

SYSTEM AND METHOD OF PULVERIZING AND
EXTRACTING MOISTURE

Technical Field

5 The present invention relates to techniques for processing materials to pulverize and
extract moisture

Background of the Invention

Numerous industries require the labour intensive task of reducing materials to
smaller particles and even to a fine powder. For example, the utility industry
requires coal to be reduced from nuggets to powder before being burned in power
10 generation furnaces. Limestone, chalk and many other minerals must also, for most
uses, be reduced to powder form. Breaking up solids and grinding them into powder
is a mechanically demanding process. Ball mills, hammer mills, and other
mechanical structures impact on, and crush, the pieces of material. These systems,
although functional, are inefficient and relatively slow in processing.

15 Numerous industries further require moisture extraction from a wide range of
materials. Food processing, sewage waste treatment, crop harvesting, mining, and
many other industries require moisture extraction. In some industries materials are
discarded because moisture extraction cannot be performed efficiently. These same
materials, if they could be efficiently dried, would otherwise provide a commercial
20 benefit. In other industries, such as waste treatment and processing, water

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extraction is an ongoing concern and tremendous demand exists for improved methods. Although several techniques exist for dehydrating materials, there is an increasing need for improved moisture extraction efficiency.

Thus, it would be an advancement in the art to provide more efficient processes for pulverizing materials and extracting moisture from materials. Such techniques are disclosed and claimed herein.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Figure 1 is a side view illustrating a materials pulverizer;

Figure 2 is a plan view illustrating the pulverizer of Figure 1;

Figure 3 is a cross-sectional side view illustrating a venturi of the pulverizer as the venturi receives material;

Figure 4 is a side view illustrating an embodiment of a pulverizing system of the present invention;

Figure 5 is a plan view of the pulverizing system of Figure 4;

Figure 6 is a perspective view illustrating an air generator housing and outlet restrictors;

Figure 7 is a cross-sectional view of one embodiment of an air generator housing;

Figure 8 is cross-sectional view of a venturi and a throat resizer;

Figure 9 is a diagrammatic pictorial view illustrating the components of an alternative embodiment of a pulverizing system;

Figure 10 is a diagrammatic pictorial view illustrating another embodiment of

a pulverizing system of the present invention;

Figure 11 is a perspective view of one embodiment of an airflow generator suitable for use with a system of the present invention;

Figure 12 is a cross-sectional view of a portion of the airflow generator of
5 Figure 11;

Figure 13 is a plan view of an interior portion of the airflow generator of Figure 11;

Figure 14A is a plan view of a trailing edge of a blade of the airflow generator of Figure 11;

10 Figure 14B is a plan view of an alternative embodiment of a trailing edge of a blade of the airflow generator of Figure 11;

Figure 15A is a perspective view of a portion of the airflow generator of Figure 11;

15 Figure 15B is a perspective view of a portion of an alternative embodiment of an airflow generator of Figure 11;

Figure 16 is a side view of a blade of the airflow generator of Figure 11;

Figure 17 is a cross-sectional view of the blade of Figure 16 on the line 17-17 of Figure 16;

Figure 18 is a perspective view of a portion of the airflow generator of Figure
20 11; and

Figure 19 is a side view of a further embodiment of the pulverizing system of the present invention.

Detailed Description of Preferred Embodiments

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Referring to Figures 1 and 2 of the drawings, a pulverizer 10 for pulverizing and extracting moisture is shown which includes an inlet tube 12. The inlet tube 12 includes a first end 14, communicating with free space and an opposing, second end 16 that couples to a venturi 18.

5 The inlet tube 12 provides some distance to the venturi 18 in which material can accelerate to the required velocity. A filter (not shown) may be placed to cover the first end 14 to prevent introduction of foreign particles into the pulverizer 10. The inlet tube 12 further includes an elongate opening 20 on an upper part thereof to allow communication with the open lower end of a hopper 22. The hopper 22 is
10 open at its upper end 24 to receive materials. In an alternative embodiment, the pulverizer 10 does not include a hopper 10 and material is simply inserted into the elongated opening 20 through various known conventional methods.

The venturi 18 includes a converging portion 26 coupled to the inlet tube 12. The converging portion 26 progressively reduces in diameter from that of the inlet tube
15 12 to a diameter smaller than the inlet tube 12. The venturi 18 further includes a throat 28 that maintains a consistent diameter equal to the smaller diameter of the inlet tube 12.

The venturi 18 further includes a diverging portion 30 that couples to the throat 28 and progressively increases in diameter in the direction of airflow. The diverging
20 portion 30 may be coupled to the throat 28 by casting, screw threads, or by other known methods. As illustrated, the converging portion 26 may be longer in

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longitudinal length than the diverging portion 30.

The venturi 18 is in communication with an airflow generator 32 that creates an airflow flowing from the first end 14, through the inlet tube 12, through the venturi 18, and to the airflow generator 32. The velocity of the generated airflow may range
5 from 350 mph to supersonic. The airflow velocity will be greater in the venturi 18 than in the inlet tube 12.

The airflow generator 32 is driven by a drive motor 34. The drive motor 34 drives a drive shaft 33. The power of the selected drive motor 34 can vary and depends on the material to be treated, material flow rate, and airflow generator dimensions. A
10 larger pulverizer 10 may be used at a municipal waste processing facility whereas a smaller pulverizer 10 may be used to process sewage waste on board an ocean vessel.

The airflow generator 32 includes a plurality of radially extending blades that are rotated by the shaft 33 to generate a high speed airflow. The airflow generator 32 is
15 disposed within a housing 35 that includes an air and materials outlet 36. The housing 35 couples with the venturi 18 and has a housing input aperture (not shown) that allows communication between the venturi 18 and the interior of the housing 35. The blades define radially extending flow passages through which air passes to the outlet 36 on its periphery to allow pulverized material and air to exit. One
20 embodiment of an airflow generator 32 suitable for use with the present invention is described in further detail below in reference to Figures 11 to 18.

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Referring now to Figure 3, this illustrates operation of the venturi 18 during a pulverization event. In operation, material 38 is introduced into the inlet tube 12. The material 38 may be a solid or a semi-solid. The airflow generator 32 generates an air stream, ranging from 350 mph to supersonic, that flows through the inlet tube 12 and through the venturi 18. In the venturi 18, the airflow velocity substantially accelerates. The material 38 is propelled by the high speed airflow to the venturi 18. The material 38 is smaller in diameter than the interior diameter of the inlet tube 12 and a gap exists between the inner surface of the inlet tube 12 and the material 38.

As the material 38 enters the converging portion 26, the gap becomes narrower and eventually the material 38 causes a substantial reduction in the area of the converging portion 26 through which air can flow. A recompression shock wave 40 trails rearwardly from the material and a bow shock wave 42 builds up ahead of the material 38. Where the converging portion 26 merges with the throat 28 there is a standing shock wave 44. The action of these shock waves 40, 42, 44 disintegrates the material 38 and results in pulverization and moisture extraction from the material. The pulverized material 45 continues through the venturi 18 and exits into the airflow generator 32.

The material size reduction depends on the material being pulverized and the dimensions of the pulverizer 10. By increasing the velocity of the airflow, pulverization and particle size reduction increases with certain materials. Thus, the pulverizer 10 allows the user to vary desired particle dimensions by varying the velocity of the airflow.

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The system 10 has particular application in pulverizing solid materials into a fine dust. The system 10 has further application in extracting moisture from semi-solid materials such as municipal waste, paper sludge, animal by-product waste, fruit pulp, and so forth.

5 Referring to Figures 4 and 5, an embodiment of a system 100 of the present invention is shown for pulverizing material and for extracting moisture from the material. The system 100 illustrated includes a blender 102 for blending materials in a preprocessing stage. Raw material may include polymers that tend to lump the material into granules. The granules may be oversized and, due to the polymers,
10 resist breaking down into a desired powder form.

The presence of polymers is typical with municipal waste as polymers are introduced during sewage treatment to bring the waste particles together. Waste is processed on a belt press resulting in a material that is mostly semi-solid. In some processes the material may be approximately 15 to 20 percent solid and the remainder
15 moisture.

In the preprocessing stage, a drying enhancing agent is mixed with the raw material to break down the polymers and the granulization of the material. Non-polymerized products may be processed without the blending. Raw material is introduced into the blender 102 that blends the material with a certain amount of a drying enhancing
20 agent. The drying enhancing agent may be selected from a wide range of enhancers such as attapulgit, coal, lime, and the like. The drying enhancing agent

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may also be a pulverized and dried form of the raw material. The blender 102 mixes the material with the drying enhancing agent to produce an appropriate moisture content and granular size.

The raw material is transferred from the blender 102 to the hopper 22 by any one of
5 a number of methods including the use of a conveyance device 104 such as a belt conveyor, screw conveyor, extruder, or other motorized devices. In the illustrated embodiment, the conveyance device 104 is an inclined track that relies on gravity to deliver raw material to the hopper 22. The conveyance device 104 is positioned below a flow control valve 106 located on the lower portion of the blender 102.

10 In an alternative embodiment, the hopper 22 may be eliminated and material is delivered directly to the elongate opening 20 of the inlet tube 12.

One or more sensors 108 monitor the flow rate of material passing from the blender 102 to the inlet tube 12. The sensor 108 is in communication with a central processor 110 to regulate the flow rate. The sensor 108 may be disposed proximate
15 to the conveyance device 104, proximate to the hopper 22, within the hopper 22, or even between the hopper 22 and the elongate opening 20 to monitor the material flow rate. The central processor 110 is in communication with the flow control valve 106 to increase or decrease the flow rate as needed. Alternative methods for monitoring and controlling the flow rate may also be used including visual inspection
20 and manual adjustment of the flow control valve 106.

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The hopper 22 receives the material and delivers the material to the elongate opening 20 of the inlet tube 12.

The airflow pulls the material from the inlet tube 12 through the venturi 18. In the illustrated embodiment, the first end 14 is configured as a flange to converge from a
5 diameter greater than the inlet tube 12 to the diameter of the inlet tube.

In the illustrated embodiment, the diverging section 30 couples to the housing 35 and communicates directly with the housing 35. The larger diameter of the diverging section 30 is not necessarily the same as that of the inlet tube 12. In an alternative embodiment, the diverging section 30 may couple to an intermediary component,
10 such as a cylinder, tube, or pipe, prior to coupling with the housing 35.

One or more air flow valves 111 are disposed on the diverging portion 30 and provide additional air volume into the interior of the housing 35 and the airflow generator 32. In one embodiment, two flow valves 111 are disposed on the diverging portion 30. The system 100 may be operated with the flow valves 111
15 partially or completely opened. If material begins to obstruct the airflow generator 32, the flow valves are closed to provide additional force and drive material through the airflow generator 18. The flow valves 111 are adjustable and are shown in electrical communication with the central processor 110 for control. Although manual operation of the flow valves 111 is within the scope of the invention,
20 computer automation greatly facilitates the process.

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The venturi 18 provides a point of impact between higher velocity shock waves and lower velocity shock waves. The shockwaves provide a pulverization and moisture extraction event within the venturi 18. In operation, there are no visible signs of moisture on the interior of the venturi 18 or in the housing outlet 36. The amount of moisture removed is substantial although a residual amount may remain. The pulverization event further reduces the size of materials. Experimental work has shown that certain materials having a diameter of 2" (50 mm) entering the venturi 18 are reduced to a fine powder with a diameter of 20 um in one pulverization event. Size reduction depends on the material being processed and the number of pulverization events. Separating water from the material has numerous applications such as material dehydration and greatly reducing the number of pathogens.

The present invention has particular application in processing municipal waste. The preprocessing step of blending a drying enhancing agent provides a waste material that is readily processed by the system 100. It is believed that the pulverizing and moisture extraction process greatly reduces the amount of illness causing pathogens in the waste material by rupturing their cell wall. A second source of pathogen reduction is moisture extraction which reduces the pathogens. Analytical data from treating municipal waste shows that the present invention eliminates the majority of total coliform, faecal coliform, escherichia coli, and other pathogens.

The present invention has specific application in extracting moisture from fruit and vegetable products. In one application, the system 100 may be used to dehydrate fruit and vegetable products such as apples, oranges, carrots, nectarines, peaches,

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melons, tomatoes, and so forth. Extracted moisture, which is relatively sanitary, may be condensed and recaptured to provide a pure juice product.

In another application, the invention may be used to pulverize and extract water from certain agricultural products such as banana stalk, palm trees, sugar canes, rhubarb,
5 and so forth. In pulverizing banana stalk fibers, the fibers are separated and moisture is extracted.

The material, moisture, and air stream proceed through the airflow generator 32 and exit through the housing outlet 36. The housing outlet 36 is coupled to an exhaust pipe 112 which delivers the material to a cyclone 114 for material and air separation.

10 The diameter size of the exhaust pipe 112 influences the amount of drying that occurs in the pipe 112. High air volume is required for further drying of materials. In the exhaust pipe 112, the faster moving air in the exhaust pipe 112 passes the material and removes moisture remaining on the material. The air and vapor travel to a cyclone 114 where air and vapor are separated from the solid material.

15 A pulverization event generates heat that assists in drying the material. In addition to pulverization, rotation of the airflow generator 32 generates heat. The dimensions between the housing 35 and the airflow generator 32 are such that during rotation the friction generates heat. The heat exits through the housing outlet 36 and exhaust pipe 112 and further dehydrates the material as the material travels to the

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cyclone 114. The generated heat may also be sufficient partially to sterilize the material in certain applications.

The diameter of the housing outlet 36 may be increased or decreased to adjust the resistance and the amount of heat traveling through the housing outlet 36 and exhaust pipe 112. The diameter of the exhaust pipe 112 and the housing outlet 36 effects the removal of moisture on pulverized material. Adjusting the outlet diameter is further discussed below.

Heavier materials with less water, such as rock materials, require less moisture extraction. With such materials, the housing outlet 36 and exhaust pipe 112 diameters may be increased as less drying is required. Consequently, with wetter materials, the housing outlet 36 and the exhaust pipe 112 diameters may be decreased to increase the amount of air and heat to achieve the proper dehydration of the material.

The angle of inclination of the exhaust pipe 112 relative to the longitudinal axis of the venturi 18 and airflow generator 32 also effects dehydration performance. The exhaust pipe angle to horizontal may be approximately 25 degrees to approximately 90 degrees in order to enhance moisture extraction. Material traveling upward is held back by gravity whereas air is less restricted by gravity. This allows the air to move faster than the material and increase moisture removal. The angle may be adjusted to increase or decrease the effect on moisture extraction.

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The cyclone 114 is a well known apparatus for separating particles from an airflow.

The cyclone 114 typically includes a settling chamber in the form of a vertical cylinder 116. Cyclones can be embodied with a tangential inlet, axial inlet,

peripheral discharge, or an axial discharge. The airflow and particles enter the

5 cylinder 116 through an inlet 118 and spin in a vortex as the airflow proceeds down the cylinder 116. A cone section 120 causes the vortex diameter to decrease until the gas reverses on itself and spins up the center to an outlet 122. Particles are centrifuged toward the interior wall and collected by inertial impingement. The collected particles flow down in a gas boundary layer to a cone apex 124 where they
10 are discharged through an air lock 126 and into a collection hopper 128.

In certain applications, the system 100 may further include a condenser 130 to receive the airflow from the cyclone 114. The condenser 130 condenses the vapor in the airflow into a liquid which is then deposited in a tank 132. An outlet 134

couples to the condenser 130 and provides an exit for air. The condenser 130 has

15 particular application in food processing. In an alternative embodiment, the condenser 130 is replaced by an alternative treatment device such as a charcoal filter or the like. Condensation or filtering will depend on the material and application. The outlet 134 may include or couple to a filter (not shown) to filter out residue, particles, vapor, etc.

20 Passing material through the system 100 multiple times will further dehydrate material and will further reduce particle size. In municipal waste applications, multiple cycles through the system 100 may be required to achieve the desired

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dehydration results. The present invention contemplates the use of multiple systems 100 in series to provide multiple venturis 18 and multiple pulverization events. Thus, a single cycle through multiple systems 100 in series achieves the desired results. Alternatively, material may be processed and reprocessed by the same system 100 until the desired particle size and dryness is achieved.

In one implementation, the resulting product issuing from a system 100 is analyzed to determine the size of the powder granules and/or the moisture percentage. If the product fails to meet a threshold value for size and/or water percentage the product is directed through one or more cycles until the product meets the desired parameters.

The system 100 allows homogenization of different materials. In operation different materials enter the inlet tube 12 together, are processed through the venturi 18, and undergo pulverization. The resulting product is blended and homogenized as well as being dehydrated and reduced in size.

A particular application of the present invention involves the homogenization of sewage waste with coal. After pulverization and water extraction, the combined and homogenized waste and coal product is used in a coal burner to achieve optimum burning rates for creating steam in an electrical generation plant. The waste is used for energy production rather than for routine disposal.

If desired, the material may be mixed in the blender 102 prior to pulverization or at

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an intermediate stage between pulverization events. Mixing materials may enhance homogenization with certain materials. If desired, the material may be mixed in the blender 102 prior to pulverization or at an intermediate stage between pulverization events.

- 5 Materials blended in a preprocessing stage may be cycled through multiple pulverizing stages to provide the desired homogenization. A first material may be processed through multiple pulverizing stages and then homogenized with a second material. Between pulverizing stages the second material may be blended with the processed material in a preprocessing stage. The first and second materials are
10 then passed through one or more pulverizing stages to produce a homogenized, final product.

As an additional example, a first material may cycle through three pulverizing stages. After the third pulverizing stage, a second material may be blended together in a blender 102. Before mixing, the second material may have passed through a
15 venturi 18 for pulverization and reduction to a desired particle size. The first and second materials may then pass together through one or more additional pulverizing stages to provide the desired moisture content, size, and homogenization for industrial use.

Referring to Figure 6, a perspective view is shown of a housing 200 that includes a
20 housing outlet 202. The housing 200 encompasses the operational components of the airflow generator 32. The housing 200 is shown with a cut-away section to

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illustrate the airflow generator 32 within. In order to provide variance in the output flow, a restrictor 204 may be introduced into the housing outlet 202. The restrictor 204 increases the resistance to the airflow and also increases heat. Varying the amount of resistance and airflow is dependent on the material to be processed.

- 5 The restrictor 204 includes a neck 206 to nest within the housing outlet 202 and a restrictor aperture 208. The restrictor aperture 208 has a cross-section less than that of the housing outlet 202. A restrictor aperture 208 may be rectangular, circular, or have another suitable shape. The neck 206 provides a converging flow path from a cross-section approximating that of the outlet 202 to the final cross-section of the
- 10 restrictor aperture 208. A number of restrictors 204 with varying aperture sizes may be available to manipulate the output flow and thereby tune the system 100 to suit the material being pulverized.

Referring to Figure 7, a cross-sectional view of the airflow generator 32 within the housing 200 is shown. The airflow generator 32 is not necessarily coaxially aligned

15 within the housing 200. In one implementation, the airflow generator 32 includes a diverter plate 250 that has a cutting edge 252 near the airflow generator 32. The cutting edge 252 of the diverter plate 250 directs pulverized material into the housing outlet 202. The diverter plate 250 is coupled to the interior of the housing 200 and may be coupled to the interior of the housing outlet 202.

- 20 The diverter plate 250 prevents pulverized material from further rotation within the housing 200. As such, the diverter plate 250 serves as the first separation of

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pulverized material from air that continues to rotate within the housing 200.

Subsequent separation of pulverized material from air is performed by the

cyclone 114. If pulverized materials continue to rotate within the housing 200 the

pulverized materials may build up and eventually obstruct the airflow generator 32.

5 The cutting edge 252 varies the airflow volume proceeding through the housing 200.

The position of the diverter plate 250 may be adjustable to increase or decrease the

gap between it and the airflow generator 32. Adjustment may be required

depending on the materials being processed or to manipulate airflow volume.

Adjustment may be controlled by the central processor 110 which communicates

10 with an electromechanical or pneumatic device for moving the diverter plate 250.

The cutting edge 252 has a bevel that accommodates the shape of the airflow generator 32.

Referring to Figure 8, a cross-sectional view of a venturi 18 with an accompanying

throat resizer 300 is shown. The throat resizer 300 is a removable component that,

15 when inserted, nests within the throat 28. The throat resizer 300 reduces the

effective diameter of the throat 28 and increases the air velocity. Variance of the

throat diameter is required depending on the material and the desired dehydration

and particle reduction. Thus, although the airflow generator 32 may vary the airflow,

it is further desirable to manipulate throat diameter of venturi 18.

20 The throat 28 may be configured with a ledge 302 upon which a collar 304 of the

throat resizer 300 nests. A crown member 306 is coupled to the collar 304 and

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conforms to the interior surface of the converging portion 26. The throat resizer 300 includes a sleeve 308 that conforms to the interior surface of the throat 28 and extends within a major portion of the venturi throat length to resize the venturi 18.

Referring to Figure 9, a system 400 is shown that incorporates two pulverizing stages 402, 404. Each time material passes through a venturi 18, pulverization occurs, moisture is extracted, and particle reduction occurs. As discussed previously, this process may be repeatedly performed with a single venturi 18 or with multiple venturis 18 in series until the desired amount of water is extracted and desired product size is achieved. This process may be continued until nearly 100 percent water extraction is achieved.

Although two pulverizing stages are shown with the system 400, it will be appreciated that a system may include three, four, five, or more stages. The first pulverizing stage 402 is similar to that previously described with reference to Figures 4 and 5. The first pulverizing stage 402 includes the hopper 22, blender 102, conveyance device 104, flow control valve 106, venturi 18, housing 35 (with an airflow generator 32 within), and an exhaust pipe 112. The system 400 may further include a flow control valve 405 in the exhaust pipe 112 to regulate airflow.

As in the previous embodiments, the exhaust pipe 112 couples to a cyclone 114 to separate the processed product from the air. The system 400 further includes a second cyclone 406 to receive air from the outlet 122 of the first cyclone 114. The second cyclone 406 further separates air from residual particles and delivers the

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purified air to a condenser 130. A first tank 132 is in communication with the second cyclone 406 to receive condensed liquid from the condenser 130. An outlet 134 provides an exit for air passing from the condenser 130 and the second cyclone 406. A residual hopper 408 is positioned to receive residual particles from the second
5 cyclone 406.

Particles separated by the first cyclone 114 are delivered to a hopper 410 using any number of conventional techniques including gravity. Although not shown, particles from both the first and second cyclones 114, 406 may be delivered to the hopper 410. The hopper 410 receives the particles that then undergo the second
10 pulverizing stage 404. The hopper 410 delivers the particles to a second inlet tube 412 that is coupled to a second venturi 414 as with the first pulverizing stage 402.

One or more flow control valves 416 are located on the second venturi 414 and are in electrical communication with the central processor 110. The flow valves 416 function similar to those previously described and referenced as 111.

15 The second venturi 414 communicates with a second airflow generator (not shown) in a housing 418. The second airflow generator generates a high speed airflow through the venturi 414. The second housing 418 couples to a second exhaust pipe 420 that delivers air and processed material to a third cyclone 422. The second exhaust pipe 420 is inclined at an angle of approximately 25 degrees to
20 approximately 90 degrees relative to the longitudinal axis of the second venturi 414. A second flow control valve 424 is within the second exhaust pipe 420 to regulate

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airflow within. As with the first flow control valve 404, the second flow control valve 424 is in electrical communication with the central processor 110 for regulation.

The third cyclone 422 separates the particles from the air and delivers a product that is delivered to another conveyance device 425. A fourth cyclone 426 receives air
5 from the third cyclone 422 and further purifies the air and removes residual particles. Residual particles from the fourth cyclone 426 are deposited in a residual hopper 428. The fourth cyclone 426 delivers air to a second condenser 430 where vapor is condensed into a liquid and received by a second tank 432. An outlet 434 couples to the second condenser 430 to allow air to exit.

10 The system 400 further includes a heat generator 436 to provide heat through the inlet tubes 12, 412 and the venturis 18, 414 and assist in drying materials. The addition of heat is not required for water extraction and is merely used to further increase the rate of drying. The heat generator 436 may communicate with the hoppers 22, 438 or with the inlet tubes 12, 412. The heat generator 436 may also
15 be used in a similar manner in the structures illustrated in Figures 1, 2, 4 and 5.

In Figure 9, the heat generator 436 is in communication with a first heat control valve 440 to deliver heat to the first hopper 22. The first heat control valve 440 is in electrical communication with the central processor 110 to regulate the heat delivery. Alternatively, the heat control valve 440 may be operated manually. The heat
20 generator 436 is further in communication with a second heat control valve 442 that regulates heat flow to hopper 438. Heating material during the second pulverizing

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stage 404 may be desirable depending on the material or the application. If heating is required, the hopper 438 receives particles from the first cyclone 114. Otherwise, the material may pass to the hopper 410 as illustrated in Figure 9.

The system 400 may include one or more pulverizing stages for further dehydration and particle reduction. The conveyance device 425 may feed back into the blender 102 or the hopper 22 for further cycling of product through the pulverizing stages 402, 404. The second and fourth cyclones 406, 426 provide further purification of air. In certain applications the condensers 130, 430 may be removed or another type of treatment apparatus, such as a filter, be used.

Referring to Figure 10 an alternative embodiment of a pulverization and moisture extraction system 450 is shown. The system 450 is similar to that of Figures 4 and 5 and further includes a second cyclone 406 in communication with the first cyclone 114, a residual hopper 408 to collect particles from the second cyclone 406, a condenser 130 in communication with the second cyclone 406, a tank 132 in communication with the condenser 130, and an outlet 134 coupled to the condenser 130. The system 450 further includes a diverter valve 452 coupled to the first cyclone 114.

The diverter valve 452 directs particles received from the first cyclone 114 to a first outlet 454 or a second outlet 456. The first outlet 454 is coupled to a collector 458 such as a bag, hopper, tank, or the like. The second outlet 456 is coupled to a recycling tube 460 to introduce the pulverized material through the system 450

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again. The recycling tube 460 is coupled at its opposing end to the first end 14.

Alternatively, the recycling tube 460 may direct pulverize material into the hopper 22 or directly into the elongate opening 20.

5 In operation, material is pulverized as it passes through the system 450 and is redirected, by control of the diverter valve 452, to pass through the system 450 again for another pulverization event. This may be repeated as desired until a final product results which is then directed by the diverter valve 452 into the collector 458.

Referring to Figure 11, an embodiment of an airflow generator 500 is shown.

10 Various metals are suitable for the airflow generator, depending on the material to be processed. For abrasive material a harder alloy steel may be used. As can be appreciated by one of skill in the art, the material selected is a balance between strength and anticipated wear. Casting of the airflow generator 500 is advantageous as fabrication creates welds of inconsistent shape due to heat affected zones.

15 The airflow generator 500 is received within a housing such as that illustrated in Figure 6. The housing 200 at least partially encircles the airflow generator 500 and preferably completely encircles the airflow generator 500 so that the only egress is the housing outlet 36. The airflow generator 500 may have a close clearance to the housing 200 to generate additional friction and heat. The heat is desired to assist in further drying materials passing through the airflow generator 500 and into the
20 exhaust pipe 112.

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The airflow generator 500 includes a front plate 502 with a concentrically disposed inlet aperture 504 to receive incoming materials. The diameter of the input aperture 504 is variable depending on the processed material size and anticipated air volume. A back plate 506 parallels the front plate 502 and includes a concentrically disposed shaft aperture 508. The aperture 508 receives and locates the drive shaft of the generator 500. Alternative airflow generators 500 may be used with the present invention and include generators with a single back plate coupled to blades or generators with radially extending blades alone.

The back plate 506 may further include bolt apertures 509 that are disposed concentrically around the aperture 508. The bolt apertures 509 each receive a corresponding bolt (not shown) that are each secured to the drive shaft. The bolts are secured to back plate 506 by nuts or other conventional devices.

A plurality of blades 510 are disposed between the front and back plates 502, 506. The number of blades 510 may vary and depends, in part, on the material to be processed. The thickness of the blades 510 may also vary depending on the material to be processed.

In one embodiment, the blades 510 extend through the front and back plates 502, 506 to form blade fins 511 on the exterior face of the front and back plates 502, 506. The blade fins 511 may extend approximately 12 mm from either the front or back plates 502, 506. The blade fins 511 generate a cushion of air between the airflow generator 500 and the interior of the housing 200. The blade fins 511 further act to

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clean out materials that may enter between the housing 500 and the airflow generator 200.

Referring to Figure 12, a cross-sectional view of the aperture 508 is shown. The aperture 508 receives the drive shaft which rotates the airflow generator 500. The
5 bolt apertures 509 each receive a bolt to secure the back plate 506. In this embodiment, the drive shaft transitions from a first diameter, with bolts extending, to a second diameter suitable for insertion into the aperture 508. The bolt apertures 509 may each provide a well 515 to receive a nut that engages a bolt.

Referring to Figure 13, a plan view of the interior of the airflow generator 500 is
10 shown with a single blade 510. The single blade 510 is shown to illustrate the unique features of blades 510 incorporated within the airflow generator 500. The remaining blades 510 are similarly configured.

The blade 510 extends from a trailing edge 512 at the perimeter 513 of the back and front plates 502, 506 to a leading edge 514 adjacent the aperture 508. The blade
15 510 includes a wedge portion 516 adjacent the edge 512. The wedge portion 516 has a thicker cross-section to increase pressure and airflow volume. The wedge portion 516 provides increased resistance to wear which is advantageous with some materials.

Referring to Figure 14A, a plan view illustrating the wedge portion 516 in greater
20 detail is shown. The shape of the wedge portion 516 affects airflow volume, airflow

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velocity, and material flow rate through the airflow generator 500. The wedge portion 516 may be altered in the circumferential and longitudinal direction to alter airflow volume, airflow velocity, and material flow rate. Casting techniques advantageously allow variance in three dimensions and allows any number of

5 circumferential and longitudinal profiles in the wedge portion 516.

The increased thickness of the wedge portion 516 enhances the life of the airflow generator 500 as this is where the blade 510 typically experiences the most wear. The material used and the hardness of the wedge portion 516 may also differ from the remainder of the blade 510.

10 Referring to Figure 14B, an alternative embodiment of a wedge portion 518 is shown which includes a replaceable wear tip 520. With the airflow generator 500 rotating in a clockwise direction, the replaceable wear tip 520 is subject to the most material contact. Although thickened to increase wear resistance, the wedge portion 518 is subject to more wear than other components of the airflow generator 500 and may

15 wear out sooner. By replacing the replaceable wear tip 520, replacement of the entire airflow generator 500 is deferred. The replaceable wear tip 520 is secured to the remainder of the wedge portion 518 through any known fastening device including a securing nut and bolt 522. The replaceable wear tip 520 may be a material harder than the remainder of the blade 510. The replaceable wear tip 520

20 may also be replaced with a replaceable wear tip 520 having a different circumferential and longitudinal profile. In yet another embodiment, the entire wedge portion 518 is replaceable.

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Referring to Figure 15A, a perspective view of the airflow generator 500 is shown illustrating the wedge portion 516 and the front and back plates 502, 506. The blade fins 511 are further shown extending from the exterior surface of the front and back plates 502, 506. As shown, the wedge portion 516 is substantially thicker than the
5 corresponding blade fins 511. The blade fins 511 are not subject to the same wear as the wedge portion 516 and are not as thick.

Referring to Figure 15B a perspective view of the airflow generator 500 is shown with an alternative embodiment of the wedge portion 516. The wedge portion 516 increases in thickness and in circumferential profile as it extends in the longitudinal
10 direction from the front plate 502 to the back plate 506. The wedge portion 516 also increases in thickness as it extends radially towards the perimeter.

Pulverized material entering into the airflow generator 500 has a tendency to accumulate proximate to the back plate 506. The longitudinally increasing thickness encourages pulverized material to remain centered between the front and back
15 plates 502, 506 rather than accumulating along the back plate 506. Casting techniques enable production of such a wedge portion 516 as three dimensional variation is possible. The replaceable wear tip 520 may include and define the longitudinally increasing thickness. If another wedge portion 516 shape is desired another replaceable wear tip 520 without a longitudinally increasing thickness or a
20 more pronounced longitudinally increasing thickness may be used. Thus, pulverized material flow direction may be manipulated longitudinally by using wedge portions 516 of different circumferential and longitudinal configurations.

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Referring again to Figure 13, the blade 510 transitions from a position perpendicular to the back plate 506 to an angled position. The blade 510 transitions as it proceeds from the wedge portion 516 to a location prior to the leading edge 514. The angled position causes the blade 510 to pitch into the direction of the airflow.

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In the illustrated embodiment, a trailing portion 524 of the blade 510, including the wedge portion 516, extends perpendicular from the back plate 506. The trailing portion 524 may be approximately one fourth to one half of the blade 510 as the blade 510 extends from the trailing edge 512 to the leading edge 514. A leading
10 portion 526 is the remaining amount of the blade 510 from the trailing portion 524 to the leading edge 514. The illustrated leading portion 526 has an angled transition from a perpendicular position relative to the back plate 506 to an angled position.

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The angled position has an angle that is referred to herein as the angle of attack as it allows the leading edge 514 to cut into the incoming airflow. In Figure 13, the final attack angle of the blade 510 at the leading edge 514 is approximately 25 degrees.

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The transition from a perpendicular position to an angled position may extend over the entire blade 510 or any portion thereof. The angle of attack may be selected from a broad range of angles based on anticipated airflow velocity, material flow rate, and material. The angled position may have a range of approximately 20 to 60 degrees.

Alternatively, the blade 510 may remain perpendicular along its entire length. The blade 510 may also have an angle of attack along its entire length. Although

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extending along the entire length, the angle of attack may still vary as the blade 510 extends from the trailing edge 512 to the leading edge 514.

Referring to Figure 16, a view of the leading edge 514 is shown. Conventionally, an edge may be relatively straight and proceed at an angle relative to the back plate 506. In the illustrated form, the leading edge 514 proceeds from the back plate 506 with an outwardly curving portion 528 and then transitions into an inward curve 530. The outwardly curving portion 528 assists in capturing air traveling into the inlet aperture 504 of the airflow generator 500. The leading edge 514 so profiled is able to cut into air.

Referring to Figure 17 a cross section of the leading edge 514 taken along section 17-17 is shown. The leading edge 514 has an oval shaped cross-section that assists in slicing into incoming airflow.

Referring to Figure 18, a perspective view of the airflow generator 500 is shown without the front plate 502 to illustrate the blades 510. The illustrated embodiment includes nine blades 510 although the number is variable. Each blade 510 includes a wedge portion 516 for added resistance to wear and to increase pressure and airflow. Each blade 510 further transitions from a perpendicular position to an angle of attack.

In operation, the rotating blades 510 generate a high speed airflow ranging from 350 mph or greater in the venturi and draw air and pulverized material into the inlet

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aperture 504. The leading edges 514 of the blades 510 cut into the air and pulverized material and direct both the air and pulverized material into flow paths 532 defined by the blades 510 and extending from the input aperture 504 to the perimeter 513 of the front and back plates 502, 506. The wedge portions 516 push
5 the air and pulverized material to the housing outlet 202 that is located within the housing 200.

The systems 10, 100, 400, 450 disclosed herein may be fixed structures. Alternatively, a system may be mounted within or on a vehicle such as a truck, trailer, rail car, boat, barge, and so forth. Any vehicle that provides a sufficient
10 planar footprint may be used. Having a mobile system is advantageous in certain applications such as agricultural harvesting, remote site treatments, demonstrations, and so forth.

Referring to Figure 19, a mobile system 600 is diagrammatically shown. The system 600 includes components previously discussed such as the inlet tube 12, venturi 18,
15 airflow generator 32, housing 35, motor 34, exhaust pipe 112, and first and second cyclones 116, 406. The system 600 may include additional elements such as the blender 102, central processor 110, condenser 130, and so forth. Systems with a plurality of pulverization stages may be mounted on a vehicle in similar manner.

The system 600 includes a vehicle generally designated as 602 and providing a
20 sufficient footprint to support the assembled components. The system 600 further includes a plurality of supports 604. The system 600 may further include a housing

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606 that encompasses components of the system. The housing 606 protects the components and dampens noise during operation.

- One or more components of the system 600 may be removable to facilitate transportation. For example, the first and second cyclones 116, 406 may extend out of the housing 606 and need to be moved during transportation. The cyclones 116, 406 may be removed entirely or partially disassembled prior to transportation. Similarly a blender 102 may be removable for transportation. The necessity of removing components is based on the size of the system 600, vehicle 602, and other design constraints.
- 10 The housing 606 may accommodate a control room for a user to operate the system 600. The housing 606 may include windows for viewing the components and access for viewing, operation, repair, and inserting material to be processed.

Claims:

1. A method for pulverizing material and extracting moisture from material, comprising:
 - providing an airflow generator in communication with a venturi;
 - the airflow generator generating an airflow through the venturi and towards the airflow generator;
 - introducing the material into the airflow; and
 - passing the material through the venturi to extract moisture and pulverize the material.
2. The method of claim 1 and comprising passing the pulverized material through an exhaust pipe inclined at an angle ranging from 25 degrees to 90 degrees relative to the longitudinal axis of the venturi.
3. The method of claim 2, and further comprising controlling the flow rate in the exhaust pipe.
4. The method of claim 2, and further comprising:
 - passing the pulverized material from the exhaust pipe to a cyclone for separating pulverized material from air.
5. The method of claim 4, and further comprising passing the air from the first cyclone to a second cyclone to remove residual particles from the air.

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6. The method of claim 5 and, further comprising passing the air into a condenser to condense vaporized moisture.
7. The method of claim 1, and further comprising heating air upstream of the venturi.
8. The method of claim 1, and further comprising controlling the flow rate of the material upstream of the venturi.
9. The method of claim 1, wherein said venturi includes a diverging portion, and the method comprises causing a controlled flow of air to enter the diverging portion from externally of the diverging portion.
10. A method for homogenizing materials, comprising:
 - providing an airflow generator in communication with a venturi;
 - the airflow generator generating an airflow through the venturi and towards the airflow generator;
 - introducing first and second materials into the airflow; and
 - passing the first and second materials through the venturi to pulverize and homogenize the materials.
11. The method of claim 10, and further comprising heating the airflow.

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12. The method of claim 10 or 11 and further comprising pulverizing the first material by passing the first material through a venturi prior to introducing first and second materials into the airflow.
13. An apparatus for pulverizing material and extracting moisture from material, comprising:
 - an inlet tube;
 - a venturi upstream of the inlet tube; and
 - an airflow generator to generate an airflow, the airflow generator being in communication with the outlet end of the venturi to suck an airflow through the inlet tube and through the venturi, whereby material introduced into the airflow passes through the venturi and is subject to pulverization and moisture extraction.
14. The apparatus of claim 13, and further comprising a heat generator in communication with the inlet tube for heating air flowing towards the venturi.
15. The apparatus of claim 13 or 14 and including an exhaust pipe connected to the outlet of the airflow generator, said pipe being inclined at an angle ranging from 25 degrees to 90 degrees relative to the longitudinal axis of the venturi.
16. The apparatus of claim 15, and further comprising a cyclone coupled to said exhaust pipe to separate air from pulverized material.

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17. The apparatus of claim 16, and further comprising a second cyclone in communication with the first cyclone to receive air and separate residual particles.
18. The apparatus of any one of claims 13 to 17, and further comprising an air flow control valve disposed on the diverging portion of the venturi to permit air to flow from externally of the venturi into said diverging portion.
19. An apparatus for pulverizing material and extracting moisture from material, comprising:
 - an inlet tube;
 - a venturi coupled to the inlet tube; and
 - an airflow generator to generate an airflow and including, a front plate, an input aperture disposed within the front plate, a back plate, and a plurality of blades disposed between and coupled to the back and front plates; and
 - a housing at least partially encompassing the airflow generator, the housing including an outlet in communication with the input aperture of the airflow generator, wherein the airflow generator is in communication with the venturi to direct the airflow through the venturi, and toward the input aperture, wherein material introduced into the airflow passes through the venturi and is subject to pulverization and moisture extraction.

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20. The apparatus of claim 19, wherein each blade includes a wedge portion disposed proximate to a perimeter of the front and back plates, the wedge portion having a thickness greater than the remainder of the corresponding blade.
21. The apparatus of claim 20, wherein each wedge portion increases in thickness as it extends longitudinally from the front plate to the back plate to control the direction of a longitudinal material flow in the airflow.
22. The apparatus of claim 20, wherein each wedge portion includes a removable wear tip.
23. The apparatus of claim 20, wherein each wedge portion is removable to allow replacement.
24. The apparatus of claim 20, wherein each blade transitions from a position perpendicular to the back plate to an inclined position as the blade proceeds to the input aperture.
25. The apparatus of claim 24, wherein the angle of the inclined position of the blade is approximately 20 to 60 degrees from a position perpendicular to the back plate.
26. The apparatus of claim 19, wherein each blade includes a leading edge

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proximate to the input aperture and a trailing edge proximate to a perimeter of the front and back plates, the leading edge having an outward curve portion proximate to the back plate and an inward curve portion proximate to the front plate.

27. The apparatus of claim 26, wherein the leading edge includes an oval shaped cross-section.
28. The apparatus of claim 19 further comprising a plurality of fins disposed on an exterior surface of the front plate and the back plate.
29. The apparatus of claim 19, wherein the housing further includes a diverter plate coupled to the interior of the housing proximate to the outlet and having a cutting edge proximate to the airflow generator.
30. The apparatus of claim 29, wherein the diverter plate is adjustably coupled to the interior of the housing to vary the distance from the cutting edge end to the airflow generator.