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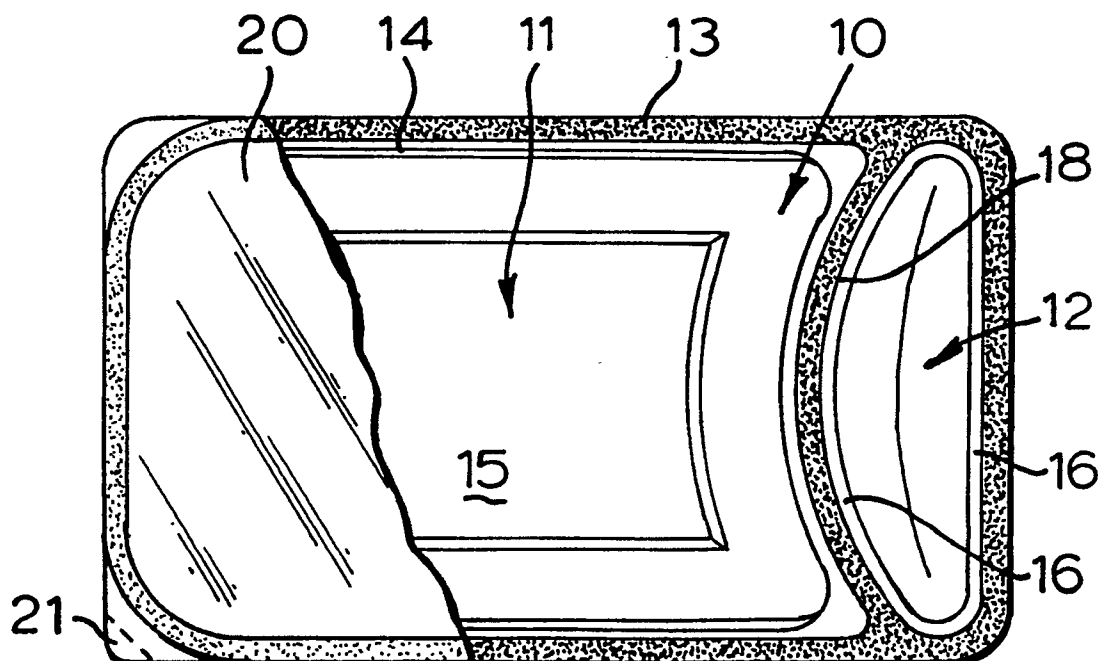
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(54) **Snack-food packaging.**

(57) A snack-food packaging particularly suitable for snack-foods having two components which cannot be stored together, such as pieces of a dry snack-food and a liquid dip therefor. The packaging has a shell (10) moulded from a plastics material to define first and second open-topped containers (11 and 12) with a flange (13) extending around the mouths to the containers. A tapering gap 19 exists between the containers, into which a consumer may press his fingers, to hold the container, the region (18) of the flange (13) flexing if necessary to widen the gap (19). A strippable cover sheet (20) is sealed to the flange (13) to maintain the contents of the containers wholly separate until the cover is stripped.

FIG.1



SNACK-FOOD PACKAGING

This invention relates to a packaged snack-food, and also to packaging suitable for the transport and sale of a manufactured snack-food.

The term 'snack-food' is used herein to refer to a foodstuff intended for casual consumption, as distinct from being or forming a part of a proper meal; the term thus refers to a foodstuff which is intended to be picked up for eating with the fingers rather than by using any utensils and which normally is solid and in a number of small, essentially bite-sized pieces.

In view of the increasing demand for snack-foods, the producers of such foodstuffs are constantly striving to satisfy that demand, by producing new forms of snack-foods, and better ways of presenting such products to consumers so as to make the products more attractive, and so more appealing. Most solid snack-foods, whether in one piece such as a bar or in many pieces such as potato- or cereal-based products, are commonly sold in the United Kingdom packaged in sealed bags of appropriate sizes, manufactured from, or coated with, plastics materials, whereby the snack-food may be contained in an hermetically-sealed environment within the package, to prevent deterioration of the product. For example, potato crisps (chips) and a wide range of other potato- or cereal-based products are all packaged and marketed in this way. Though printing may cover the greater part of the area of the packaging, in the case of packaging made from a transparent plastics material, it is a common practice to leave a part of the area of the packaging clear of all printing so that a consumer may have sight of the contained snack-food product.

Though bags of a wide variety of shapes and sizes are quite suitable for the packaging of essentially dry snack-food products, it is known to employ rigid or semi-rigid containers for different kinds of snack-foods having a moist or semi-liquid texture, such as flavoured yogurts, and which must be eaten with a utensil. Moreover, semi-rigid moulded plastics containers are also used for snack-foods which may be damaged in transit; for example sandwiches may be packed in this way. The open mouth of a container of this kind may be closed by a clear plastics film, allowing a consumer to view the contents, or may be closed by some other sheet-like material, printed as appropriate, such as a metal foil.

All of the above-described packaging for snack-foods are intended for use with a single kind of snack-food, either of a substantially dry character, or of a more liquid character. It is however a principal aim of the present invention to provide a packaged snack-food which may consist of two distinct components, which components are to be maintained separate until the snack-food is being consumed, as well as packaging for such a snack-food.

According to one aspect of this invention, there is provided a packaged snack-food product (as defined hereinbefore) comprising a moulded plastics material shell defining separate first and second open-topped containers, a quantity of discrete pieces of a substantially dry snack-food located in one of said containers, a flavoured sauce located in the other of the containers, and a cover sheet sealed over the first and second containers to maintain the snack-food and sauce in their respective containers separate from each other, which cover sheet is strippable from the containers to permit a consumer to gain access to the contents thereof.

It will be appreciated that the packaged snack-food product of this invention consists of two separate food components which cannot be marketed together (i.e. in the same bag or other container) without at least one of the components spoiling. For example, one of the containers may be used to accommodate potato crisps or pieces of some other similar substantially dry snack-food product such as tortilla chips, whereas the other container may accommodate a liquid or semi-liquid sauce, such as a tomato ketchup, flavoured mayonnaise or taco sauce, into which each piece of the potato crisps, chips or other product may individually be dipped, during consumption. Thus, the packaged snack-food product of this invention allows a whole new range of snack-foods to be marketed, which snack-foods could not be marketed using conventional snack-food packaging.

According to a further aspect of this invention, there is provided packaging for a snack-food which packaging comprises a semi-rigid moulded plastics material shell defining a first open-topped container for accommodating pieces of a substantially solid snack-food and further defining a second open-topped container for accommodating a sauce in which a consumer may dip pieces of the snack-food taken from the first container, the first and second containers being juxtaposed side-by-side but with a gap between the adjacent side walls of the respective containers which gap opens to the underside of the shell and is of such a size that the shell may be held in a consumer's upturned hand with at least some of the consumer's fingers located in said gap.

It will be appreciated that with the packaging of this invention, said gap must appropriately be dimensioned to permit at least partial location therewithin of some of the fingers of one hand of a consumer of the contained snack-food, whereby the consumer does not need to exert a firm grip on the packaging. However, in view of the diverse range of sizes of the fingers of likely consumers, it is preferred for the width of the gap to vary, the gap being widest nearest the opening thereto, and narrowing in the upward

direction towards the top of the packaging. In this way, the depth of entry of a consumer's fingers will depend upon the size of those fingers, but appropriate dimensioning of the gap will enable the packaging to be securely positioned on the fingers.

In the packaging of this invention, it is preferred for the first and second open-topped containers to have rounded contours, with the side walls thereof blending smoothly with each other and with a base wall. In this way, the packaging may be given a pleasing appearance and will also be comfortable to hold, when positioned on an up-turned hand with at least some of the consumer's fingers located in said gap between the adjacent side walls of the respective first and second open-topped containers.

The first open-topped container may have a considerably greater volume than the second open-topped container. Moreover, the second container may have a much more rounded profile - and perhaps substantially semi-circular in vertical transverse cross-section - to facilitate removal of a contained sauce therefrom.

The material from which the shell is moulded to define the first and second containers should be semi-rigid - that is to say, the material should be capable of holding its moulded shape during normal service use, but which material may nevertheless flex to some extent without damage, for example as the consumer's fingers are pressed into said gap. In particular, the plastics material should be resistant to cracking or splitting, and the material must also be suitable for food use. The shell may for example be made from a known form of food-quality three-layer polyester/EVOH/polyethylene material, using an injection moulding process.

Preferably, the respective mouths of the first and second open-topped containers are substantially coplanar. To that end, it is preferred for the shell to define a flange moulded integrally with the first and second containers which flange extends continuously around the mouths of both containers. Such a flange may serve as the sole interconnection between the two containers and so also define the size of the gap between the adjacent side walls of the two containers. Then, in order to allow the gap to vary to some extent, as a consumer's fingers are pressed into that gap the region of the flange between the two containers may flex, so varying the effective width of the gap.

For the purpose of containing and protecting a snack-food product within the packaging until it is to be consumed, it is preferred for the packaging to include a stripable cover sheet, extending over the mouths of the first and second open-topped containers. In the case where a flange extends continuously around the mouths of the containers, that cover sheet preferably is attached to the flange in such a way that the sheet may readily be stripped therefrom, when the product within the packaging is to be consumed.

Moreover, by being sealed to the flange extending wholly around the mouths of both containers, the contents of the two containers will be maintained quite separate, until such time as the cover sheet has been stripped and the consumer deliberately intermixes the contents of the two containers.

The packaging of this invention allows the marketing of a two-component snack-food product which otherwise could not be marketed without at least one of the components spoiling, as described above. The invention thus extends to packaging of this invention, in combination with pieces of a snack-food product accommodated in the first open-topped container, a sauce accommodated in the second open-topped container and a cover sheet sealed over the open mouths of said first and second containers, so as to maintain separate the contents of each of the two containers until such time as the cover sheet is stripped from the packaging.

By way of example only, one specific embodiment of snack-food packaging according to this invention will now be described in detail, reference being made to the accompanying drawings, in which:-

Figure 1 is a plan view on the embodiment of packaging for a two-component snack-food product;

Figure 2 is a side view on the packaging of Figure 1; and

Figure 3 is an end view on that packaging.

Referring to the drawings, it can be seen that the packaging of this invention intended for use with a two component snack-food product comprises a moulded plastics material shell 10 defining first and second open-topped containers 11 and 12 respectively. Moulded integrally with the containers 11 and 12 is a flange 13 extending wholly around the mouths of both of the containers 11 and 12 and so serving also to interconnect those two containers. The shell 10 is produced by a vacuum-forming or an injection-moulding operation from a food-grade of semi-rigid plastics material, in such a manner that the shell has relatively thin walls but has sufficient rigidity to maintain its shape and form during all ordinary use of the packaging. Such a material may comprise a three-layer sheet, of polyester/EVOH/polyethylene bonded together.

Container 11 has side walls 14 and a base wall 15, recessed to enhance the rigidity thereof. The junctions between those walls 14 and 15 are generally rounded, to ease the moulding thereof and to improve the appearance. Container 12 is of a generally semi-circular cross-sectional shape, considered on a vertical transverse section plane, defined by a pair of walls 16 blending together in a rounded base region 17.

The walls 16 of the container 12 are shaped such that the width of the container tapers, from the top where the container is widest, to the bottom.

The adjacent side walls 14 and 16 of the containers 11 and 12 are similarly curved, as best seen in Fig-

ure 1, with a portion 18 of the flange 13 extending between the upper edges of those walls. There is thus a gap 19 defined between those adjacent side walls, which gap is open from the underside of the packaging and tapers towards the flange portion 18 joining the two containers.

Open-topped container 11 is of a generally rectangular vertical cross-sectional shape, and typically has a volume of from five to ten times that of open-topped container 12. For example, the container 11 may have a volume suitable for holding about 35-40 g of potato crisps or small popadoms, and the volume of container 12 may be suitable for holding about 25-30 g of a liquid sauce, such as a flavoured mayonnaise or tomato ketchup. The gap 19 between the adjacent side walls may taper from its greatest value of about 13mm adjacent the lowermost central region of container 12, to about 8mm adjacent the flange-portion 18.

The packaging is completed by a cover 20, sealed to the upwardly facing surface of the flange 13, around each of the open-topped containers 11 and 12. Such a cover sheet may be made of a metalised polyethylene sheet, printed as appropriate to indicate the nature of the contents of the packaging and adhered to the flange 13 all around both containers by means of a heat-sealing operation. In a manner known in the art, one corner portion 21 of the flange 13 may be partially scored through, in order to facilitate removal of the cover sheet by breaking off that corner portion 21 whilst it remains adhered to the cover sheet, and then using that broken-off corner portion to strip the entire cover sheet from the packaging, as shown in Figure 2.

In use, the packaging may be used both for the transport and retail sale of a manufactured snack-food product and suitable sauce for consumption with that snack-food product, with the cover being appropriately printed in order to indicate the nature of the contents. Though the shell 10 may be transparent in order to allow a consumer to view the contents, it is preferred for the shell to be opaque; in this case the cover sheet may have one or more clear regions in order to allow a consumer to see the contents. Alternatively, the cover sheet may be metalised over the whole of its area, and be suitably printed all over.

After the cover sheet has been stripped from the shell 10, in the manner described above, the consumer may wedge the packaging on to the fingers of an upturned hand, by locating those fingers in the gap 19 between the adjacent side walls of the two containers 11 and 12 respectively. During this, either of the containers, but preferably the smaller second container 12, is disposed to overlie the palm of the hand of the consumer, the curvature of the side walls then generally following that of a group of the consumer's fingers. In this way, the consumer's fingers may be wedged in the gap 19 to stabilise the container, so

obviating the need for a consumer firmly to hold the packaging. Despite this, the likelihood of spillage or accidental dropping of the packaging is much reduced, by virtue of the wedging action of the tapering gap 19 on a consumer's fingers.

Claims

1. A packaged snack-food product comprising a moulded plastics material shell containing a quantity of discrete pieces of a substantially dry snack-food and a strippable cover sheet therefor, which packaged snack-food product is characterised in that the shell (10) defines first and second open-topped containers (11 and 12), the discrete pieces of dry snack-food are located in the first container (11), a flavoured sauce is located in the second container (12) and the cover sheet (20) is sealed over the first and second containers to maintain the snack-food and sauce in their respective containers (11 and 12) separate from each other.
2. Packaging for a snack-food which packaging comprises a semi-rigid moulded plastics material shell defining an open-topped container for accommodating pieces of a substantially solid snack-food, characterised in that the shell further defines a second open-topped container (12) for accommodating a sauce in which a consumer may dip pieces of the snack-food taken from the first container (11), the first and second containers (11 and 12) being juxtaposed side-by-side but with a gap 19 between the adjacent side walls of the respective containers which gap (19) opens to the underside of the shell (10) and is of such a size that the shell may be held in a consumer's up-turned hand with at least some of the consumer's fingers located in said gap (19).
3. Packaging according to claim 2, characterised in that the width of the gap (19) varies and is widest nearest an opening at the bottom of the packaging, and narrows in the upward direction towards the top (13) of the packaging.
4. Packaging according to claim 2 or claim 3, characterised in that the first and second open-topped containers (11 and 12) have rounded contours, with the side walls (14,16) thereof blending smoothly with each other and with a base wall (15).
5. Packaging according to any of claims 2 to 4, characterised in that the respective mouths of the first and second open-topped containers (11 and 12) are substantially co-planar.

6. Packaging according to claim 5, characterised in that the shell defines a flange (13) moulded integrally with the first and second containers which flange extends continuously around the mouths of both containers. 5
7. Packaging according to claim 6, characterised in that said flange (13) is the sole interconnection between the two containers (11 and 12), and may flex to allow the gap (19) between the containers to vary as a consumer's fingers are pressed into that gap. 10
8. Packaging according to claim 6 or claim 7, characterised in that there is provided a strippable cover sheet (20) sealed to the shell and extending over the mouths of the first and second open-topped containers. 15
9. Packaging according to claim 8, characterised in that cover sheet (20) is heat-sealed to the flange (13) in such a way that the sheet may readily be stripped therefrom to expose the contents of the containers when the product within the packaging is to be consumed. 20 25
10. Packaging according to any of claims 2 to 9, in combination with pieces of a snack-food product accommodated in the first open-topped container (11), a sauce accommodated in the second open-topped container (12), and a cover sheet (20) sealed over the open mouths of said first and second containers (11 and 12), so as to maintain separate the contents of each of the two containers until such time as the cover sheet is stripped from the packaging. 30 35

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FIG.1

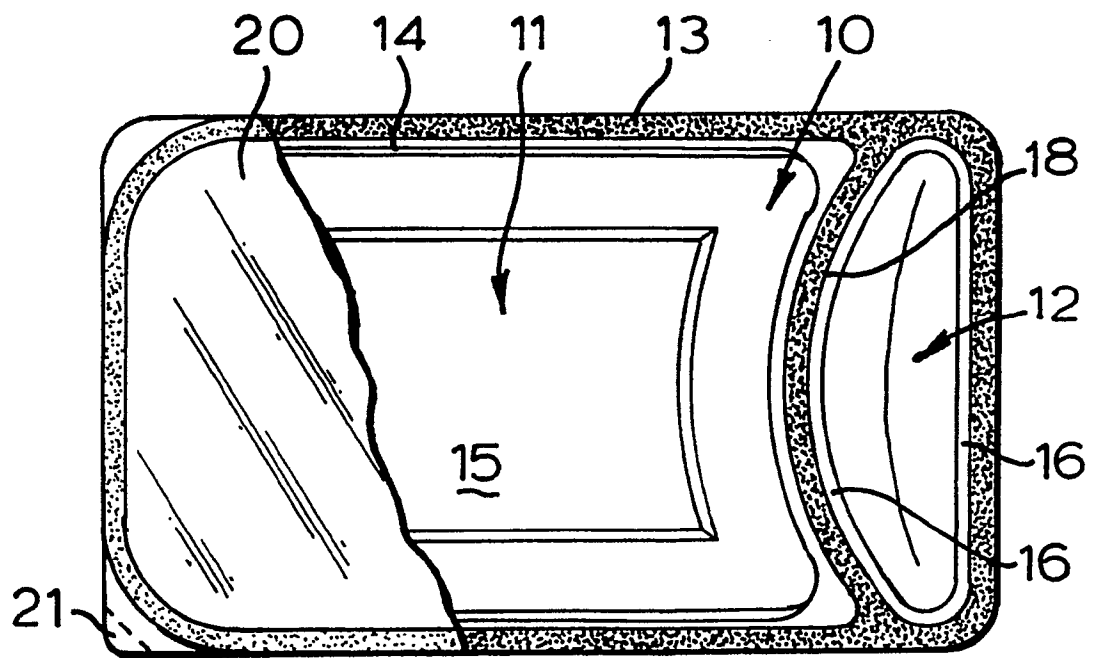


FIG.2

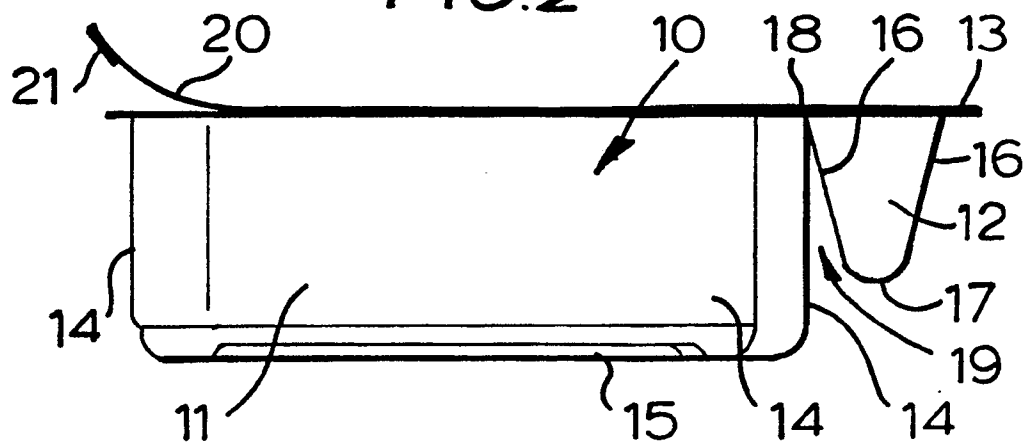


FIG.3

