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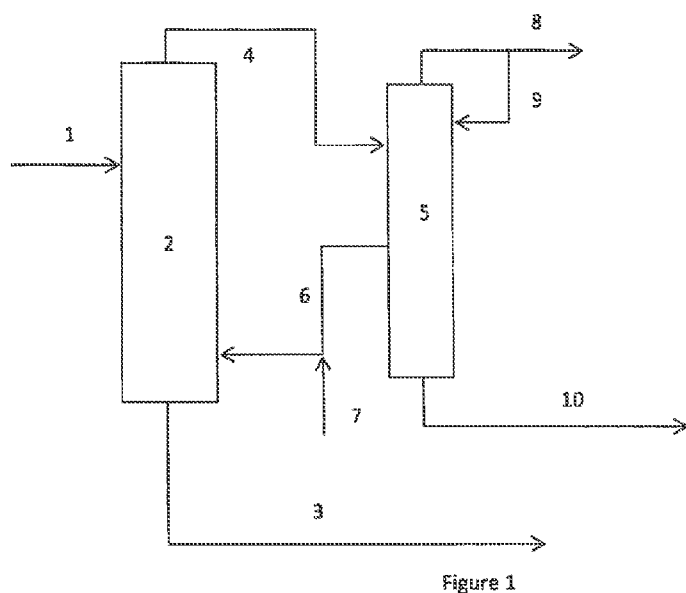
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(54) **Title:** PROCESS FOR THE PRODUCTION OF FATTY ACID ESTERS



(57) **Abstract:** A process for the production of fatty acid esters comprising: (a) subjecting a fatty acid or fatty acid mixture to esterification with a lower alkanol in an esterification reactor maintained under esterification conditions to form a stream comprising the corresponding lower alkyl ester or esters and recovering same; (b) recovering an overhead stream from the esterification reactor comprising unreacted lower alkanol, water, and a heavy organic content comprising one or more of lower alkyl ester and/or acids; (c) subjecting the recovered overhead stream to distillation in a first distillation column operating under first distillation conditions to separate a portion of the lower alkanol from a stream comprising the water, the remaining lower alkanol and the heavy organic content; (d) recovering the stream comprising the water, the remaining lower alkanol and the heavy organic content; and (e) subjecting the stream comprising the water, the remaining lower alkanol and the heavy organic content to distillation in a second distillation column operating under second distillation conditions to provide an

overhead stream comprising lower alkanol and at least a major portion of the heavy organic content and a water stream having a reduced heavy organic and alkanol content.