

Description**BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION**

5 The present invention relates to a weight detecting device which is mounted in an automatic heating and cooking apparatus such as an electronic oven, etc. for use in detecting the weight of a food to be heated or cooked.

10 The weight of a food is an extremely important and useful factor for cooking, together with vapor and/or gas generated from the food, when the automatization of cooking is going to be realized. Particularly, in the technical field of the electronic oven, the automatization of cooking has been established through detection of the weight of the food by the use of a weight sensor, and this technique of the automatic cooking has been already practiced, for example, when automatically defrosting frozen foods.

15 US-A-4 615 405 discloses a food weight measuring device comprising a table for carrying a foodstuff, a pivotable electrode plate for receiving the food weight, the pivotable electrode being pivotably moved responsive to the food weight, a fixed electrode plate for providing an electrical signal corresponding to the food weight in cooperation with the pivotable electrode plate, and an output circuit responsive to the fixed electrode plate for outputting the electrical signal representative of the food weight. A steel ball receiver made of an insulating material is provided at the substantial central portion of the pivotable electrode plate for receiving a steel ball. The steel ball is stored in a steel ball storing portion at the lower end of a shaft supporting the table. The steel ball storing portion has a circular conical, concave shape. Accordingly, the table shaft is connected to the pivotable electrode plate through the steel ball.

20 Meanwhile, the weighing errors due to the difference in the position where the food or the like to be measured is placed are a common problem in any weight detecting devices including the weight sensor of the electronic oven. For avoiding such influences by the weighing errors as above, therefore, for example, 25 the weight sensor of the electronic oven disclosed in the article 54(3) EPC document EP-A1-259494 corresponding to WO 87/04786 employs a weighing system called Roberval's system which works to transmit the load of an object to be measured correctly to a weight detecting means wherever the object is placed on a weighing platform in the sensor. As shown in Fig. 6, the load of the object is effectively transmitted in a thrust direction with respect to a shaft 22. Therefore, it is not necessary for a user of the 30 weight sensor to place the object in a designated position on the platform, but the correct weight of the object can be detected wherever the object is placed on the platform.

35 The Roberval's mechanism is, although it is remarkably useful in practical use as described above, generally a complicated and bulky structure as presumed from Fig. 6. Moreover, from the characteristic viewpoint, since the system's efficiencies will be effectively brought out as the space in the thickness direction is increased, the system is inevitably large in size. Thus, the presence of the Roberval's mechanism in the weight sensor is contradictory in itself to the improvement of efficiencies, resulting in an obstacle to design a space-saving, thinner weight sensor.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

40 An essential object of the present invention is to provide a weight detecting device which is provided with a compact and thin weight arrangement in the simplified structure of the Roberval's mechanism, nevertheless which is highly reliable with securing the same weighing accuracy and sturdiness.

45 In accomplishing the above-described object, according to the present invention, the weight detecting device comprises a saucer on which is placed an object to be measured, a rotatable shaft for supporting said saucer which can move with a predetermined displacement amount in the supporting direction, a driving means for rotating said supporting shaft, an elastic member which receives said supporting shaft and moves in the supporting direction, a load detecting means which converts the load transmitted through said elastic member in the supporting direction of said supporting shaft into corresponding electrically 50 physical amount, and a weight detecting circuit which detects the weight of the object from the electrically physical amount put out from the load detecting means, and is characterized in that said elastic member is a flat plate-like spring member, the surface of which is perpendicular to the direction of the axis of said supporting shaft, and that said elastic member is supported at more than two points, and the position where said elastic member is contacted with said supporting shaft is approximately at the center of the supporting 55 points.

In the above-described construction, the load of the object to be measured is transmitted to the load detecting means without direct contact to the latter although some stress loss is caused by the elastic member. Therefore, there is no such problem at all that the supporting shaft which is always rotated is

brought into contact with the load detecting means to be worn off, so that the durability of the weight detecting device is greatly improved. Furthermore, in the present invention, the above-described load detecting means is a compact and thin electrostatic capacity type which is comprised of a pressure sensitive sensor formed in the manner that two diaphragms made of sintered alumina are bonded to each other to make a several tens microns' minute gap therebetween, with electrodes provided on each opposite surface, and a load transmission member which, upon receipt of the load, becomes in contact with the sensitive sensor at a predetermined area to apply pressure, thus bringing about a much thinner weight detecting device. At the same time, if the most adequate shape is selected for each of the load transmission member and the supporting shaft, the weighing errors due to the difference in the placement position of the object (positional errors) can be reduced.

In addition to the above, a very small gap is formed between the load detecting means and the platform of the load detecting means in the weight detecting device of the present invention, and therefore the load detecting means can be prevented from being added pressure from the side of the platform, thereby to improve the measuring accuracy. Simultaneously, it can be avoided that the diaphragms are excessively deflected and broken because of an overload or an impact application.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other objects and features of the present invention will become clear from the following description taken in conjunction with the preferred embodiments thereof with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a main body of an electronic oven in which a weight detecting device according to one preferred embodiment of the present invention is mounted;

Fig. 2 is a block diagram showing the system of the electronic oven of Fig. 1;

Fig. 3 is a cross sectional view of an essential part of the weight detecting device according to one preferred embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 4 is an exploded perspective view of the essential part of Fig. 3;

Fig. 5 is an exploded view of an electrostatic capacity type load sensor installed in the weight detecting device of Fig. 3;

Fig. 6 is a cross sectional view of the electrostatic capacity type load sensor of Fig. 5;

Fig. 7 is a graph showing the relation between the electrostatic capacity and the weight of the electrostatic capacity type load sensor of Fig. 5;

Fig. 8 is a cross sectional view of a weight detecting device provided with the electrostatic capacity type load sensor of Fig. 5;

Fig. 9 is a circuit diagram of an interface circuit of the electrostatic capacity type load sensor of Fig. 5 and a microcomputer;

Fig. 10 are signal waveforms in positions (1) and (2) of the interface circuit of Fig. 9;

Fig. 11 are graphs respectively showing the load-electrostatic capacity characteristics of the electrostatic capacity type load sensor and the weight-electrostatic capacity characteristic of the interface circuit of Fig. 9;

Fig. 12 is a graph showing the principle of effects when the instantaneous weights are integrated to obtain the average;

Fig. 13 is a cross sectional view of a modified weight detecting device which is improved in structure so as to reduce the change of the instantaneous weight resulting from the rotation of the platform;

Figs. 14(a) and 14(b) are waveforms of the instantaneous weight showing the effects of the weight detecting device of Fig. 13;

Fig. 15 is a cross sectional view of a weight detecting device mounted with a thin film spacer for prevention of the breakage of the load sensor;

Fig. 16 is a view explaining the principle of how the breakage of the load sensor is prevented when the contact surface of a substrate with the sensor platform is ground;

Fig. 17 is a view explaining the principle how the breakage of the load sensor is prevented when water repellant coating is coated on the surface of the electrostatic capacity type load sensor;

Fig. 18 is a view explaining the principle how the breakage of the sensor is prevented when a very small gap is formed in the sensor platform by etching; and

Fig. 19 is a view explaining the principle how the breakage of the load sensor is prevented when the very small gap of Fig. 18 is filled with silicon rubber filling agent.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Before the description of the present invention proceeds, it is to be noted that like parts are designated by like reference numerals throughout the accompanying drawings.

In Fig. 1, there is shown a perspective view of a main body of a heating and cooking apparatus provided with a weight detecting device according to the present invention. At the front face of a main body 1 of the heating and cooking apparatus, a door member 2 is supported by a shaft to be freely openable and closable so as to place a food into the main body. A key input part 4 and a display tube 3 are provided on an operating panel 5. The selection of the category of cooking, inputting of the cooking time, ordering start or stop of cooking, etc. are performed through the key input part 4, and a user watches the operating condition or makes conversation with the heating apparatus through the display tube 3.

Fig. 2 is a block diagram showing the structure of the heating and cooking apparatus of Fig. 1. A food 8 is accommodated in a heating chamber 6 within the main body 1, placed on a rotary saucer 7 and rotated by a motor 10 so as to reduce uneven heating during cooking. A weight detecting device 9 is secured to the bottom portion of the heating chamber 6 and outputs a given electrically physical amount upon receipt of the load of the food 8 through a supporting shaft 11 of the motor 10. An interface circuit 12 receives and converts the output of the weight detecting device 9 into a different form of signal which is easily detectable by the following device. A microcomputer 13 receives the output signal from the interface circuit 12 to calculate the weight of the food 8 and at the same time, controls the whole system. The heating and cooking apparatus further includes a magnetron 14 for supplying high-frequency power to the food 8 in the heating chamber 6, a high voltage generating circuit 15 which converts low voltage of a commercial power supply 17 into high voltage necessary for oscillation of the magnetron 14, and a relay actuator 16 which receives the signal from the microcomputer 13 to feed power of the commercial power supply 17 to the high voltage generating circuit 15 or stops the supply of power from the commercial power supply 17 to the high voltage generating circuit 15.

When the user selects the category of cooking through the keyboard 4 and orders starting of cooking, the microcomputer 13 detects the weight of the food 8. For example, in the case of automatic defrosting, the microcomputer 13 promptly calculates the necessary time for the food 8 to be automatically defrosted on the basis of the weight information, which time is indicated on the indication tube 3, so that the food is automatically completely processed in accordance with a predetermined cooking procedure. The weight detecting device is applied in the above-described manner in the electronic oven, thus contributing greatly to the automatization of cooking.

However, the weight detecting device in the electronic oven is obliged to be mounted in the bottom portion of the heating chamber 6 because of its structure, thereby to raise a problem of the accommodation space therefore in the electronic oven. By way of example, it is one way to design an electronic oven which has a large space allotted for the weight detecting device in the bottom portion of the heating chamber. However, if a generally accepted proportion of parts of the electronic oven as shown in Fig. 1 is desired to be followed, the space allotted for the weight detecting device in the bottom portion of the heating chamber 6 might be too small, and therefore a thinner and more compact weight detecting device is required to be invented. It is needless to say that the above-described weight detecting device in thinner and more compact structure should not lose its efficiencies. Fig. 3 is a view showing the basic structure of the weight detecting device which meets the aforementioned requirement. The supporting shaft 11 of the weight detecting device passing through the motor 10 which rotates the rotary saucer 7 is held movable in the vertical direction. In the weight detecting device of Fig. 3, there are further provided an elastic member 16 consisting of a leaf spring, a load detecting means 17 for supporting the elastic member 16 and detecting the load transmitted in the thrust direction of the supporting shaft 11, and a metal fitting 25 into which is placed the load detecting means 17.

Fig. 4 is an exploded perspective view of an essential portion of the weight detecting device of the present invention. Both the motor 10 and the fixing metal fitting 25 are fixedly secured to the bottom portion of the heating chamber 6 directly or indirectly via some means. The supporting shaft 11 passing through the motor 10 is smoothly moved in the thrust direction thereof. The structure of the motor 10 will be described in more detail later. The movement of the motor 10 is, through the elastic member 16 which has opposite ends horizontally supported by the fixing metal fitting 25, transmitted to the load detecting means 17. Supposing that the distance between the opposite ends of the elastic member 16 is l , the elastic member 16 comes into contact with the supporting shaft 11 and the load detecting means 17 approximately at the center of the distance l . The position of half the distance $l/2$ is only one single position where the elastic member 16 presses the load detecting means 17 in the vertical direction due to the movement of the supporting shaft 11, so that the transmission loss is rendered minimum. Although some of the load is naturally lost as the spring stress depending on the deflection amount of the elastic member 16 when the load is measured, such problem can be solved by making the elastic constant of the elastic member 16

small enough that the sensitivity of the load detecting means 17 is not worsened. This will be explained in more detail later. Because of the presence of the elastic member 16, it is prevented that the supporting shaft 11, while rotating, directly touches the load detecting means 17, consequently to wear out or break the load detecting means 17 as a result of the sliding therebetween. Moreover, since the leaf spring is employed for the elastic member 16, the space in the thickness direction is hardly changed. It is desirable so as to endure a long term use that lubricating oil is inserted in the portion where the elastic member 16 contacts the supporting shaft 11. Various kinds of sensors such as a deflection gauge type sensor, an electrostatic capacity type sensor, etc. are applicable for the above-described load detecting means 17.

Referring to Figs. 5 and 6 showing an electrostatic capacity type load detecting means 30, the principle of the load detection will be described hereinbelow. A diaphragm 19 is made of a ceramic flat plate such as an alumina plate (each side having approximately 25 mm length) in the thickness of 0.5 mm. A substrate 20 is formed of the same material into the same shape as the diaphragm 19. Gold electrodes 21 and 21, each in a round shape having the thickness of 1 micron or so and the diameter of 20 mm, are printed and baked in the confronting surfaces of the diaphragm 19 and the substrate 20. Moreover, the substrate 20 and the diaphragm 19 are bonded with each other, with a small gap of about 45 mm therebetween formed by a glass spacer 22 which is concentrically spaced a predetermined distance in the circumference of electrodes 21. Supposing that the gap between the electrode 21 is d , the area of the electrodes is S , and the dielectric constant of the air which is a medium between the electrodes 21 is ϵ , the electrostatic capacity C between the electrodes with no load is represented by:

$$C = \epsilon \frac{S}{d} \quad (1)$$

When the load transmission member 18 placed approximately in the center on the diaphragm 19 where the electrode is formed is added load, the diaphragm 19 is deflected, thereby to narrow the gap of the electrodes 21. In other words, according to equation (1), the denominator d becomes smaller and the electrostatic capacity C becomes larger when the load is added. A general formula to obtain the electrostatic capacity C when the load is actually added is far more complicated than equation (1), and therefore is abbreviated here. Only the radiation of the electrostatic capacity and the load is indicated in a graph of Fig. 7 in which the abscissa designates the weight of an object to be measured. The initial bias weight, for example, the weight of the rotary saucer, the supporting shaft and the like, is already added in the sensor in advance. The electrostatic capacity-load characteristic varies in accordance with the change in the contact area between the load transmission member 18 and the diaphragm 19, and the parameter is set to be the diameter of the contact area of the load transmission member 18. It is seen from the graph of Fig. 7 that the sensitivity in the case where the diameter of the contact area is 4 mm is better than that in the case where the diameter of the contact area is 6 mm. In other words, high sensitivity is gained when the contact area is rendered small. Thus, when 5 kg is added, the electrostatic capacity is increased up to 50-60 PF, although it is about 25 PF without any load.

The load sensor 30 of an electrostatic capacity type described above is compact and thin in structure, but displays tremendously strong load-electrostatic capacity characteristic, and chemical stability without any change at all even after a long time has passed. Therefore, the electrostatic capacity type load sensor 30 is remarkably effective in practical use. However, since the load sensor 30 is inferior in mechanism strength, some protective countermeasures should be considered when mounting the load sensor into the weight detecting device.

Fig. 8 shows the structure of a weight detecting device which is provided with the electrostatic capacity type load sensor 30. The supporting shaft 11 passes through the interior of the motor 10. Moreover, the supporting shaft 11 is held by a bearing 29 in a manner to keep an adequate clearance. The material of the supporting shaft 11 is suitable to be ceramic in terms of abrasion-proof characteristic thereof. The motor 10 in an electric source synchronous model which has a permanent magnet and a coil as its driving source changes the rotation of the driving source at high speed into low speed and large torque by the use of many gears such as a gear A and a gear B secured to the supporting shaft 11. The supporting shaft 11 is formed with a through-hole into which is inserted a brake pin 33 to prevent the falling off of the shaft. It is also desirable that lubricating oil is filled in the clearance between the supporting shaft 11 and the bearing 29 so as to achieve smooth sliding.

The electrostatic capacity type load sensor 30 is placed on a sensor platform 23, and is entirely covered with a metallic sensor covering 24, so that the load sensor 30 is not only electrically shielded, but fixedly maintained. Further, a through-hole is formed in the sensor covering 24, through which the upper part of the load transmission member 18 projects outwards to be held movable in the vertical direction. The sensor platform 23 is a sheet metal in the shape obtained when the sensitive part of the substrate 20 (inside

the concentric glass spacer 22) is punched out, which prevents the load application from the lateral side of the substrate 20. In the above-described construction, the load W is transmitted correctly to the load transmission member 18 and the diaphragm 19 through the supporting shaft 11. On this occasion, the stress of the elastic member 16 should be taken into consideration. For example, 1 kg load is added and the elastic member 16 is deflected 5 mm, the elastic constant K1 of the elastic member 16 is 0.2 (kg/mm). On the other hand, since it is a standard of the electrostatic capacity type load sensor 30 that the upper and lower electrodes 21 are brought into contact with each other when 6 kg load (including the initial bias weight) is added, the displacement amount is equal to the initial gap 0.045 mm of the electrodes, and therefore the elastic constant K2 is 133 (kg/mm).

As described above, K2 is 666 times as large as K1 and according the load sensor 30 can neglect the influences of the elastic member 16. However, so long as the elastic member 16 is not broken due to the bending thereof or the elastic member 16 is not pierced through because of the friction with the supporting shaft 11, the thickness of the elastic member 16 is better to be thinner to avoid influences of K1, thereby enhancing the sensitivity of the load sensor.

Thereafter, the load transmitted to the electrostatic capacity type load sensor 30 is converted to an electrostatic capacity and taken outwards by a lead wire 34. However, since the microcomputer 13 can not recognize the electrically physical amount of the electrostatic capacity, the interface circuit 12 is required so that the electrostatic capacity is converted into a different form of information. The analog amount which the conventional microcomputer is able to recognize is generally and only the voltage level if the microcomputer is provided with an A/D conversion function. In accordance with the recent progress in the sensor technique, however, various kinds of microcomputers have been developed and, among those microcomputers, even such a one that can count the number of pulses inputted from an exterior circuit for a predetermined time independently of the operation of the CPU has been brought into the commercial market. Therefore, nowadays, several hundreds KHz of frequencies have come to be read directly by such microcomputer as above with extreme ease. Accordingly, in the present invention, such microcomputer as described above which is equipped with the even counter function is employed, together with an oscillating circuit as the interface circuit 12 wherein the frequency is changed depending on the electrostatic capacity. Fig. 9 is a circuit diagram of the interface circuit 12. Operational amplifiers OP1 and OP2 are operated by three power sources, namely, V+, V- and GND. An integrated circuit comprised of the operational amplifier OP1, a resistance R and the electrostatic capacity C of the electrostatic capacity type load sensor 30 and a hysteresis comparator comprised of the operational amplifier OP2, and resistances R1 and R2 are combined to form an oscillating circuit in which the frequency is changed depending on the electrostatic capacity C. The principle of the operation of the interface circuit will be briefly described hereinbelow. An output of the operational amplifier OP2 has two levels, that is, H level Voh and L level Vol. For example, if the output at the instant time is H level Voh, a (-) input terminal of the operational amplifier OP1 is negative-fed back by the electrostatic capacity C and imaginary short-circuited with a (+) input terminal at GND potential. Therefore, a constant current Voh/R flows in the (-) input terminal of the operational amplifier OP1 through the resistance R. However, the input impedance of the operational amplifier OP1 is extremely high, and consequently most of the output flows in the electrostatic capacity C to drop an output of the operational amplifier OP2 linearly. At the time when the voltage at the (+) input terminal of the operational amplifier OP2 which is determined by the divided voltage of the resistance R1 and R2 becomes lower than the GND potential, the output of the operational amplifier OP2 is reversed to Vol, and a constant current Vol/R flows in the electrostatic capacity C in the reverse direction, whereby the output of the operational amplifier OP2 is finally reversed again. Fig. 10 illustrates voltage waveforms at points (1) and (2) of Fig. 9. Such vibrations as shown by the waveforms in Fig. 10 are repeated to continue the oscillation. A frequency f is generally expressed by the following equation (2):

$$f = \frac{1}{CxZ} \quad \dots\dots (2)$$

wherein a circuit constant (determined by the characteristics of the resistances and the amplifiers) is Z and the electrostatic capacity is C. As is seen from formula (2), the frequency f is inversely proportional to the electrostatic capacity C. A rectangular wave signal of the output of the operational amplifier OP2 is level-shifted to a rectangular wave signal concurrent with the operating voltages V+, GND of the microcomputer by a succeeding buffer circuit comprised of a diode D1, resistances R3 and R4 and a transistor Tr1. Fig. 11 shows the oscillation frequency-weight characteristic of the rectangular wave signal. The weight in Fig. 11 indicates the weight of the food placed on the rotary saucer 7. The microcomputer 13 memorizes the

relation between the frequency and the weight in the form of a higher order power series approximative formula. For example, supposing that the number of pulses counted by the microcomputer 13 for n seconds is f, and the detected weight is W, the following equation (3) is established:

$$W = K_n \cdot f^n + K_{n-1} \cdot f^{n-1} + \dots + K_1 \cdot f + K_0 \quad (3)$$

wherein $K_n, K_{n-1}, \dots, K_1, K_0$ are coefficients of the approximative formula. The weight of the food is approximately calculated by the above formula (3). Although it depends on the efficiency of the microcomputer 13, it may be suitable to calculate the weight approximately by a secondary order or a third order formula.

The principle of the weight detection would be understood from the foregoing description. Still one more problem remains yet to be solved before the weight detecting device is put into practical use, which will be explained with reference to Fig. 8. Although it has been described earlier that the supporting shaft 11 is held movable only in the vertical direction by the bearing portion 29 with the proper clearance maintained between the shaft 11 and the bearing portion 29, actually it is impossible to hold the supporting shaft 11 precisely vertically. If the food is put on the rotary saucer 7, the supporting shaft 11 is inclined in any optional direction, thereby to change the load transmission condition to the load sensor 30 correspondingly. This is a great reason for positional errors. It will be found, for example, from Fig. 14(b) showing the characteristic of the instantaneous weight detected during rotation of the rotary saucer 7 of the weight detecting device having the construction of Fig. 8 that the instantaneous weight is greatly changed in accordance with the rotation of the saucer 7. Therefore, the weight should be detected when the motor is stopped, resulting in positional errors and inferior measuring accuracy. It is thus required that the weights are detected during one rotation of the saucer 7 or for such a long period of time as corresponding to the time period of one rotation of the saucer 7 which are in turn integrated to obtain the average. The advantages of the integration will be seen from Fig. 12. In this case, for an easy example, a sine wave of the average weight W_0 , the oscillation width A, and the angular velocity (rotating speed of the motor) ω during rotation is considered to obtain the average weight W by the integration as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} W &= \frac{1}{t_1} \int_{t_0}^{t_0+t_1} (W_0 + A \sin \omega t) dt \\ &= W_0 + \frac{A}{t_1} \{ \cos \omega t_0 - \cos \omega(t_0+t_1) \} \quad \dots \quad (4) \end{aligned}$$

wherein the beginning time is t_0 and the integration time period is t_1 . An error from the true value W_0 is expressed in the second term of equation (4), which is proportional to the oscillation width A and inversely proportional to the integration time period t_1 . Accordingly, it is desirable to integrate to obtain the average for a time period closer to the rotating cycle of the motor so as to reduce the errors.

The motor for rotating the saucer in the electronic oven rotates generally at low speeds of 5-6 rpm in many cases, resulting in long integration time period of 10-12 seconds. It is necessary, however, from convenience's sake that the time point when cooking is finished be immediately informed to the user in the case where the earlier-mentioned automatic defrosting is selected among the category of cooking. Therefore, the oscillation width A should be made smaller to shorten the integration time as much as possible in equation (4). In Fig. 13, the construction of a weight detecting device which is improved in structure to reduce the change amount of the instantaneous weight in accordance with the rotation as is shown. In the weight detecting device of Fig. 13, the contact area of the supporting shaft 11 with the elastic member 16 is made smaller than the cross sectional area in the central part of the shaft 11, that is, the contact portion of the shaft 11 is sharpened. According to the above-described construction, even when the rotary saucer 7 is rotated consequently to change the inclination degrees of the supporting shaft 11, the contact portion of the shaft 11 with the elastic member 16 is moved within a relatively narrow space, thereby reducing the change of the stress by the elastic member 16. Further, if the contact surface between the load transmission member 18 and the elastic member 16 is formed flat, the load to be transmitted through the elastic member 16 can be transmitted positively in the vertical direction to the electrostatic capacity type load sensor 30, resulting in reduction of the transmission loss. Because of the aforementioned construction, the instantaneous weight during rotation of the motor is changed with remarkably reduced scale. Fig. 14(a) shows the characteristic of the instantaneous weight in the case where the tip of the supporting shaft 11 is sharpened to make the contact area small between the shaft 11 and the elastic

member 16, and at the same time, the upper part of the load transmission member 18 is made flat as in the weight detecting device of Fig. 13, while Fig. 14(b) shows the characteristic of the instantaneous weight in the case where the contact portion of the supporting shaft 11 is cut flat and the load transmission member 18 is formed in the conventional cannon ball shape as in the weight detecting device in Fig. 8. Although the food to be measured is 1000 g in both cases, the change of the instantaneous weight is improved to be about 1/7 according to the present invention. Therefore, the above-described integration time period t_1 can be shortened, whereby the weight can be detected immediately.

In the manner as described above, the conventional Roberval's mechanism is rendered completely simplified, and simultaneously, errors due to the positional difference of the food on the saucer, can be avoided. With respect to the measuring accuracy, it is possible to measure the weight relatively instantaneously although a little neglectable delay is present in actual use, thus fully responding to such requirements that the detected result be informed to the user promptly in the electronic oven, etc.

The following description refers to the breakage preventing arrangement which will turn the weight detecting device of the present invention to be a sturdy and highly reliable one. As has been described earlier, the electrostatic capacity type load sensor has considerably strong electrostatic capacity characteristic with respect to the load, and is finely small, and accordingly, the electrostatic capacity type load sensor can be most suitably mounted in a thin weight detecting device. However, since the load sensor is constructed by alumina ceramic which is greatly easy to be broken, the load sensor should be mounted with some arrangement. In the weight detecting device shown in Fig. 8, for example, the sensor platform 23 is hollow because the lower portion of the sensitive part is bored in order to avoid the application of the load from the side of the substrate 20. In the above construction, if an impact or an overload is added to the weight detecting device, since no cushion or buffer for absorbing the impact is present in such construction, the diaphragm 19 is deflected to an unlimited scale. As a result, not only the diaphragm 19 is contacted with the substrate 20, but the substrate 20 itself is caused to be deflected to be finally broken. According to the present embodiment, the diaphragm 19 and the substrate 20 are made of alumina plate having the thickness of approximately 0.5 mm, the deflection amount leading to the breakage of which is below 100 microns at the maximum, and the structural arrangement is necessary to control the above-described small deflection amount.

Fig. 15 is a view showing the structure of one example of a weight detecting device which is provided with a protective mechanism so as to control the small deflection amount referred to above. The A-A' surface of a flat sensor platform 23 is ground, maintaining the strict planeness. Therefore, the sensor platform is scarcely influenced by the load application from the side of the substrate 20. When the load is added in this weight detecting device, the diaphragm 19 is deflected until it is brought into contact with the substrate 20. Thereafter, even when much load is further added, the sturdy sensor platform 23 restricts the deflection of the diaphragm 19, thereby to prevent the destruction of the substrate 20. Although the above-described arrangement can make some improvement, the grinding operation of the AA' surface of the flat sensor platform 23 is necessitated which will require considerable accuracy, and which is therefore disadvantageous from the fact that the number of operations is increased, with higher manufacturing cost. Moreover, since the substrate 20 is curved or warped in the manufacturing process or foreign matters may be adhered onto the ground surface of the sensor platform, it is impossible to completely avoid the application of pressure from the side of the substrate 20.

In the weight detecting device of Fig. 15, a thin-film spacer 31 is inserted below the sensitive part of the substrate 20 so as to prevent the breakage of the load sensor. A generally-sold aluminum foil has the stable thickness, approximately 15 microns. Therefore, it is this aluminum foil referred to above is employed as the thin film spacer 31, a very small gap in the thickness of about 15 microns can be secured precisely below the sensitive part of the substrate 20. This will be effective for prevention of the breakage of the load sensor similarly as in the case where the deflection amount of the diaphragm is restricted.

Fig. 16 displays a further arrangement of the protective mechanism for prevention of the breakage of the load sensor wherein a small gap is formed below the sensitive part of the substrate 20.

According to the arrangement of Fig. 16, the water repellant coating 32 which is disclosed in WO 87/04786 (SAKAMOTO et al.) is positively utilized. The coating 32 is such that polyimide amidic resin, silicon resin or fluorize resin, etc. is coated on the surface of the load sensor, thereby to avoid influences of the leak current due to the dew drops, dusts, or the like produced on the surface of the load sensor, and therefore the water repellant coating is considerably useful to secure the efficiency of the sensor. As shown in Fig. 17, the water repellant coating 32 is coated except the pressure sensitive part of the substrate 20, so that a gap of the water repellant coating approximately 10 microns in thickness can be secured below the sensitive part of the substrate 20. Accordingly, it is able not only to avoid the influences of the leak current, but to protect the load sensor by the small gap below the sensitive part of the substrate. In order to control

the coating thickness of the water repellant coating 32, uniformity is required in the coating operation conditions, namely, in the coating manner of the coating material or in the spraying condition of the coating material, etc.

It will be understood from the above description that it is extremely difficult to form the small gap below the sensitive part of the substrate 20 with high precision. Fig. 18 illustrates the structure of a sensor protecting mechanism subjected to etching to secure the small gap precisely. The metallic sensor platform 23 is corroded through etching by the depth of about 10 microns below the sensitive part of the substrate 20, thereby to form a small gap. The corrosion depth of etching can be adjusted by the accuracy of 1 micron if the density and temperature of the etching solution, and the time period during which the object to be corroded is left in the etching solution are controlled. Therefore, the etching method is superior in that the depth is rarely irregular and good productivity is secured.

Further, as shown in Fig. 19, more effects can be achieved when liquid silicon rubber is filled into the small gap formed in the above-described various methods. The liquid silicon rubber is able to spread into the gap without adding unnecessary stress to the sensitive part, producing the sealed condition. The silicon rubber, after being hardened, is stable in the temperature range of -50 to 200°C as the elastic material, so that extraordinary deflection of the diaphragm 19 can be limited, and at the same time impacts can be absorbed, thus improving reliability of the protective function of the arrangement.

The weight detecting device according to the present invention is applicable to a heating and cooking apparatus, like an electronic oven, provided with a rotary saucer. Moreover, the present invention is not restricted to the heating and cooking apparatus, but it is needless to say that the present invention is also applicable to a weight detecting device which can measure the weight of an object while rotating the object.

Claims

1. A weight detecting device which comprises:
 - a saucer (7) on which is placed an object to be measured;
 - a rotatable shaft (11) for supporting said saucer (7) which can move with a predetermined displacement amount in the supporting direction;
 - a driving means (10) for rotating said supporting shaft;
 - an elastic member (16) which receives said supporting shaft (11) and moves in the supporting direction;
 - a load detecting means (17) which converts the load transmitted through said elastic member (16) in the supporting direction of said supporting shaft (11) into corresponding electrically physical amount; and
 - a weight detecting circuit (13) which detects the weight of the object from the electrically physical amount put out from the load detecting means (17);
 characterized in that
 - said elastic member (16) is a flat plate-like spring member, the surface of which is perpendicular to the direction of the axis of said supporting shaft (11), and that
 - said elastic member (16) is supported at more than two points, and the position where said elastic member (16) is contacted with said supporting shaft (11) is approximately at the center of the supporting points.
2. A weight detecting device as claimed in claim 1, wherein said elastic member (16) is a flat plate-like leaf spring.
3. A weight detecting device as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein said load detecting means (17) is provided on an extension line of said supporting shaft (11).
4. A weight detecting device as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said weight detecting circuit (73) is so constructed as to integrate outputs of the load detecting means (77) for a given time period less than the rotating cycle of the driving means (70) while the object to be measured is rotated by the driving means (70), thereby to detect the weight of the object.
5. A weight detecting device as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said load detecting means (77) is comprised of a substrate (20) made of sintered alumina, a diaphragm (79) made of sintered alumina and opposed a predetermined distance from said substrate (20), capacity electrodes (21) formed on the opposite surfaces of said substrate (20) and said diaphragm (19), a glass spacer (21) coupling said diaphragm



the coating thickness of the water repellant coating 32, uniformity is required in the coating operation conditions, namely, in the coating manner of the coating material or in the spraying condition of the coating material, etc.

It will be understood from the above description that it is extremely difficult to form the small gap below the sensitive part of the substrate 20 with high precision. Fig. 18 illustrates the structure of a sensor protecting mechanism subjected to etching to secure the small gap precisely. The metallic sensor platform 23 is corroded through etching by the depth of about 10 microns below the sensitive part of the substrate 20, thereby to form a small gap. The corrosion depth of etching can be adjusted by the accuracy of 1 micron if the density and temperature of the etching solution, and the time period during which the object to be corroded is left in the etching solution are controlled. Therefore, the etching method is superior in that the depth is rarely irregular and good productivity is secured.

Further, as shown in Fig. 19, more effects can be achieved when liquid silicon rubber is filled into the small gap formed in the above-described various methods. The liquid silicon rubber is able to spread into the gap without adding unnecessary stress to the sensitive part, producing the sealed condition. The silicon rubber, after being hardened, is stable in the temperature range of -50 to 200 °C as the elastic material, so that extraordinary deflection of the diaphragm 19 can be limited, and at the same time impacts can be absorbed, thus improving reliability of the protective function of the arrangement.

The weight detecting device according to the present invention is applicable to a heating and cooking apparatus, like an electronic oven, provided with a rotary saucer. Moreover, the present invention is not restricted to the heating and cooking apparatus, but it is needless to say that the present invention is also applicable to a weight detecting device which can measure the weight of an object while rotating the object.

Claims

1. A weight detecting device which comprises:
 - a saucer (7) on which is placed an object to be measured;
 - a rotatable shaft (11) for supporting said saucer (7) which can move with a predetermined displacement amount in the supporting direction;
 - a driving means (10) for rotating said supporting shaft;
 - an elastic member (16) which receives said supporting shaft (11) and moves in the supporting direction;
 - a load detecting means (17) which converts the load transmitted through said elastic member (16) in the supporting direction of said supporting shaft (11) into corresponding electrically physical amount; and
 - a weight detecting circuit (13) which detects the weight of the object from the electrically physical amount put out from the load detecting means (17);
 characterized in that
 - said elastic member (16) is a flat plate-like spring member, the surface of which is perpendicular to the direction of the axis of said supporting shaft (11), and that
 - said elastic member (16) is supported at more than two points, and the position where said elastic member (16) is contacted with said supporting shaft (11) is approximately at the center of the supporting points.
2. A weight detecting device as claimed in claim 1, wherein said elastic member (16) is a flat plate-like leaf spring.
3. A weight detecting device as claimed in claim 1 or 2, wherein said load detecting means (17) is provided on an extension line of said supporting shaft (11).
4. A weight detecting device as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said weight detecting circuit (73) is so constructed as to integrate outputs of the load detecting means (77) for a given time period less than the rotating cycle of the driving means (70) while the object to be measured is rotated by the driving means (70), thereby to detect the weight of the object.
5. A weight detecting device as claimed in Claim 1, wherein said load detecting means (77) is comprised of a substrate (20) made of sintered alumina, a diaphragm (79) made of sintered alumina and opposed a predetermined distance from said substrate (20), capacity electrodes (21) formed on the opposite surfaces of said substrate (20) and said diaphragm (19), a glass spacer (21) coupling said diaphragm



(19) with said substrate (20) in the outer periphery of said capacity electrodes (21), and a load transmission member (18) which is provided approximately in the center of the capacity electrode (21) of said diaphragm (19) to transmit to said diaphragm (19) the load from outside.

- 5 6. A weight detecting device as claimed in Claim 5, wherein the contact area of said supporting shaft (11) with said elastic member (16) is made smaller than the central cross sectional area of said supporting shaft (11), so that the end of said supporting shaft (11) is sharpened.
- 10 7. A weight detecting device as claimed in Claim 5, wherein said load transmission member (18) has the surface contacted with the elastic member (16) formed into a flat surface.
8. A weight detecting device as claimed in Claim 5, wherein a flat plate-like sensor platform (25) is provided so as to place said load detecting means (77) thereon, the surface of which at the side contacted with said substrate (20) is ground to be plane.
- 15 9. A weight detecting device as claimed in Claim 5, further comprising the sensor platform (23) for placing the load detecting means (77), and a thin film spacer (37) in the microns' thickness inserted between said sensor platform (23) and said substrate (20), said thin film spacer (37) boring the sensitive part of the substrate (20) inside the glass spacer (22).
- 20 10. A weight detecting device as claimed in Claim 5, further comprising the flat sensor platform (23) for placing the load detecting means (77), so constructed that said load detecting means (77) except said load transmission member (78) and the sensitive part of the substrate (20) is coated with water repellant material.
- 25 11. A weight detecting device as claimed in Claim 5, further comprising the flat sensor platform (23) for placing the load detecting means (77), the portion of which opposite to the sensitive part of the substrate (20) inside the glass spacer (22) is etched to form a microns' small gap.
- 30 12. A weight detecting device as claimed in Claims 9, 10, and 11, wherein the small gap below the substrate (20) is filled with silicon rubber to be in a sealed condition.

Patentansprüche

- 35 1. Gewichterfassungsvorrichtung, welche aufweist:
einen Teller (7), auf dem ein zu messender Gegenstand angeordnet wird;
eine drehbare Welle (11), die den Teller (7) stützt und sich um einen bestimmten Verschiebeweg in Stützrichtung bewegen kann;
eine Antriebseinrichtung (10) zum Drehen der Stützwelle;
40 ein elastisches Teil (16), das die Stützwelle (11) aufnimmt und sich in Stützrichtung bewegt;
eine Lasterfassungseinrichtung (17), die die durch das elastische Teil (16) in Stützrichtung der Stützwelle (11) übertragene Last in eine entsprechende elektrischphysikalische Größe umwandelt; und
eine Gewichterfassungsschaltung (13), die das Gewicht des Gegenstandes aus dem elektrisch-physikalischen Wert von der Lasterfassungseinrichtung (17) ermittelt;
45 dadurch gekennzeichnet, daß
das elastische Teil (16) ein flaches plattenförmiges Federelement ist, dessen Oberfläche senkrecht zur Richtung der Achse der Stützwelle (11) verläuft, und daß das elastische Teil (16) an mehr als zwei Punkten gehalten wird und die Stelle, an der sich das elastische Teil (16) in Berührung mit der Stützwelle (11) befindet, etwa in der Mitte von den Haltepunkten liegt.
- 50 2. Gewichterfassungsvorrichtung nach Anspruch 1, bei welcher das elastische Teil (16) eine flache plattenförmige Blattfeder ist.
3. Gewichterfassungsvorrichtung nach Anspruch 1 oder 2, bei welcher die Lasterfassungseinrichtung (17) an einer Verlängerungslinie der Stützwelle (11) vorgesehen ist.
- 55 4. Gewichterfassungsvorrichtung nach Anspruch 1, bei welcher die Gewichterfassungsschaltung (13) so konstruiert ist, daß sie die Ausgangssignale der Lasterfassungseinrichtung (17) für eine gegebene



Zeitdauer integriert, die geringer als der Umdrehungszyklus der Antriebseinrichtung (10) ist, während der zu messende Gegenstand von der Antriebseinrichtung (10) gedreht wird, um dadurch das Gewicht des Gegenstandes zu ermitteln.

- 5 5. Gewichterfassungsvorrichtung nach Anspruch 1, bei welcher die Lasterfassungseinrichtung (17) aus einem aus gesinterter Aluminiumoxyd bestehenden Substrat (20), aus einer aus gesinterter Aluminiumoxyd bestehenden Membran (19), die in einem bestimmten Abstand dem Substrat (20) gegenüberliegt, an den gegenüberliegenden Seiten des Substrates (20) und der Membran (19) ausgebildeten kapazitiven Elektroden (21), einem die Membran (19) mit dem Substrat (20) am äußeren Umfang der kapazitiven Elektroden (21) verbindenden Glasabstandshalter und einem Lastübertragungselement (18) besteht, das etwa in der Mitte der kapazitiven Elektrode (21) der Membran (19) vorgesehen ist, um die Last von außen auf die Membran (19) zu übertragen.
- 10 6. Gewichterfassungsvorrichtung nach Anspruch 5, bei welcher die Berührungsfläche der Stützwelle (11) mit dem elastischen Teil (16) kleiner als die zentrale Querschnittsfläche der Stützwelle (11) ist, so daß das Ende der Stützwelle (11) angespitzt ist.
- 15 7. Gewichterfassungsvorrichtung nach Anspruch 5, bei welcher die sich mit dem elastischen Teil (16) in Berührung befindliche Oberfläche des Lastübertragungselementes (18) als ebene Oberfläche ausgebildet ist.
- 20 8. Gewichterfassungsvorrichtung nach Anspruch 5, bei welcher ein flacher, plattenförmiger Sensorsockel (23) so vorgesehen ist, daß die Lasterfassungseinrichtung (17) darauf angeordnet wird, dessen Oberfläche an der sich mit dem Substrat (20) in Berührung befindlichen Seite so geschliffen ist, daß sie eben ist.
- 25 9. Gewichterfassungsvorrichtung nach Anspruch 5, welche außerdem den Sensorsockel (23) zur Anordnung der Lasterfassungseinrichtung (17) und einen zwischen dem Sensorsockel (23) und dem Substrat (20) eingesetzten dünnen Folienabstandshalter (31) mit einer Dicke im Mikron-Bereich aufweist, wobei der dünne Folienabstandshalter (31) den sensitiven Teil des Substrates (20) innerhalb des Glasabstandshalters (22) durchbohrt.
- 30 10. Gewichterfassungsvorrichtung nach Anspruch 5, welche außerdem den flachen Sensorsockel (23) zur Anordnung der Lasterfassungseinrichtung (17) aufweist, welcher so konstruiert ist, daß die Lasterfassungseinrichtung (17), ausgenommen das Lastübertragungselement (18) und den sensitiven Teil des Substrates (20), mit wasserabweisendem Material beschichtet ist.
- 35 11. Gewichterfassungsvorrichtung nach Anspruch 5, welche außerdem den flachen Sensorsockel (23) zur Anordnung der Lasterfassungseinrichtung (17) aufweist, dessen dem sensitiven Teil des Substrates (20) innerhalb des Glasabstandshalters (22) gegenüberliegender Abschnitt so geätzt ist, daß ein kleiner Spalt im Mikron-Bereich gebildet wird.
- 40 12. Gewichterfassungsvorrichtung nach den Ansprüchen 9, 10 und 11, bei welcher der kleine Spalt unterhalb des Substrates (20) mit Silikongummi gefüllt ist, um sich im dichtenden Zustand zu befinden.
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Revendications

1. Un dispositif de détection de poids comprenant :
 - 50 un plateau (7) sur lequel est placé un objet à mesurer;
 - un barreau tournant (11) destiné à supporter le plateau (7), qui peut se déplacer avec une valeur de déplacement prédéterminée dans la direction de support;
 - des moyens d'entraînement (10) destinés à faire tourner le barreau de support;
 - un élément élastique (16) qui reçoit le barreau de support (11) et qui se déplace dans la direction
 - 55 de support;
 - des moyens de détection de charge (17) qui convertissent en une grandeur physique électrique correspondante la charge transmise par l'élément élastique (16) dans la direction du barreau de support (11); et



un circuit de détection de poids (13) qui détecte le poids de l'objet à partir de la grandeur physique électrique qui est émise par les moyens de détection de charge (17);

caractérisé en ce que

l'élément élastique (16) est un élément à ressort plat, en forme de plaquette, dont la surface est perpendiculaire à la direction de l'axe du barreau de support (11), et en ce que

l'élément élastique (16) est supporté en plus de deux points, et la position à laquelle cet élément élastique (16) vient en contact avec le barreau de support (11) se trouve approximativement au centre des points de support.

2. Un dispositif de détection de poids selon la revendication 1, dans lequel l'élément élastique (16) est un ressort à lame plat, en forme de plaquette.
3. Un dispositif de détection de poids selon la revendication 1 ou la revendication 2, dans lequel les moyens de détection de charge (17) sont placés sur un prolongement du barreau de support (11).
4. Un dispositif de détection de poids selon la revendication 1, dans lequel le circuit de détection de poids (13) est réalisé de façon à intégrer des signaux de sortie des moyens de détection de charge (17) pendant une durée donnée inférieure au cycle de rotation des moyens d'entraînement (10), pendant que l'objet à mesurer tourne sous l'action des moyens d'entraînement (10), pour détecter ainsi le poids de l'objet.
5. Un dispositif de détection de poids selon la revendication 1, dans lequel les moyens de détection de charge (17) sont constitués par un substrat (20) en alumine frittée, une membrane (19) en alumine frittée, placée face au substrat (20), à une distance prédéterminée de ce dernier, des électrodes capacitives (21) formées sur les surfaces opposées du substrat (20) et de la membrane (19), une entretoise en verre (22) reliant la membrane (19) au substrat (20) à la périphérie extérieure des électrodes capacitives (21), et un élément de transmission de charge (18) qui est placé approximativement au centre de l'électrode capacitive (21) de la membrane (19), pour transmettre à la membrane (19) la charge provenant de l'extérieur.
6. Un dispositif de détection de poids selon la revendication 5, dans lequel l'aire de contact du barreau de support (11) avec l'élément élastique (16) est inférieure à l'aire de section droite centrale du barreau de support (11), ce qui fait que l'extrémité du barreau de support (11) est pointue.
7. Un dispositif de détection de poids selon la revendication 5, dans lequel la surface de l'élément de transmission de charge (18) qui est en contact avec l'élément élastique (16) est une surface plane.
8. Un dispositif de détection de poids selon la revendication 5, dans lequel une plate-forme de capteur ayant la forme d'une plaquette plane (23) est incorporée de façon à supporter les moyens de détection de charge (17), et la surface de cette plate-forme qui se trouve du côté venant en contact avec le substrat (20) est meulée de façon à être plane.
9. Un dispositif de détection de poids selon la revendication 5, comprenant en outre la plate-forme de capteur (23) prévue pour recevoir les moyens de détection de charge (17), et une entretoise à couche mince (31), ayant une épaisseur de l'ordre de quelques microns, intercalée entre la plate-forme de capteur (23) et le substrat (20), cette entretoise à couche mince (31) supportant la partie sensible du substrat (20) à l'intérieur de l'entretoise en verre (22).
10. un dispositif de détection de poids selon la revendication 5, comprenant en outre la plate-forme de capteur plane (23) destinée à recevoir les moyens de détection de charge (17), construit de façon que les moyens de détection de charge (17), à l'exception de l'élément de transmission de charge (18) et de la partie sensible du substrat (20), soient revêtus d'un matériau hydrofuge.
11. Un dispositif de détection de poids selon la revendication 5, comprenant en outre la plate-forme de capteur plane (23) destinée à recevoir les moyens de détection de charge (17), et la partie de cette plate-forme qui est opposée à la partie sensible du substrat (20) à l'intérieur de l'entretoise en verre (22) étant gravée pour former un petit espace, de quelques microns.



12. Un dispositif de détection de poids selon les revendications 9, 10 et 11, dans lequel le petit espace au-dessous du substrat (20) est rempli avec du caoutchouc aux silicones pour établir une condition d'étanchéité.

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