Claims

1. An interesterification process for the production of an ester product, comprising a second ester mixture, from a first ester mixture comprising at least two different ester compounds, said second ester mixture having a melting point which is lower than the melting point of said first ester mixture, the interesterification process comprising the steps of:
    a) mixing together at least two different starting ester compounds to form a first ester mixture; and
    b) contacting said first ester mixture with a catalyst comprising from 30 – 60 wt% of calcium oxide and at least one second metal oxide,

   wherein the second metal oxide is selected from the group consisting of an oxide of a Group 2A metal other than calcium, an oxide of a transition metal, lanthana, silica, alumina and a metal aluminate.

2. A process as claimed in claim 1, wherein at least one of the starting esters is a triglyceride.

3. A process as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, wherein at least one of the starting ester compounds comprises an ester of a carboxylic acid containing from 12 to 24 carbon atoms.

4. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the catalyst is pre-dispersed in at least one of said starting ester compounds.

5. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the second metal oxide comprises magnesium oxide.

6. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the catalyst further comprises from 1 – 5 wt% of an alkali metal.

7. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the catalyst has a surface area less than 20 m^2/g.

8. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the contact between the first ester mixture and the catalyst takes place at a temperature between 0 and 300 °C.

9. A process as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein the catalyst is separated from the second ester mixture and added to a first ester mixture for use in a subsequent process.

10. A process according to any one of the preceding claims wherein said catalyst comprises from 30 – 60 wt% of calcium oxide, from 40 – 70 wt% of magnesium oxide and from 0 to 5 wt% of sodium or potassium.

11. A catalyst for use in an interesterification reaction comprising 30 – 60 wt% of calcium oxide, from 40 – 70 wt% of magnesium oxide and from 0 to 5 wt% of sodium or potassium.

12. A catalyst as claimed in claim 11, consisting essentially of calcium oxide and magnesium oxide and optional ingredients selected from an alkali metal, pelleting aids, lubricants, binders, compaction aids or other additives useful in forming a shaped catalyst particle.

13. A catalyst as claimed in claim 11 or claim 12, wherein the catalyst has a surface area in the range from 1 to 20 m^2/g.

14. A catalyst as claimed in any one of claims 11 - 13, in the form of a powder or in the form of a plurality of shaped catalyst particles having a minimum dimension of at least 0.5mm.