

Description

[0001] The present invention relates to a food container provided with an eating implement holder, particularly but not exclusively to be used in the field of the packaging of ice creams, dairy products such as yogurt, diced fruit, olives, small shellfish and crustaceans such as shrimps.

[0002] Conventional food containers are composed essentially of an open tray having various shapes and dimensions and of a closure lid. The tray and the lid can be mutually coupled along their respective edges. Containers of this type are currently used to package the above cited kinds of food. In many cases, the food is consumed shortly after purchase and for this reason the containers are provided with an adapted eating implement preferably made of plastics, for removing the food from the tray separated from the lid. Currently, a typical eating implement is, for example, inserted between the lid and a film that is heat-sealed to the edges of the lid. Accordingly, in order to access the implement it is necessary to separate the lid of the tray and then break the film. Other containers have an interlocking coupling of the implement on the face of the lid that is directed toward the inside of the container. In these cases, on the inward face there are multiple small protrusions between which the implement is positioned during packaging. Another container is disclosed in Italian utility model application No. VI2000U0000017 to this same Applicant. In such container, the implement, which can be for example a spoon or a small fork which is in any case made of plastics, adheres weakly to the face of the lid that is directed toward the inside of the container. This is allowed by the overmolding technique, which is widely known in the field of the processing of plastics and specifically consists in injecting, above and around the pre-formed implement, the plastics that constitutes the lid. Separation of the utensil from the lid is accordingly greatly facilitated, since it is sufficient to apply a slight manual pressure in the opposite direction with respect to the slight camber of the lid. In this manner, the implement becomes ready for use.

[0003] The main drawback found in the first example cited above relates to the fact that tampering with the container in order to take possession of the implement is not avoided. In relation to the other known examples, it is noted that the implement remains in any case in contact with the food contained in the container.

[0004] The aim of the present invention is to provide a food container, provided with a holder for the eating implement, that prevents the removal of the implement without causing evident tampering of container and, at the same time, prevents contact of the utensil with the food contained in the container.

[0005] An object of the invention is to provide a container that limits production costs, for example by eliminating the heat-sealing operations on the container.

[0006] This aim, this object and others that will be-

come better apparent hereinafter are achieved by a food container, with eating implement holder as claimed in the appended claims.

[0007] Further characteristics and advantages of the present invention will become better apparent from the description of an embodiment thereof, illustrated only by way of non-limitative example in the accompanying drawings, wherein:

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a container according to the invention, provided with a spoon-like implement;

Figure 2 is a top view of the container of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a top view of a container according to the invention, provided with a fork-like implement;

Figure 4 is a detail perspective view of the lid of the container of Figure 1;

Figures 5, 6 and 7 are views, similar to Figure 4, of the steps for extracting the implement.

[0008] With reference to the accompanying figures, the container, generally designated by the reference numeral 8, comprises a frustum-shaped open containment tray 9 and a circular flat closure lid 10. The tray and the lid can be coupled along respective edges 11.

[0009] Both the tray and the lid may have any shape, size, etc. without thereby abandoning the scope of the present invention.

[0010] The container 8 is provided with a holder, generally designated by the reference numeral 12, for the eating implement adapted to remove the food contained in the container 8. Such implement may be, for example, a spoon 13, as shown in Figure 2, or a fork 14, as shown in Figure 3. The holder 12 is constituted by two diametrically opposite tabs 15 and 16, that protrude from a face 17 of the lid 10 that is directed toward the inside of the container 8. In the active position, as shown particularly in Figures 2 and 3, the tabs 15 and 16 retain the implement 13 and 14 in a position in which it is adjacent to the face 17. In the inactive position, as shown particularly in Figures 5, 6 and 7, the tabs 15 and 16 allow the manual removal of the implement 13 and 14 from the holder 12.

[0011] In detail, on the face 17, at each one of the tabs 15 and 16 and in a symmetrical position, there are two pins 18, that, by protruding at right angles from the face 17, are adapted to center the implement 13, 14 on the face 17.

[0012] The tabs 15 and 16 are constituted by perimetricaly contoured blades, that are flexibly connected to the face 17. This connection is provided during the manufacture of the lid 10 and consists of portions 19, which act substantially as a hinge and are joined respectively to the face 17 and to the tabs 15 and 16.

[0013] On the opposite sides of the tabs 15 and 16, proximate to the connection to the face 17, there are recesses 20, which engage the edge of the implement 13, 14. These recesses 20 are in fact provided with mu-

tually opposite teeth 21, which grip the edge of the implement 13, 14 that is directed toward the face 17 of the lid 10.

[0014] The tabs 15 and 16 have different extensions in order to allow the user to extract the implement 13, 14 preferably always from the side where the handle is located.

[0015] As shown particularly in Figures 2 and 3, the tab 16 that covers respectively the bowl of the spoon 13 or the prongs of the fork 14 in fact adheres more to the profile of the spoon 13 and of the fork 14, while the tab 15 that covers the handle region of the implement 13, 14 is larger, so that the user is invited almost automatically to lift it.

[0016] Preferably, the lid 10 and the tabs 15 and 16 are made of transparent materials so as to allow direct viewing of the implement 13 and 14.

[0017] With particular reference to Figures 4 - 7, the operation of the container is as follows.

[0018] Once the lid 10 has been separated from the corresponding tray 9, then, with a slight lifting action, the tab 15 is moved into the position of Figure 5, so as to disengage the teeth 21 of the tab 15 from the implement 13.

[0019] The implement moves, due to the tab 16, into an inclined position that is slightly raised with respect to the face 17.

[0020] At this point it is sufficient to grip the implement 13 with one hand in order to extract it with a simple pulling action, as shown in Figure 7.

[0021] In practice it has been observed that the container provided with the described holder achieves the intended aim and object, since it prevents the removal of the implement without causing evident tampering of the container and, at the same time, prevents any contact of the implement with the contained food. The container, according to the invention, significantly reduces production costs with respect to conventional containers, wherein the holders are produced by heat-sealing operations. Finally, it has also been shown that the insertion of the utensil in the container during its packaging and its extraction by the user are extremely simple and easy operations.

[0022] In practice, the materials used, as well as the contingent shapes and dimensions, may be any according to requirements.

Claims

1. A food container, with eating implement holder comprising an open tray for containing food and a lid for closure, that can be mutually coupled along the edges, **characterized in that** said holder comprises two diametrically opposite tabs that protrude from the face of said lid that is directed toward the inside of said container, said tabs retaining an implement adjacent to said inward face in their active

position and allowing the manual extraction of said implement in their inactive position.

2. The container according to claim 1, **characterized in that** said tabs comprise blades that are perimetrically contoured and are flexibly connected, along at least one side, to said face of said lid by means of small portions that act as a hinge.
3. The container according to one or more of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** said blades have recesses, on their opposite sides, proximate to the side connected to said face, said recesses being provided with mutually opposite teeth for engaging the edge of said implement that is directed toward said face.
4. The container according to one or more of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** said tab for covering the handle of said implement protrudes laterally with respect to it so as to be easily gripped by the user's fingers in order to lift it.
5. The container according to one or more of the preceding claims, **characterized in that** it comprises two pins, for each one of said tabs, said pins being formed in a symmetrical position, protruding at right angles from said face, and allowing the centering of said implement on said face.

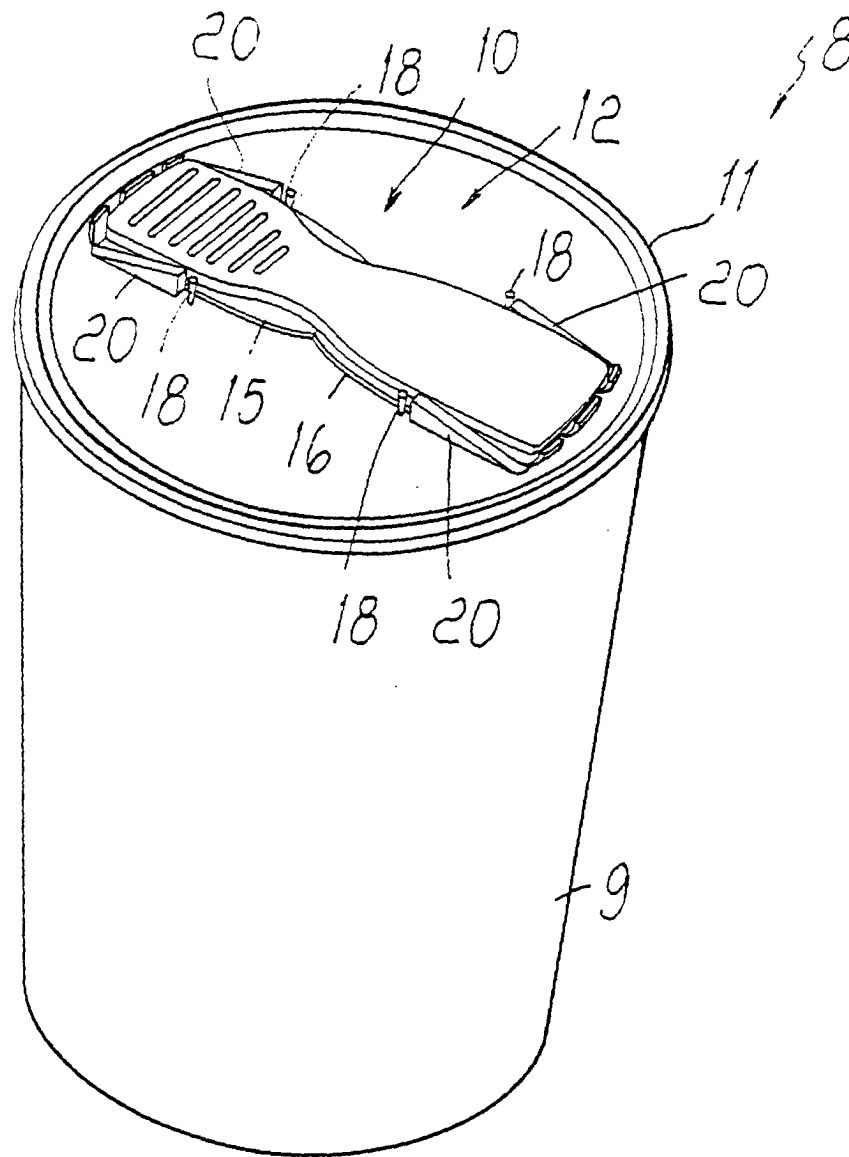
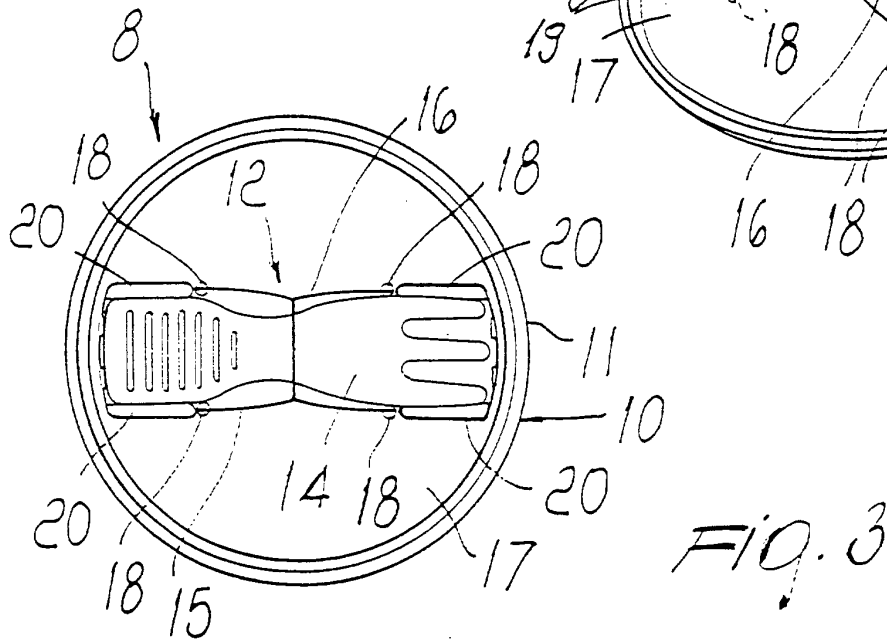
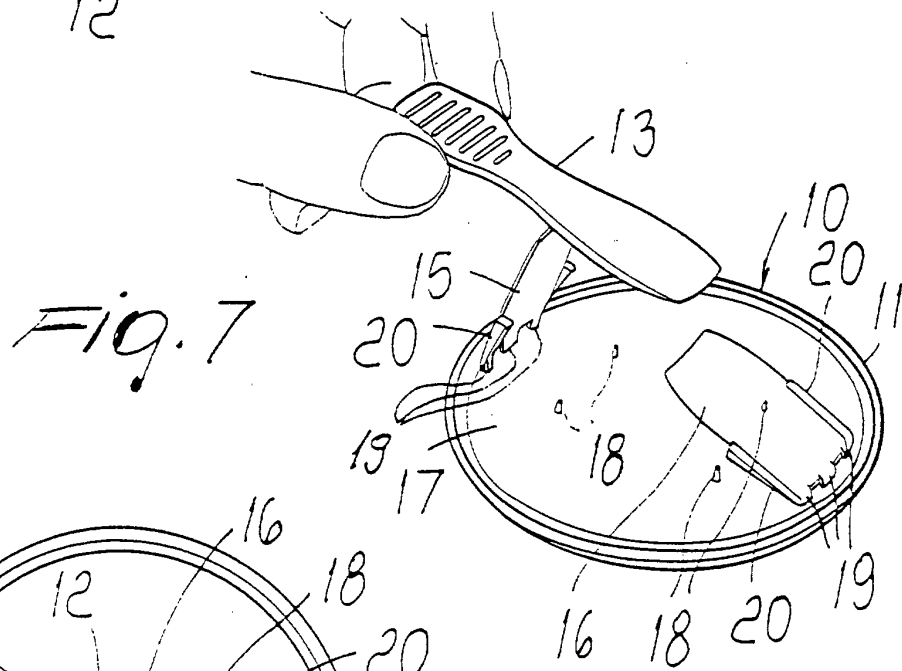
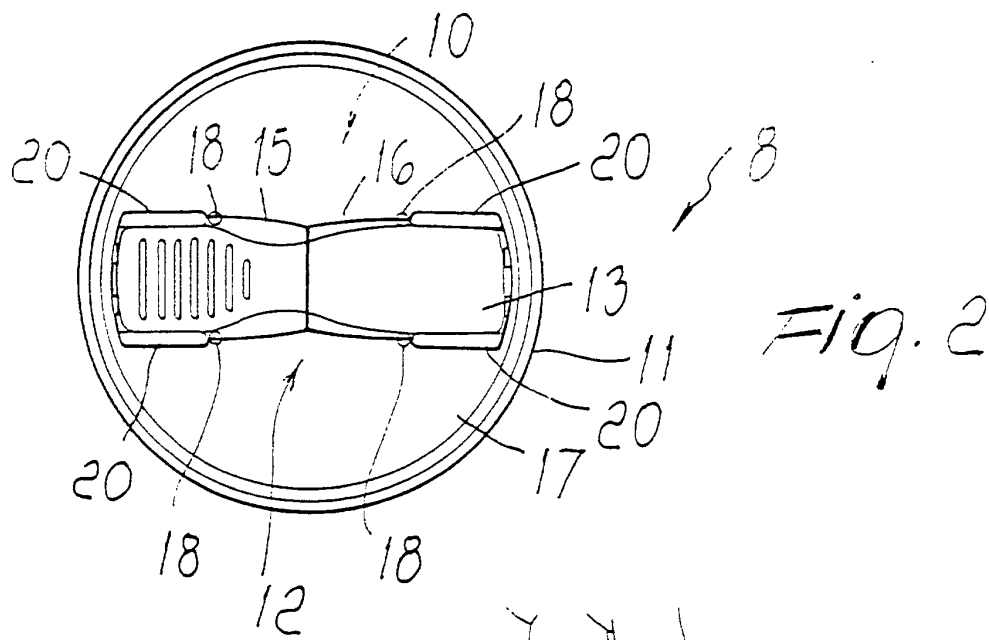
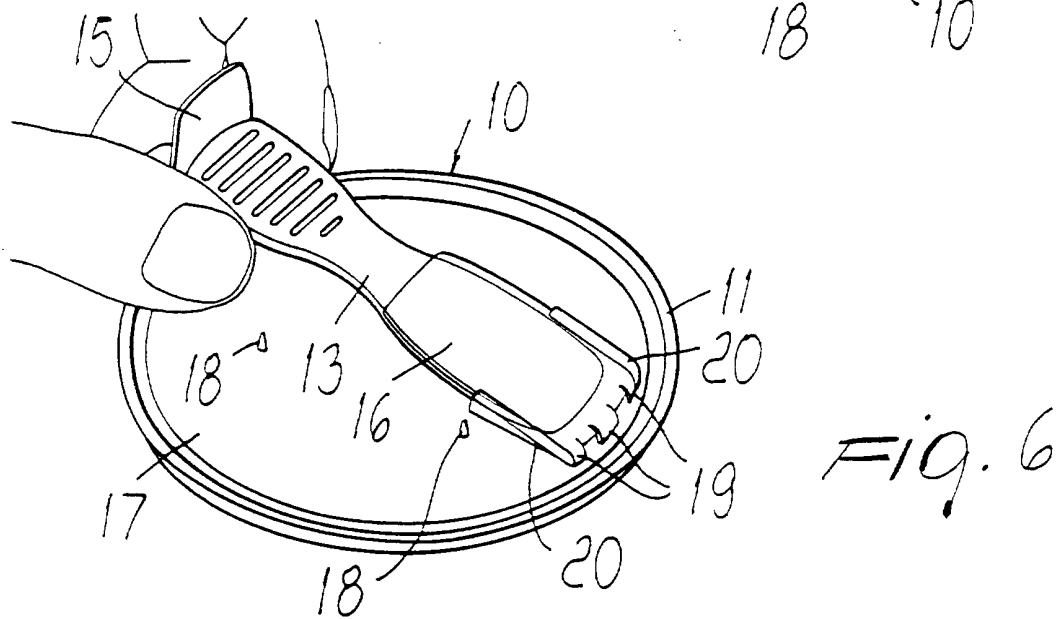
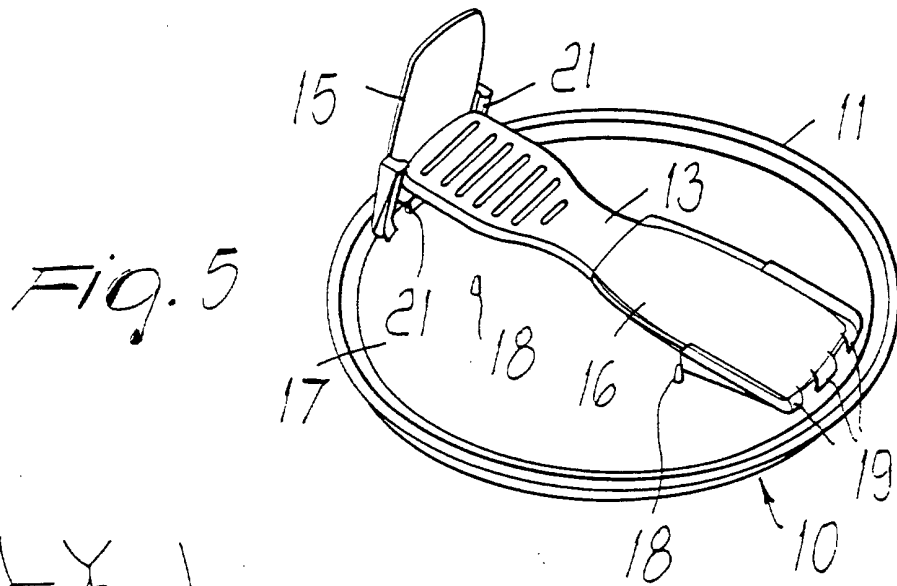
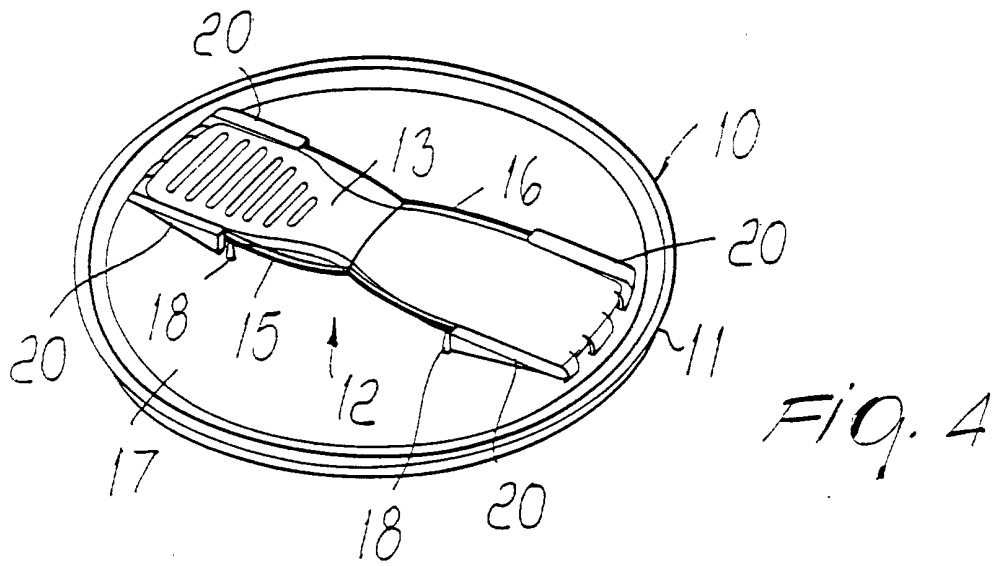


Fig. 1







European Patent
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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 01 12 7292

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.7)
A	GB 1 349 332 A (FIRST DYNAMICS) 3 April 1974 (1974-04-03) * page 2, line 116 - line 118; figure 4 * -----	1	B65D51/24
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.7)
			B65D
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search	Date of completion of the search	Examiner	
THE HAGUE	25 February 2002	Martens, L	
CATEGORY OF CITED DOCUMENTS X : particularly relevant if taken alone Y : particularly relevant if combined with another document of the same category A : technological background O : non-written disclosure P : intermediate document T : theory or principle underlying the invention E : earlier patent document, but published on, or after the filing date D : document cited in the application L : document cited for other reasons & : member of the same patent family, corresponding document			

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**ANNEX TO THE EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT
ON EUROPEAN PATENT APPLICATION NO.**

EP 01 12 7292

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned European search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on

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25-02-2002

Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
GB 1349332	A	03-04-1974	NONE

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For more details about this annex : see Official Journal of the European Patent Office, No. 12/82