

batches of raw meat, and the rattan trays need to be turned at various stages. All these operations require the oven doors to be opened while smoking is in progress. Every time the oven doors are opened, smoke escapes (and therefore needs replenishing) and the oven temperature drops. The working environment for the oven operators is therefore very hot and smoky. Indeed, the unpleasant working environment makes it difficult to find workers who will operate the existing ovens.

The problems are compounded because, in large scale production facilities, a number of such ovens are used, so doors are continuously being opened.

The racks supporting the rattan trays do not allow automatic turning of the rattan trays. Accordingly, to turn the rattan trays, it is necessary to open the oven doors. With the doors open it is possible to access the rattan trays in the racks to turn the trays. However, the oven doors are open and need to be kept open whilst the rattan trays are being turned.

Known ovens use two layers of trays, a bottom layer and an upper layer stacked above the bottom layer. The bottom layer needs to be as close as possible to a charcoal bed in the base of the oven to allow sufficient heat from the charcoal to reach the upper layer of trays. The space between the bottom layer of trays and the charcoal bed is, therefore, small. It is common practice in such a system for the trays on the bottom level to be stocked with meat which is in its first stage of cooking and for the upper layer of trays to be stocked with meat which has already been cooked on the bottom layer. The meat on the upper layer is between 60 and 70% cooked. Maintenance of such an oven is extremely difficult as the fixtures inside the oven

supporting the rattan trays become clogged with meat which slips from the rattan trays and which also drops into the charcoal bed.

Some manufacturers have, in the past, attempted to build large scale ovens but have found that control of the temperature within the oven is difficult because of the size of the oven. To reduce this problem, partition walls have been provided in the ovens to maintain the spaces between the partitions within the required temperature range. The provision of such partition walls is inconvenient, restricts the amount of space available to an operator within the oven and makes maintenance procedures more difficult.

The present invention seeks to overcome the above problems and provides a method of cooking a foodstuff using a cooking apparatus comprising an oven and a conveyor disposed partially within the oven, a first part of the conveyor located outside the oven comprising a handling station and a second part of the conveyor located inside the oven comprising a cooking station, which method comprises the steps of: providing a supply of raw or partially cooked foodstuff at the handling station; locating the foodstuff on the conveyor at the handling station; transporting the foodstuff on the conveyor from the handling station into the oven; cooking the foodstuff on the cooking station of the conveyor in the oven; transporting the foodstuff from the cooking station through and out of the oven and back to the handling station.

In order that the present invention may be more readily understood, embodiments thereof will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:



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The present invention seeks to overcome the above problems and provides a method of cooking a foodstuff using a cooking apparatus comprising an oven having an enclosure with at least one opening and a conveyor disposed partially within the oven, a first part of the conveyor located outside the oven comprising a handling station and a second part of the conveyor located inside the oven comprising a cooking station, which method comprises the steps of: providing a supply of raw or partially cooked foodstuff at the handling station; locating the foodstuff on the conveyor at the handling station; transporting the foodstuff on the conveyor from the handling station through the at least one opening and into the oven; cooking the foodstuff on the cooking station of the conveyor in the oven; transporting the foodstuff from the cooking station through either the at least one opening or other opening and out of the oven and back to the handling station; and preventing heat and/or smoke escaping through the at least one opening by the use of an extractor unit operable to

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remove escaping heat and/or smoke through a hood located adjacent the at least one opening.

The present invention further provides a cooking apparatus comprising an oven for cooking a foodstuff and a conveyor for continuously transporting the foodstuff, the oven comprising: an enclosure having at least one opening; means comprising an extractor unit to prevent heat and/or smoke escaping through the at least one opening; and the conveyor having a handling portion located externally of the enclosure and a cooking portion located within the enclosure, the conveyor transporting the foodstuff from the handling station, through the at least one opening and into the enclosure through either the at least one opening or another opening and out of the enclosure, the foodstuff being cooked whilst in the enclosure, said extractor unit being operable to remove escaping heat and/or smoke through a hood located adjacent the at least one opening.

In order that the present invention may be more readily understood, embodiments thereof will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

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remove escaping heat and/or smoke through a hood located adjacent the at least one opening.

The present invention further provides a cooking apparatus comprising an oven for cooking a foodstuff and a conveyor for continuously transporting the foodstuff, the oven comprising: an enclosure having at least one opening; means comprising an extractor unit to prevent heat and/or smoke escaping through the at least one opening; and the conveyor having a handling portion located externally of the enclosure and a cooking portion located within the enclosure, the conveyor transporting the foodstuff from the handling station, through the at least one opening and into the enclosure through either the at least one opening or another opening and out of the enclosure, the foodstuff being cooked whilst in the enclosure, said extractor unit being operable to remove escaping heat and/or smoke through a hood located adjacent the at least one opening.

In order that the present invention may be more readily understood, embodiments thereof will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

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Date : 20 MAY 1996

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means to prevent heat and/or smoke escaping through the at least one opening; and the conveyor having a handling portion located externally of the enclosure and a cooking portion located within the enclosure, through either the at least one opening or another opening and out of the enclosure, the foodstuff being cooked whilst in the enclosure.

In order that the present invention may be more readily understood, embodiments thereof will now be described, by way of example, with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:

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the factory housing the oven. This provides an much cleaner and cooler working environment.

The chain conveyor 2 is located over the base 3 and describes a circuit entering the oven 1 through the open end 7, travelling the length of one side wall 4, turning through 180° at the end wall 5, travelling the length of the other side wall 4', exiting the oven 1 at the open end 7, turning through 180° outside of the oven 1 and then re-entering the oven 1 to complete the circuit.

The chain conveyor 2 comprises a sprocketed drive wheel 8 located outside the oven 1 at the open end 7 thereof and a guide wheel 9 located within the oven 1 toward the end wall 5. A drive chain 10 loops around the drive wheel 8 and the idler wheel 9. By driving the drive wheel 8, the drive chain 10 follows the above described circuit around the drive wheel 8 and the idler wheel 9.

A guide rail 11 is mounted at the same height as the drive chain 10 above the base 3. The guide rail 11 defines a wider circuit than the above described drive chain circuit. The guide rail 11 is equi-spaced from the drive chain 10 throughout the circuit.

A carriage 12, as shown in Figures 2 & 3, comprising a pair of parallel rods 13a, 13b interconnected by cross-members 14 is mounted on the chain conveyor 2. The cross-members 14 are regularly spaced apart along the length of the carriage 12. The cross-members 14 are spaced apart by a small distance sufficient to stop the meat on the rattan trays from slipping through the cross-members 14 and onto the charcoal below thereby preventing wastage of meat. Additionally, less maintenance of the oven and the

conveyor system is required as less meat falls into the charcoal bed and parts of the conveyor system.

Along one of the rods 13b, a prop bar 15 extends upwardly from one end of each of the cross-members 14. The prop bars 15 are inclined by approximately 60° to the horizontal but remain within a vertical plane which extends through the rod 13b. A third rod 16 extends parallel to the first and second rods 13a, 13b and caps the ends of all of the prop bars 15. A pair of struts 17a, 17b extend from the endmost cross-members 14 to respective ones of the endmost prop bars 15 to provide the structure with the requisite rigidity.

The inclination of the prop bars 15 allows rattan trays to be located between the cross-members 14 and leant against a respective prop bar 15 so that a number of rattan trays can be stacked on a single carriage 12.

The cross-members 14 may be formed with downwardly extending lugs 18 for engaging with the chain conveyor 2. The carriage 12 thereby accompanies the drive chain 10 in its motion around the circuit.

A number of such carriages 12 are fixed to the chain conveyor 2 around the drive chain 10 so that rattan trays 16 may be loaded on and retrieved from the chain conveyor 2 when the carriages 12 are outside the oven. The chain conveyor 2 is driven continuously and provides, for example, a smoking time between thirty minutes and one hour. When the speed at which the drive chain 10 is driven is increased, then the smoking time is reduced and vice versa.

CLAIMS:

1. A cooking apparatus comprising an oven for cooking a foodstuff and a conveyor for continuously transporting the foodstuff, the oven comprising: an enclosure having at least one opening; means comprising an extractor unit to prevent heat and/or smoke escaping through the at least one opening; and the conveyor having a handling portion located externally of the enclosure and a cooking portion located within the enclosure, the conveyor transporting the foodstuff from the handling station, through the at least one opening and into the enclosure, through either the at least one opening or another opening and out of the enclosure, the foodstuff being cooked whilst in the enclosure, said extractor unit being operable to remove escaping heat and/or smoke through a hood located adjacent the at least one opening.

2. A method of cooking a foodstuff using a cooking apparatus comprising an oven having an enclosure with at least one opening and a conveyor disposed partially within the oven, a first part of the conveyor located outside the oven comprising a handling station and a second part of the conveyor located inside the oven comprising a cooking station, which method comprises the steps of: providing a supply of raw or partially cooked foodstuff at the handling station; locating the foodstuff on the conveyor at the handling station; transporting the foodstuff on the conveyor from the handling station through the at least one opening and into the oven; cooking the foodstuff on the cooking station of the conveyor in the oven; transporting the foodstuff from the cooking station through either the at least one opening or other opening and out of the oven and back to the handling station; and preventing heat and/or smoke escaping through the at least one opening by



the use of an extractor unit operable to remove escaping heat and/or smoke through a hood located adjacent the at least one opening.

3. A method according to Claim 2, wherein escaping heat and/or smoke is reintroduced into the oven.

4. A method according to Claim 2 or Claim 3, wherein, in use, the foodstuff is continuously transported into and out of the oven by the conveyor to provide a continuous supply of partially cooked, or cooked, foodstuff at the handling station.

5. A method according to any one of Claims 2 to 4, wherein the conveyor transports the foodstuff in a circuit from the handling station to the cooking station and back to the handling station.

6. A method of cooking a foodstuff according to any one of Claims 2 to 5, wherein the foodstuff is inspected whilst on the handling station and, if required, the foodstuff is allowed to be transported back through the oven for further cooking without intervention.

7. A method according to any one of Claims 2 to 6, wherein partially cooked foodstuff being transported out of the oven is manipulated on the handling station prior to re-entering the oven.

8. A method according to Claim 7, wherein the partially cooked foodstuff is manipulated by being turned.

9. A method according to any one of Claims 2 to 8, wherein the cooking step includes smoking the foodstuff.





10

the use of an extractor unit operable to remove escaping heat and/or smoke through a hood located adjacent the at least one opening.

3. A method according to Claim 2, wherein escaping heat and/or smoke is reintroduced into the oven.

4. A method according to Claim 2 or Claim 3, wherein, in use, the foodstuff is continuously transported into and out of the oven by the conveyor to provide a continuous supply of partially cooked, or cooked, foodstuff at the handling station.

5. A method according to any one of Claims 2 to 4, wherein the conveyor transports the foodstuff in a circuit from the handling station to the cooking station and back to the handling station.

6. A method of cooking a foodstuff according to any one of Claims 2 to 5, wherein the foodstuff is inspected whilst on the handling station and, if required, the foodstuff is allowed to be transported back through the oven for further cooking without intervention.

7. A method according to any one of Claims 2 to 6, wherein partially cooked foodstuff being transported out of the oven is manipulated on the handling station prior to re-entering the oven.

8. A method according to Claim 7, wherein the partially cooked foodstuff is manipulated by being turned.

9. A method according to any one of Claims 2 to 8, wherein the cooking step includes smoking the foodstuff.





10

handling station; transporting the foodstuff on the conveyor from the handling station through the at least one opening and into the oven; cooking the foodstuff on the cooking station of the conveyor in the oven; transporting the foodstuff from the cooking station through either the at least one opening or other opening and out of the oven and back to the handling station; and preventing heat and/or smoke escaping through the at least one opening.

6. A method according to Claim 5, wherein, in use, the foodstuff is continuously transported into and out of the oven by the conveyor to provide a continuous supply of partially cooked, or cooked, foodstuff at the handling station.

7. A method according to Claim 5 or 6, wherein the conveyor transports the foodstuff in a circuit from the handling station to the cooking station and back to the handling station.

8. A method of cooking a foodstuff according to any one of Claims 5 to 7, wherein the foodstuff is inspected whilst on the handling station and, if required, the foodstuff is allowed to be transported back through the oven for further cooking without intervention.

9. A method according to any one of Claims 5 to 8, wherein partially cooked foodstuff being transported out of the oven is manipulated on the handling station prior to re-entering the oven.

10. A method according to Claim 9, wherein the partially cooked foodstuff is manipulated by being turned.

11. A method according to any one of Claims 5 to 10, wherein the cooking step includes smoking the foodstuff.



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Date : 20 MAY 1996

11

12. A method of cooking substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to the accompanying drawings.

13. An apparatus substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as shown in the accompanying drawings.

14. Any novel feature or combination of features disclosed herein.

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