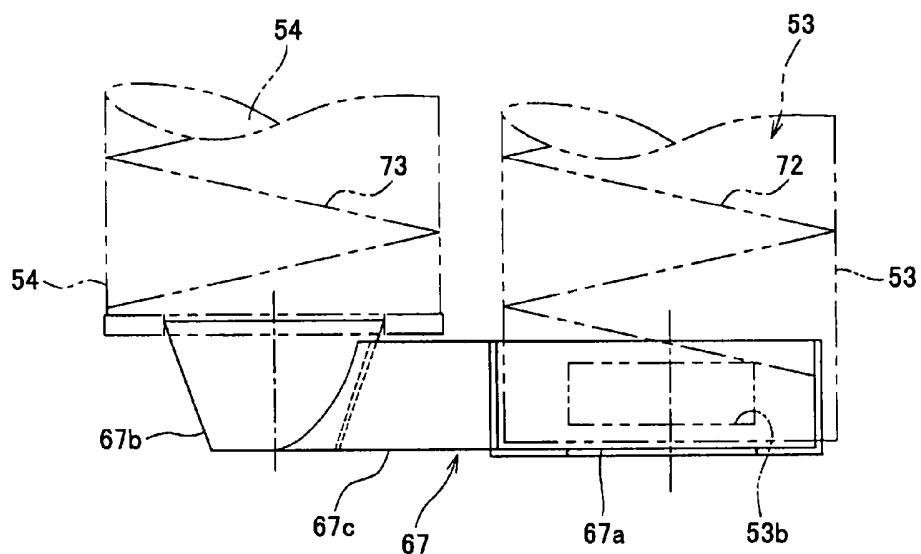
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Fig.18



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Fig.19



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Fig.20



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Fig.21

