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(54) **Snack-food packaging**

Verpackung für Schnellimbissprodukte

Emballage pour produit alimentaire

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FR-A- 2 461 657 **GB-A- 1 053 868**
GB-A- 1 405 341 **US-A- 3 083 821**

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Description

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

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. Two-compartment packaging for foodstuffs are known, for instance, from FR-2461657-A. There is described in this specification a moulded plastics container having two compartments, respectively for yoghurt and a fruit syrup, for example, the compartments being sealed by a foil sealed to a flange surrounding the compartments until the products are to be consumed. The package is such that the two compartments may be moved one with respect to the other to

permit the syrup to be tipped into the yoghurt, about a hinge line between the compartments, the entire package being intended to be cradled in the palm of a user's hand. This places a maximum size limit on the overall package, if it is to be gripped securely, but in any event the hinge line which allows one compartment to move with respect to the other decreases the certainty with which the package, as a whole, can be gripped with one hand whilst leaving access to the open compartment mouths.

GB-A-1 405 341 discloses a packaging according to the preamble of claim 1.

It is a principal aim of the present invention to provide a packaging for a snack-food which may consist of two distinct components, which components are to be maintained separate until the snack-food is being consumed, which packaging is particularly convenient for a consumer to use and hold, whilst using one hand to pick pieces of snack-food from the packaging and transport those pieces to his mouth.

According to the present invention, this is achieved by said packaging by the features of the characterising portion of claim 1.

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, the width of the gap must 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.

The packaged snack-food product may consist 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 packaging of this invention allows a range of snack-foods to be marketed, which snack-foods can then be consumed in a convenient manner not possible with conventional snack-food packagings.

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 posi-

tioned 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 Figure 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 adja-

cent 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. Packaging for a snack-food which packaging comprises a semi-rigid moulded plastics material shell (10) defining an open-topped container (11) for accommodating pieces of a substantially solid snack-food, and further defining a smaller, second open-topped container (12) adapted to accommodate a sauce in which a consumer may dip pieces of the snack-food taken from the first container, the first and second containers (11 and 12) being juxtaposed side-by-side but with a gap (19) between the adjacent side walls (14 and 16 respectively) of the respective containers (11 and 12) which gap opens

to the underside of the shell (10), one of said containers (11) being of such a size that the one container may be held in a consumer's up-turned hand, said containers (11 and 12) and the respective adjacent side walls (14 and 16) thereof being configured to define said gap (19) as being widest nearest the lower opening thereto and narrowing in the upward direction towards the top of the containers (11 and 12), whereby the side walls (14 and 16) may flex without damage **characterised in that** the gap is sized to allow at least some of a consumer's fingers to be wedged into the gap (19), thereby to permit secure holding of the packaging whereby the consumer does not need to exert a firm grip on the packaging.

2. Packaging according to claim 1, 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).
3. Packaging according to claim 1 or claim 2, characterized in that the respective mouths of the first and second open-topped containers (11 and 12) are substantially co-planar.
4. Packaging according to claim 3, characterised in that the shell (10) defines a flange (13) moulded integrally with the first and second containers which flange extends continuously around the mouths of both containers.
5. Packaging according to claim 4, characterised in that said flange (13) is the sole interconnection between the two containers (11 and 12), which interconnection may flex to allow the gap (19) between the containers to vary as a consumer's fingers are pressed into that gap.
6. Packaging according to claim 4 or claim 5, 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.
7. Packaging according to claim 6, 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 (11, 12) when the product within the packaging is to be consumed.
8. Packaging according to any of claims 1 to 7, 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 sec-

ond 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.

Patentansprüche

1. Packung für Schnellimbißprodukte, wobei die Packung eine halbstarre, geformte Plastikschaale (10) mit einem nach oben offenen Behälter (11) zur Aufnahme von Stücken eines im wesentlichen festen Schnellimbißproduktes und weiterhin mit einem schmaleren, zweiten, nach oben offenen Behälter (12) zur Aufnahme einer Sauce hat, in die ein Konsument Stücke des Schnellimbißproduktes aus dem ersten Behälter eintunken kann, wobei der erste und zweite Behälter (11 und 12) nebeneinander Seite an Seite, aber mit einem Spalt (19) zwischen den benachbarten Seitenwänden (14 bzw. 16) der jeweiligen Behälter (11 und 12), angeordnet sind, wobei sich der Spalt zur Unterseite der Schale (10) öffnet und einer der Behälter (11) so groß ist, daß dieser eine Behälter von einer nach oben gedrehten Hand eines Konsumenten gehalten werden kann, die Behälter (11 und 12) und deren jeweiligen benachbarten Seitenwände (14 und 16) so ausgebildet sind, daß sie die Spalte (19) bilden, welche am nächsten zu ihrer unteren Öffnung am breitesten und in der Aufwärtsrichtung zum Oberteil der Behälter (11 und 12) am schmalsten ist, wobei die Seitenwände (14 und 16) ohne Beschädigung biegsam sind, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß der Spalt so groß ist, um es mindestens einigen Fingern des Konsumenten zu ermöglichen, in den Spalt gezwängt zu werden und dadurch ein sicheres Halten der Packung zu erlauben, wobei der Konsument keinen festen Griff auf die Packung ausüben muß.
2. Packung nach Anspruch 1, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß der erste und zweite, nach oben offene Behälter (11 und 12) runde Konturen hat, dessen Seitenwände (14, 16) allmählich miteinander und mit einer Bodenfläche (15) verschmelzen.
3. Packung nach Anspruch 1 oder Anspruch 2, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß die jeweiligen Öffnungen des ersten und zweiten, nach oben offenen Behälters (11 und 12) im wesentlichen in der gleichen Ebene liegen.
4. Packung nach Anspruch 3, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß die Schale (10) einen Flansch (13) hat, der in einem Stück mit dem ersten und zweiten Behälter geformt ist, wobei sich der Flansch kontinuierlich um die Öffnungen beider Behälter herum erstreckt.

5. Packung nach Anspruch 4, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß der Flansch (13) die einzige Verbindung zwischen den zwei Behältern (11 und 12) ist, wobei die Verbindung biegsam sein kann, um zu ermöglichen, daß sich der Spalt (19) zwischen den Behältern verändern kann, wenn Finger eines Konsumenten in den Spalt gepreßt werden.

6. Packung nach Anspruch 4 oder Anspruch 5, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß eine abziehbare Aodeckfolie (20) vorgesehen ist, die mit der Schale verklebt ist und sich über die Öffnungen des ersten und zweiten nach oben offenen Behälters erstreckt.

7. Packung nach Anspruch 6, **dadurch gekennzeichnet**, daß die Abdeckfolie (20) mit dem Flansch (13) heißversiegelt ist, in einer Weise, daß die Folie leicht davon abgezogen werden kann, um die Inhalte der Behälter (11, 12) aufzudecken, wenn das Produkt aus der Packung konsumiert werden soll.

8. Packung nach einem der Ansprüche 1 bis 7 in Kombination mit Stücken eines Schnellimbißproduktes, die in dem ersten, nach oben offenen Behälter (11) befindlich sind, einer Sauce, die in dem zweiten oben offenen Behälter (12) befindlich ist, und einer Aodeckfolie (20), die über den Öffnungen des ersten und zweiten Behälters (11 und 12) aufgesiegelt ist, um die Inhalte jedes der beiden Behälter getrennt zu halten, bis zu dem Moment, in dem die Aodeckfolie von der Packung abgezogen wird.

Revendications

1. Emballage pour un aliment de cocktail, cet emballage comprenant une enveloppe en matière plastique moulée semi-rigide (10) définissant un récipient à dessus ouvert (11) pour recevoir des morceaux d'un aliment de cocktail substantiellement solide, et définissant de plus un deuxième récipient à dessus ouvert, plus petit (12), adapté pour recevoir une sauce dans laquelle un consommateur peut tremper des morceaux de l'aliment de cocktail pris dans le premier récipient, les premier et deuxième récipients (11 et 12) étant juxtaposés côte à côte, avec un espace (19) entre les parois latérales adjacentes (14 et 16, respectivement) des récipients respectifs (11 et 12), cet espace étant ouvert vers la face inférieure de l'enveloppe (10), l'un desdits récipients (11) ayant une taille telle que ce récipient puisse être contenu dans la main d'un consommateur tournée vers le haut, lesdits récipients (11 et 12) et les parois latérales adjacentes respectives (14 et 16) de ceux-ci étant configurés de façon à définir ledit espace (19), celui-ci étant le plus large au proche voisinage de l'ouverture inférieure de celui-ci, et se rétrécissant dans la direction du haut, en direction du sommet des récipients

(11 et 12), grâce auquel les parois latérales (14 et 16) peuvent s'infléchir sans détérioration, caractérisé en ce que l'espace est dimensionné de façon à permettre au moins à certains des doigts du consommateur de rentrer sous forme de coin dans l'espace (19), de façon à permettre ainsi le maintien ferme du récipient, grâce à quoi le consommateur n'a pas besoin d'exercer un agrippement fort sur l'emballage.

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2. Emballage selon la revendication 1, caractérisé en ce que les premier et deuxième récipients à dessus ouvert (11 et 12) ont des contours arrondis, les parois latérales (14, 16) de ceux-ci se joignant doucement l'une à l'autre et à une paroi de base (15).

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3. Emballage selon la revendication 1 ou la revendication 2, caractérisé en ce que les embouchures respectives des premier et deuxième récipients à dessus ouvert (11 et 12) sont sensiblement coplanaires.

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4. Récipient selon la revendication 3, caractérisé en ce que l'enveloppe (10) définit un flasque (13) moulé d'une seule pièce avec les premier et deuxième récipients, ce flasque s'étendant de façon continue autour des embouchures des deux récipients.

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5. Emballage selon la revendication 4, caractérisé en ce que ledit flasque (13) constitue la seule interconnexion entre les deux récipients (11 et 12), cette interconnexion pouvant s'infléchir de façon à permettre à l'espace (19) entre les récipients de varier lorsque les doigts d'un consommateur sont appuyés à l'intérieur de cet espace.

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6. Emballage selon la revendication 4 ou la revendication 5, caractérisé en ce qu'une feuille de couverture pouvant être arrachée (20) est présente, scellée à l'enveloppe et s'étendant sur les embouchures des premier et deuxième récipients à dessus ouvert.

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7. Emballage selon la revendication 6, caractérisé en ce que la feuille de couverture (20) est scellée thermiquement sur le flasque (13), de telle sorte que la feuille puisse facilement être arrachée de celui-ci afin d'exposer les contenus des récipients (11, 12) lorsque les produits à l'intérieur de l'emballage doivent être consommés.

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8. Emballage selon l'une quelconque des revendications 1 à 7, en combinaison avec des morceaux d'un produit d'aliment de cocktail disposés dans le premier récipient à dessus ouvert (11), une sauce étant reçue dans le deuxième récipient à dessus ouvert (12), et une feuille de couverture (20) étant scellée sur les embouchures ouvertes desdits pre-

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mier et deuxième récipients (11 et 12), de façon à maintenir séparés les contenus de chacun des deux récipients jusqu'au moment où la feuille de couverture est arrachée de l'emballage.

FIG.1

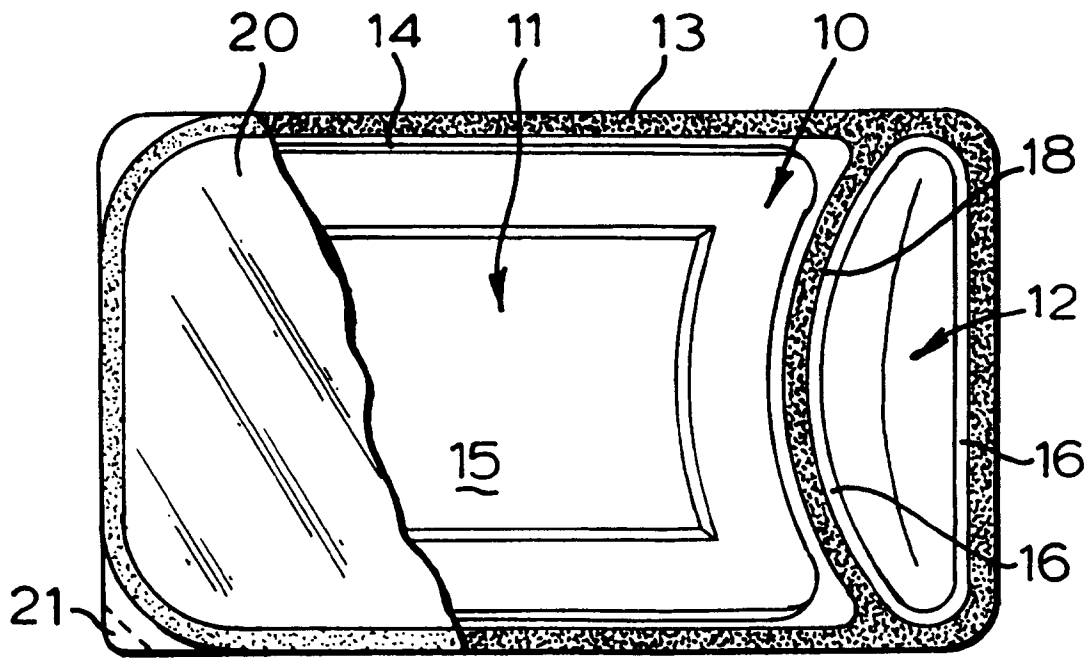


FIG.2

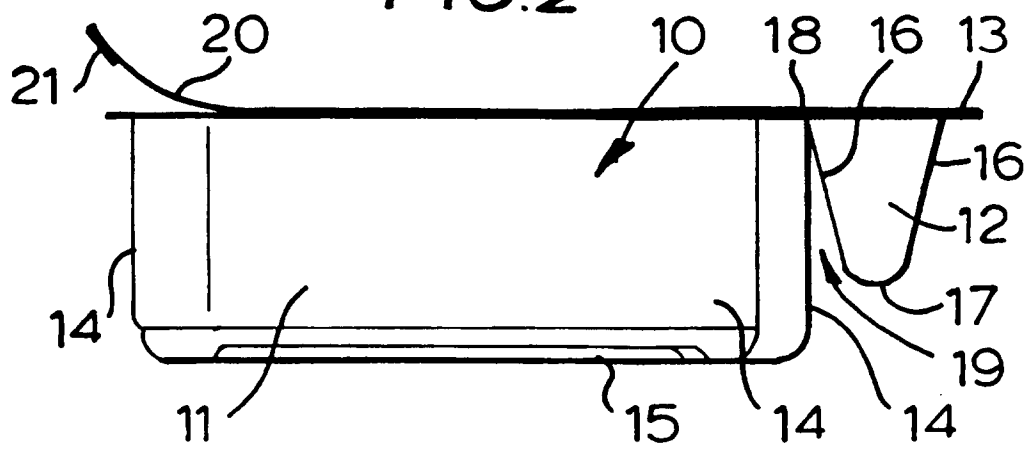


FIG.3

