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US-A- 6 036 038 US-A1- 2003 066 902

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Description

Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention generally relates to devices for food packaging and more specifically to a device for accessing food within a jar or similar container.

Background of the Invention

[0002] Many types of food products are packaged in liquid for shipping to the consumer. One such example is asparagus spears which are placed within a jar having a screw on lid or a tamper evident film with a clip on lid. Although this packaging method provides a convenient reclosable container that allows the user to selectively remove individual items from the container, a user frequently must use their fingers or an additional utensil, such as a fork, to reach into the container to grasp the food. Such a process is prone to spillage or, in the case of using one's fingers, unsanitary. Furthermore, there is also an issue with removing elongated slender food products such as green and white asparagus, which are transported in a liquid-filled container. These items are selected by a consumer because of their shape. To remove the product, a user frequently must tip the jar to contact the product. As a result, the packing liquid may spill and the product slide out. In the case of asparagus, the spears typically break when they spill out of the container. If the product is damaged during transportation or removal from the container demand will decrease. Thus the integrity of the product must be protected.

[0003] There are prior art devices that address accessing food product within a liquid filled container. U.S. Patent No. 6,036,038, Lovelace et al., discloses a food packaging system including a content lifting insert wherein the insert is a rod attached to a cup-like structure that sits at the bottom of the jar. However, this design has a number of deficiencies. The user must insert a hand into the container to reach the rod which creates sanitation issues. As the rod is lifted there is no apparatus to keep objects from falling out of the container. If a user wants to empty the container, they must proceed in an inch-wise progression, removing by hand the product that clears the top of the container, raising the rod another inch and repeating the process or else risk scattering the product.

[0004] Therefore, there is a need to have a packaging system include a device that extends into the container for the removal of food products without the unsanitary process of fishing out items by hand. The device ideally will permit the liquid to drain from the product when in use. Furthermore, the device should allow for the removal of the entire product at once in a sanitary manner that preserves the desired shape and condition of the product.

[0005] EP 0 847 934 A1 describes a container for food. The container consists of a jar having an inner basket, preferably made of plastic, to enable the contents to be

lifted out of the jar. The basket also enables drainage of any liquid whilst retaining the food. The outer surface of the basket has flexible lugs or catches which allow the basket to be held in a raised position while some of the contents are removed from it, and then pushed back into the jar after use. The basket is fitted with a hinged handle which lies flat inside the top of the jar when not in use.

Summary of the Invention

[0006] The present invention is a food packaging system that includes a lifting basket positioned within the food holding portion of the container. The present invention is defined by the features of the claims. The lifting basket forms a protective cage about the food product, the cage extending from the bottom of the container to proximate the liquid level. A foldable handle is attached to the top of the cage. With the lid in place, the foldable handle is positioned transverse to the longitudinal axis of the cage portion. With the lid removed, the handle may extend above the upper margin of the container for removal by the user.

[0007] The cage is preferably constructed of one piece of a resilient material. Suitable plastics for forming the cage may include, but are not limited to, various polymers such as polypropylene, polystyrene, polystyrene-acrylonitrile, acrylonitrile-butadiene-styrene, styrene-maleicanhydride, polycarbonate, polyethylene terephthalate, polyvinylcyclohexane, and blends thereof. The material is injected in a clam shell configuration so as to form two basket or cage halves. The cage base thus contains a seam where the two cage parts are connected. The two cage halves can be locked together at the mating faces or be aligned as the cage halves are compressed together upon placement in the container. The ribs of the side cage structure are spaced according to the food properties. For example, asparagus spears can easily be held within the cage by a few ribs located at a midpoint. Olives or pickles, or any food product having a smaller size, would require a cage with more ribs. The side cage structure may be mirror images on each cage half or, in the alternative, a design pattern unique to each face could be employed. The cage base will also include at least one aperture to effect drainage of the food product from the bottom of the cage when lifted from the container.

Brief Description of the Drawings

[0008]

Figure 1 is a perspective view of the present invention within a sealable container.

Figure 2 is a perspective view of the present invention in the closed position.

Figure 3 is a plan view of the present invention.

Figure 4 is a side plan view of the present invention.

Figure 5 is a perspective view of the present invention in an open position.

Figure 6 is a perspective view of an alternate embodiment of the present invention.

Figure 7 is a side plan view of an alternate embodiment in an open position.

Figure 8 is a plan view of the base of the alternate embodiment depicted in Figure 7.

Figure 9 is a perspective view of the alternate embodiment of Figure 7 in an open position

Detailed Description of the Drawings

[0009] The present invention is an element of a food packaging system that works cooperatively with a product container. The present invention comprises a produce strainer or lifting basket that extends from the bottom of the container to proximate the top of the container. The product container may include a cylindrical shaped jar, a square or rectangular shaped carton, a can, a spherical container or a soft sided bag container where the present invention may provide an internal structural support. Generally, the present invention forms a basket within another container. Removal of the basket allows the user to easily and without mess remove a desired product from, for example, a liquid packed product.

[0010] The lifting basket 10 is depicted in a first embodiment in Figures 1-5. The lifting basket 10 is comprised of a base 12, a vertical support structure 13, a handle 14 and a cage 15. The lifting basket 10 is disposed within container 11 for transport to the user as illustrated in Figure 1. The handle 14 extends above the top of container 11 with the container lid 50 removed in this embodiment but the handle 14 could be disposed below the top of container 11 if desired.

[0011] As illustrated in Figures 2-4 the lifting basket 10 is shown in the closed position as compared to Figure 5 wherein the lifting basket 10 is in an open position. Lifting basket 10 in the first embodiment is comprised of two identical structures, first basket half 16 and second basket half 17, that are joined at base 12 in a clam shell fashion. In the first embodiment, base 12 is a cylindrical disk that is divided by base seam 18. Base 12 may have alternate shapes depending on the dimensions of the container. Base 12 may include drain apertures. Base seam 18 can be formed in a manner of conventional ways such as a prestressed fold area or by a base groove or perforation that partially divides base 12.

[0012] Base 12 further includes lower cage 19 that further connects vertical support structure 13 with base 12. Lower cage 19 has a cage base 20 that mates with the outer margin 21 of base 12. Cage base 20 has an arcuate shape that forms a continuous joint with base 12 but in alternative embodiments may include one or more apertures to facilitate draining. Lower cage 19 is canted radially from base 12 so that cage base 20 is inboard of lower cage upper margin 22. Lower cage wings 23 extend from cage base 20 in an arcuate manner to intersect the vertical support structure 13. Lower cage wings 23, base 12

and vertical support structure 13 define drain apertures 24.

[0013] Vertical support structure 13 extends from base 12 to handle 14. As lifting basket 10 is comprised of first basket half 16 and second basket half 17, the vertical support structure 13 includes four ribs 25 so that two ribs 25 provide vertical structure to the respective basket halves 16, 17. In the first embodiment, each rib 25 has a mating face 26 and an outer face 27. Lower cage wings 23 are connected to the outer face 27 of each respective rib 25. For example, mating face 26 of rib 25 of first basket half 16 mates with the mating face 26 of rib 25 of second basket half 17. In the first embodiment, the ribs 25 are aligned together by compression due to the inner dimensions of the container 11 being closely sized to the outer dimensions of lifting basket 10. However, in alternate embodiments, the ribs 25 could include snap fittings or clasps to maintain contact between the respective mating faces 26.

[0014] Disposed intermediate of handle 14 and base 12 is cage 15. In the first embodiment cage 15 has two identical cage sections 28 that are connected to the outer face 27 of each respective rib 25. Cage sections 28 form an arcuate cross having cage center 29 from which cage arms 30 extend. Here, four cage arms 30 extend from cage center 29. Cage sections 28 have an arcuate shape to form a hemispherical boundary to lifting basket 10. The arcuate shape of the cage section 28 closely mirrors the inner circumference of the container 11.

[0015] Handle 14 is disposed at the upper end 31 of vertical support structure 13. Handle 14 is comprised of two curved grips 32. Each grip 32 is a thin arcuate slice that includes a lift tab 33 disposed at a midpoint and extending axially toward base 12. The grip 32 is connected at opposing ends to rib 25 through flex connector 34. Flex connector 34 forms a neck at upper end 31 of rib 25, the flex connector 34 having a smaller cross section than rib 25 to allow for greater flexibility. Likewise, the curved grip 32 has a cross sectional area larger than the flex connector 34. While the first embodiment does not include a locking mechanism on handle 14, it is envisioned that a number of alternative clasps, locks, flanges or other joining means could be incorporated to keep the grips 32 in a locked alignment.

[0016] An alternate embodiment of the present invention 100 is illustrated in Figure 6. Here, lifting basket 100 includes a base 112 that supports a vertical support structure 113. The vertical support structure 113 terminates at an upper end 131 with handle 114. Intermediate the handle 114 and base 112 is multiple cage structures 115. Like the previous embodiment, the present invention 100 is comprised of a clam shell design wherein the two basket halves 116, 117 are joined at seam 118 of base 112. Each basket half 116, 117 includes two vertical ribs 125 that support the opposing sides of cage section 128. Each cage section 128 forms an "x" shape. Figure 6 illustrates multiple cage sections 128 mounted to the vertical structure 113. The multiple cage sections 128 provide in-

creased retaining means for holding product within lifting basket 100.

[0017] An alternate embodiment of the present invention 200 is illustrated in Figures 7-9. Here, lifting basket 200 includes a base 212 that supports a vertical support structure 213. The vertical support structure 213 terminates at an upper end 231 with handle 214. Intermediate the handle 214 and base 212 is a cage structure 215. Like the previous embodiment, the present invention 200 is comprised of a clam shell design wherein the two basket halves 216, 217 are joined at base 212. The cage structure 215 is comprised of two cage sections 225 so that a cage section 225 is disposed within basket half 216 and the second cage section 225 is disposed within basket half 217. Each cage section 225 is mounted to at least one vertical rib 219.

[0018] The base 212 includes hinge portions 220 that connect basket base 226 to basket base 227. The hinge portion 220 is a rectangular body with a flexible hinge 228 at opposing sides. Base 212 defines multiple apertures 229 to allow for drainage. A base rib 230 extends axially from the perimeter mid-point of basket base 226 and 227. The base rib 230 terminates approximate the mid-point of base cross rib 231. Each basket half 216, 217 includes two vertical ribs 225 that support the opposing sides of cage structure 22. The base cross rib 231 extends to the respective vertical rib 219.

[0019] In operation, the lifting basket 10 is in an open configuration as illustrated in Figure 5. Products, such as asparagus, okra, pickles spears or heart of palm, are placed within the open lifting basket 10. The basket halves 16, 17 are then aligned to a closed position. The lifting basket 10 is then placed into container 11. Preferably container 11 is closely dimensional to the outer diameter of the present invention 10 so that the basket halves 16, 17 remain in contact through compression. The packing liquid is added to container 11 either before or after the lifting basket 11 is positioned in the container 11. In the alternative, the product could be added to container without a packing liquid. The handle 17 of lifting basket 10 is manipulated transverse to the axial plane of the container 11 and a container seal or lid 50 is attached. The handle 17 may be rotated as a unit or each grip 32 may be rotated in opposite directions. To access the product, the user removes the lid and grasps the grips 32. The lifting basket 10 is then raised above the packing liquid at which point the user may remove one or more items of product while maintaining the relative position of the grips 32. Conversely, the user may remove the lifting basket 10 after allowing drainage of the packing liquid through base drain aperture 24. The lifting basket 10 may then be placed in an open configuration, for example, rotating the first basket half 16 from second basket half 17.

[0020] As illustrated in Figure 6, the same procedure may be performed for products of smaller size. For example, by increasing the cage structure 115, the lifting basket 100 may be used to remove olives, artichoke

hearts, or any other liquid packaged product that usually requires draining.

[0021] It is noted that the embodiment of the food packaging system described herein detail for exemplary purposes is of course subject to many different variations in structure, design, application and methodology. Because many various and different embodiments may be taught within the scope of the inventive concept and because many modifications may be made in the embodiment herein, it is to be understood that the details herein are to be interpreted as illustrative and not in a limiting sense.

Claims

1. A food packaging system for improving access to a product, the system comprising:

a container (11) having an open end and a food holding area;
a container closure securable about the open end of the container; and
a lifting basket (10) sized to fit within the food holding area, the lifting basket (10) comprising a base (12), having one or more drainage apertures disposed to allow a fluid path from a first base side to a second base side, connected to a handle assembly (14) by a vertical support structure (13), the vertical support structure (13) including a cage element (15) disposed intermediate the handle assembly (14) and the base (12),
wherein the vertical support structure (13) is comprised of two basket halves (16,17), said two basket halves (16,17) connected at the base (12).

2. The system of claim 1 wherein the base (12) further includes a base support and a product restraining cage that extends axially from a perimeter of the base support.
3. The system of claim 1 wherein the handle assembly (14) has a handle grip and a neck section, said neck section disposed between the handle grip and the vertical support structure.
4. The system of claim 3 wherein the neck section has a smaller cross sectional area than the handle grip.
5. The system of claim 1 wherein the container (11) is one of a jar, a carton, a box, a can or a bag.
6. The system of claim 1 wherein the handle assembly (14) can rotate from a vertical position generally parallel to the longitudinal axis of the container (11) to a sealed position wherein an upper margin of the handle assembly (14) fits within the container (11).

7. A lifting basket for accessing food within a jar or similar container including a base (12) connected to a handle assembly (14) by a vertical support structure (13), the vertical support structure (13) being comprised of two basket halves (16, 17) connected at the base (12) and including a cage element (15) disposed intermediate the handle assembly (14) and the base (12). 5
8. The lifting basket of claim 7 wherein the base has at least one drainage aperture. 10
9. The lifting basket of claim 8 wherein said basket halves (16, 17) are comprised of at least one rib extending axially from the base (12), said rib supporting the cage element (15), the cage element (15) including at least one wing extending generally transverse to the rib. 15
10. The lifting basket of claim 8 wherein the handle assembly (14) includes a flexible neck, the flexible neck disposed at the intersection of the vertical support structure (13) and the handle assembly (14), the flexible neck rotatable between a first upright position and a storage position. 20
11. A method for filling a food packaging system, the food packaging system including an outer container and an inner lifting basket wherein the inner lifting basket is sized to fit within the outer container, the outer container defining a food holding area, the method comprising: 30

opening a lifting basket, said lifting basket including a first basket half and a second basket half, said first basket half and second basket half connected at a first end to a lifting basket base, wherein opening includes rotating the first basket half away from the second basket half; 35

placing a food product within a first basket half; 40

rotating the second basket half into alignment with the first basket half; and

placing the lifting basket into the outer container.
12. The method of claim 11 wherein the inner lifting basket includes a rotatable handle section, the method further including rotating the handle section to a stowed position within the food holding area. 45
13. The method of claim 11 further including fastening a container seal across an open end of the outer container. 50

Patentansprüche 55

1. Lebensmittelverpackungssystem zum Verbessern des Zugriffs auf ein Produkt, wobei das System auf-

weist:

einen Behälter (11) mit einem offenen Ende und einem Lebensmittelaufnahmebereich;
 einen Behälterverschluss, der über dem offenen Ende des Behälters befestigbar ist; und
 einen Hebekorb (10), der so bemessen ist, dass er in den Lebensmittelaufnahmebereich passt, wobei der Hebekorb (10) aufweist: eine Basis (12) mit einer oder mehreren so angeordneten Ablauföffnungen, dass ein Flüssigkeitsweg von einer ersten Basisseite zu einer zweiten Basisseite ermöglicht ist, die durch einen senkrechten Stützaufbau (13) mit einer Griffanordnung (14) verbunden ist, wobei der senkrechte Stützaufbau (13) ein Käfigelement (15) aufweist, das zwischen der Griffanordnung (14) und der Basis (12) angeordnet ist,
 wobei der senkrechte Stützaufbau (13) zwei Korbhälften (16, 17) aufweist, wobei die beiden Korbhälften (16, 17) an der Basis (12) verbunden sind.

2. System nach Anspruch 1, wobei die Basis (12) ferner eine Basisstütze und einen Produktrückhaltekäfig aufweist, der sich von einem Umfang der Basisstütze axial erstreckt. 25
3. System nach Anspruch 1, wobei die Griffanordnung (14) einen Handgriff und einen Halsabschnitt hat, wobei der Halsabschnitt zwischen dem Handgriff und dem senkrechten Stützaufbau angeordnet ist. 30
4. System nach Anspruch 3, wobei der Halsabschnitt eine kleinere Querschnittsfläche als der Handgriff hat. 35
5. System nach Anspruch 1, wobei der Behälter (11) ein Glas, ein Karton, eine Kiste, eine Dose oder ein Beutel ist. 40
6. System nach Anspruch 1, wobei die Griffanordnung (14) aus einer senkrechten Position allgemein parallel zur Längsachse des Behälters (11) in eine abgedichtete Position drehen kann, in der sich ein oberer Rand der Griffanordnung (14) in den Behälter (11) einpasst. 45
7. Hebekorb zum Zugreifen auf Lebensmittel in einem Glas oder ähnlichen Behälter mit einer Basis (12), die durch einen senkrechten Stützaufbau (13) mit einer Griffanordnung (14) verbunden ist, wobei der senkrechte Stützaufbau (13) zwei Korbhälften (16, 17) aufweist, die mit der Basis (12) verbunden sind, und mit einem Käfigelement (15), das zwischen der Griffanordnung (14) und der Basis (12) angeordnet ist. 50
8. Hebekorb nach Anspruch 7, wobei die Basis minde-

stens eine Ablauföffnung hat.

9. Hebekorb nach Anspruch 8, wobei die Korbhälften (16, 17) mindestens eine Rippe aufweisen, die sich von der Basis (12) axial erstreckt, wobei die Rippe das Käfigelement (15) stützt und das Käfigelement (15) mindestens einen Flügel aufweist, der sich allgemein quer zur Rippe erstreckt. 5
10. Hebekorb nach Anspruch 8, wobei die Griffanordnung (14) einen flexiblen Hals aufweist, wobei der flexible Hals am Schnitt des senkrechten Stützaufbaus (13) und der Griffanordnung (14) angeordnet ist und der flexible Hals zwischen einer ersten aufrechten Position und einer Lagerposition drehbar ist. 10 15
11. Verfahren zum Befüllen eines Lebensmittelverpackungssystems, wobei das Lebensmittelverpackungssystem einen Außenbehälter und einen Innenhebekorb aufweist, wobei der Innenhebekorb so bemessen ist, dass er sich in den Außenbehälter einpasst, wobei der Außenbehälter einen Lebensmittelaufnahmebereich bildet und das Verfahren aufweist: 20
 - Öffnen eines Hebekorbs, wobei der Hebekorb eine erste Korbhälfte und eine zweite Korbhälfte aufweist, die erste Korbhälfte und zweite Korbhälfte an einem ersten Ende mit einer Hebekorb-basis verbunden sind, wobei das Öffnen aufweist: Wegdrehen der ersten Korbhälfte von der zweiten Korbhälfte; 25
 - Platzieren eines Lebensmittelprodukts in der ersten Korbhälfte;
 - Drehen der zweiten Korbhälfte in Ausrichtung zur ersten Korbhälfte; und 30
 - Platzieren des Hebekorbs im Außenbehälter. 35
12. Verfahren nach Anspruch 11, wobei der Innenhebekorb einen drehbaren Griffabschnitt aufweist, wobei das Verfahren ferner aufweist: Drehen des Griffabschnitts in eine verstaute Position im Lebensmittelaufnahmebereich. 40
13. Verfahren nach Anspruch 11, das ferner aufweist: Befestigen einer Behälterabdichtung über einem offenen Ende des Außenbehälters. 45

Revendications 50

1. Système de conditionnement alimentaire pour améliorer l'accès à un produit, le système comprenant :

- un conteneur (11) ayant une extrémité ouverte et une zone de support d'aliment ; 55
- une enceinte de conteneur pouvant être fixée autour de l'extrémité ouverte du conteneur ; et

■ un panier de levage (10) dimensionné pour entrer à l'intérieur de la zone de support d'aliment, le panier de levage (10) comprenant une base (12), ayant une ou plusieurs ouvertures de drainage disposées pour permettre un écoulement de fluide d'un premier côté de base à un second côté de base, raccordée à un assemblage de poignée (14) par une structure de support verticale (13), la structure de support verticale (13) comprenant un élément de cage (15) disposé entre l'assemblage de poignée (14) et la base (12),

dans lequel la structure de support verticale (13) est composée de deux moitiés de panier (16, 17), lesdites deux moitiés de panier (16, 17) étant raccordées à la base (12).

2. Système selon la revendication 1, dans lequel la base (12) comprend en outre un support de base et une cage de rétention de produit qui s'étend axialement d'un périmètre du support de base.
3. Système selon la revendication 1, dans lequel l'assemblage de poignée (14) comporte un manche de poignée et une partie de goulot, ladite partie de goulot étant disposée entre le manche de poignée et la structure de support verticale.
4. Système selon la revendication 3, dans lequel la partie de goulot a une surface de coupe transversale inférieure à celle du manche de poignée.
5. Système selon la revendication 1, dans lequel le conteneur (11) est l'un d'un bocal, d'un carton, d'une boîte, d'une boîte de conserve ou d'un sachet.
6. Système selon la revendication 1, dans lequel l'assemblage de poignée (14) peut tourner d'une position verticale généralement parallèle à l'axe longitudinal du conteneur (11) à une position scellée à laquelle une marge supérieure de l'assemblage de poignée (14) entre dans le conteneur (11).
7. Panier de levage pour accéder à un aliment à l'intérieur d'un bocal ou d'un conteneur similaire, comprenant une base (12) raccordée à un assemblage de poignée (14) par une structure de support verticale (13), la structure de support verticale (13) se composant de deux moitiés de panier (16, 17) raccordées à la base (12) et comprenant un élément de cage (15) disposé entre l'assemblage de poignée (14) et la base (12).
8. Panier de levage selon la revendication 7, dans lequel la base comporte au moins une ouverture de drainage.

9. Panier de levage selon la revendication 8, dans lequel lesdites moitiés de panier (16, 17) se composent d'au moins une nervure s'étendant axialement de la base (12), ladite nervure supportant l'élément de cage (15), l'élément de cage (15) comprenant au moins une aile s'étendant généralement transversalement à la nervure. 5
10. Panier de levage selon la revendication 8, dans lequel l'assemblage de poignée (14) comprend un goulot flexible disposé à l'intersection de la structure de support verticale (13) et de l'assemblage de poignée (14), le goulot flexible pouvant tourner entre une première position verticale et une position de stockage. 10 15
11. Méthode de remplissage d'un système de conditionnement alimentaire, le système de conditionnement alimentaire comprenant un conteneur extérieur et un panier de levage intérieur, dans laquelle le panier de levage intérieur est dimensionné pour entrer dans le conteneur extérieur, le conteneur extérieur définissant une zone de support d'aliment, la méthode comprenant : 20 25
- l'ouverture d'un panier de levage, ledit panier de levage comprenant une première moitié de panier et une seconde moitié de panier, ladite première moitié de panier et ladite seconde moitié de panier étant raccordées à une première extrémité à une base de panier de levage, dans laquelle l'ouverture comprend la rotation de la première moitié de panier à l'écart de la seconde moitié de panier ; 30
 - le placement d'un produit alimentaire à l'intérieur d'une première moitié de panier ; 35
 - la rotation de la seconde moitié de panier en alignement avec la première moitié de panier ; et
 - le placement du panier de levage dans le conteneur extérieur. 40
12. Méthode selon la revendication 11, dans laquelle le panier de levage intérieur comprend une partie de poignée pouvant tourner, la méthode comprenant en outre la rotation de la partie de poignée à une position rétractée à l'intérieur de la zone de support d'aliment. 45
13. Méthode selon la revendication 11, comprenant en outre la fixation d'un joint de conteneur à travers une extrémité ouverte du conteneur extérieur. 50

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Fig. 1

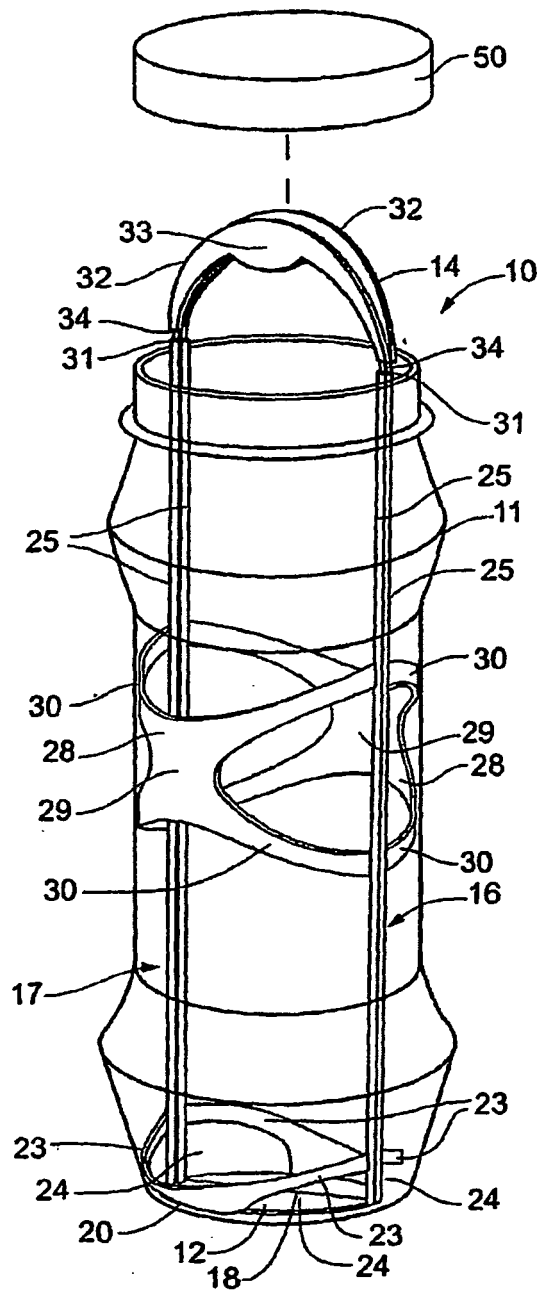


Fig. 2

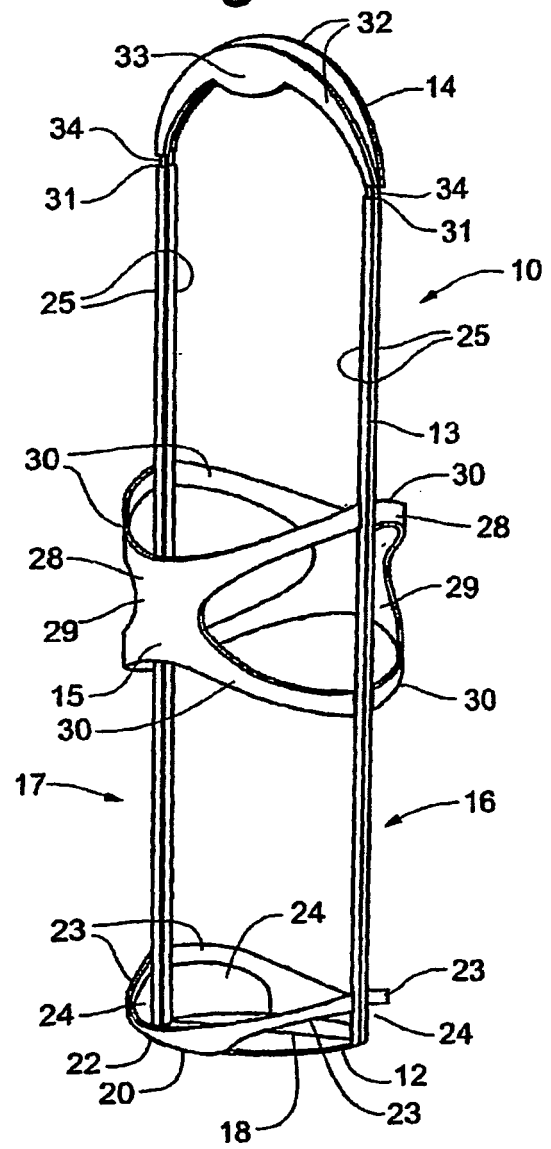


Fig. 3

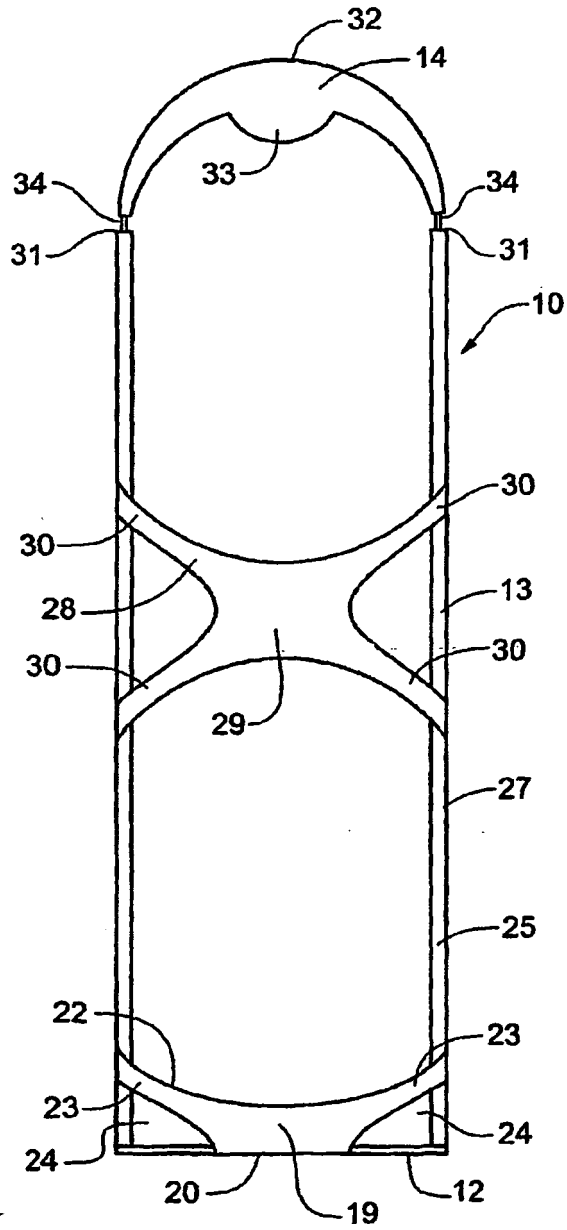
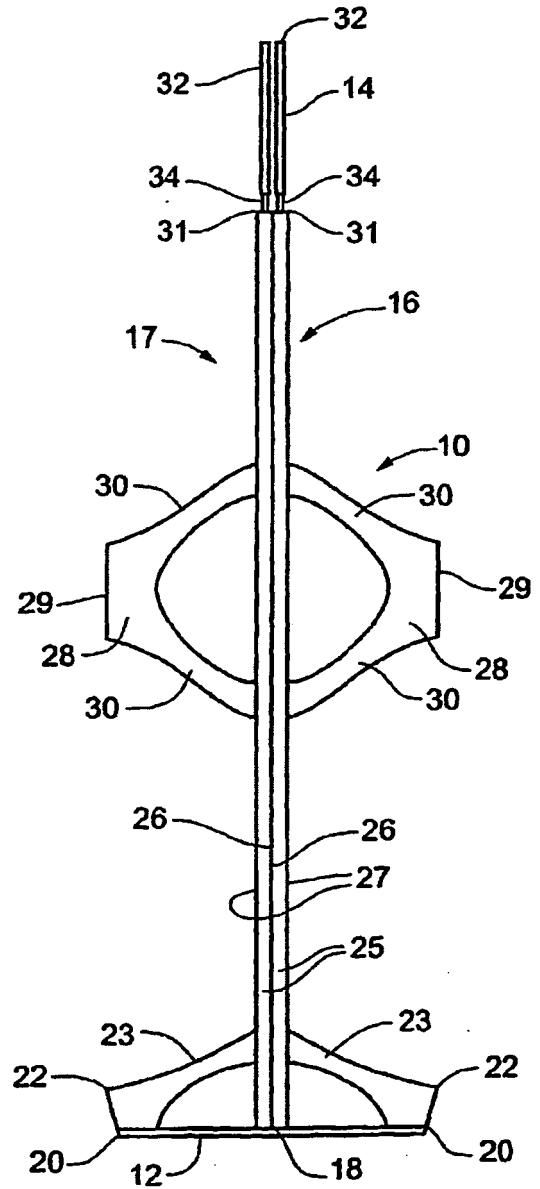


Fig. 4



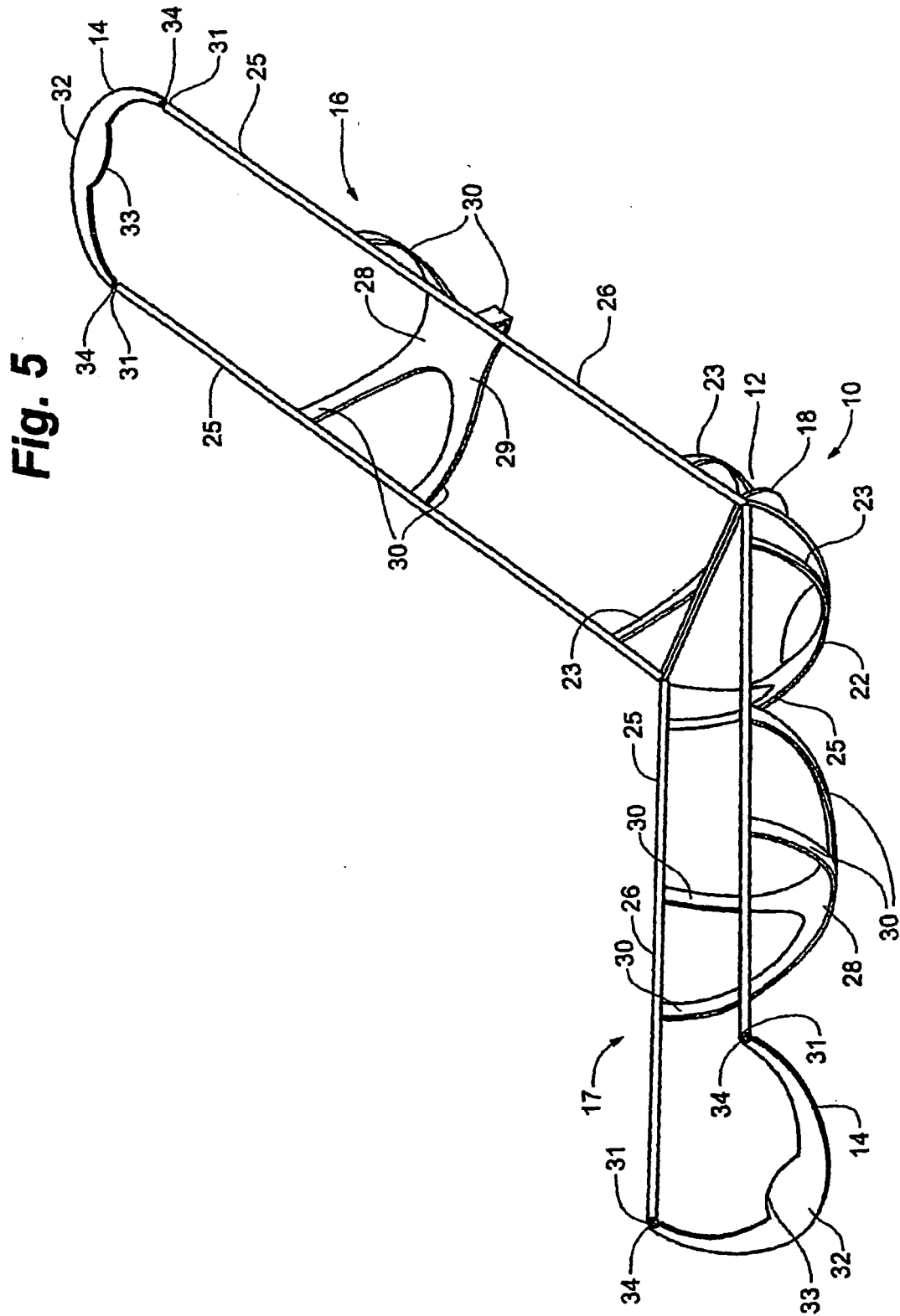


Fig. 6

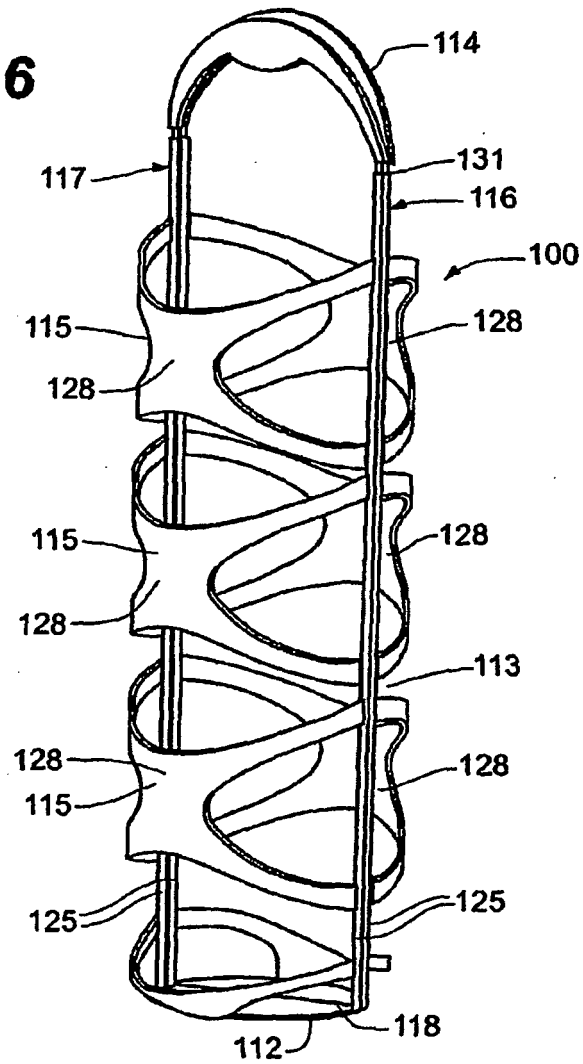
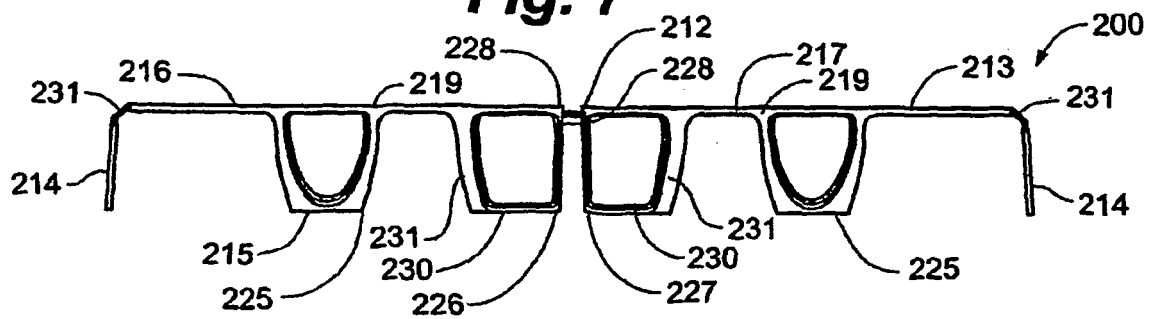
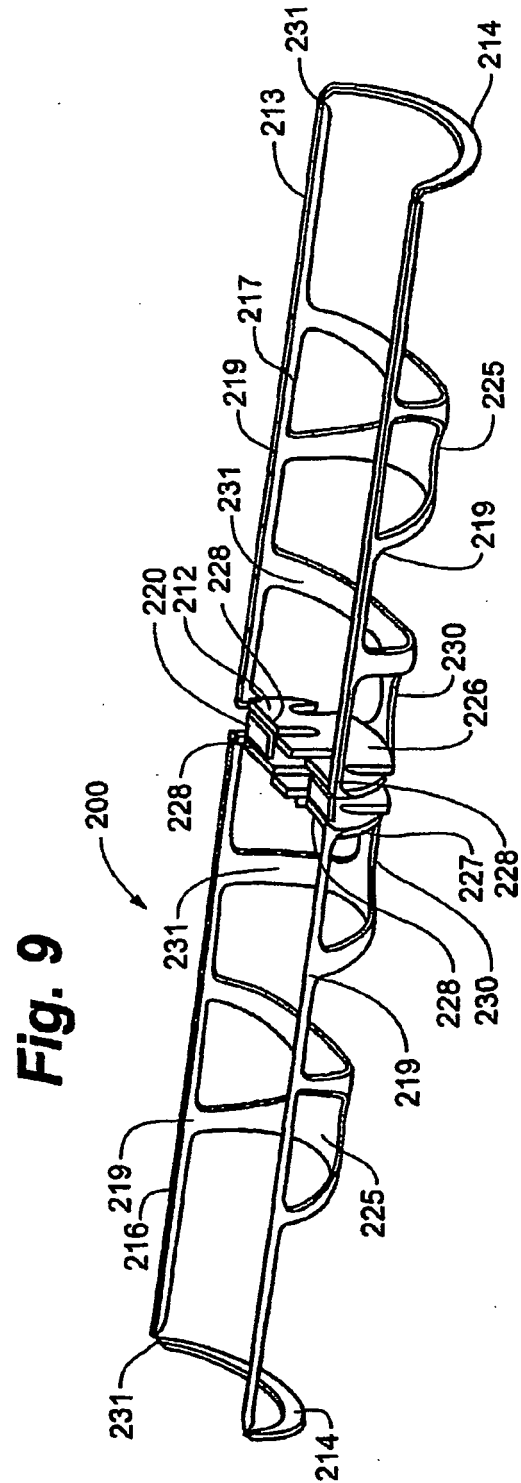
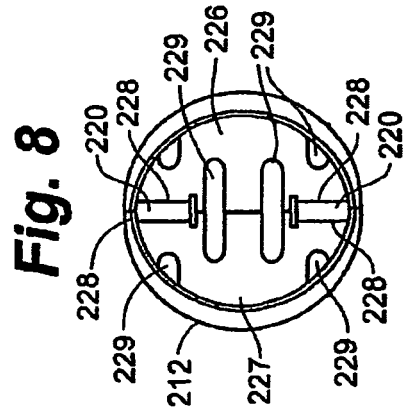


Fig. 7





REFERENCES CITED IN THE DESCRIPTION

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