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(54) STORAGE CONTAINER FOR FOODSTUFFS

(71) We, DART INDUSTRIES INC., a corporation organised and existing under the laws of the State of Delaware, United States of America, of 8480 Beverly Boulevard, Los Angeles, State of California, 90054, United States of America, do hereby declare the invention, for which we pray that a patent may be granted to us, and the method by which it is to be performed, to be particularly described in and by the following statement:—

This invention relates to a storage and serving container for, for example, poultry and other meat produce and more particularly concerns a tray and closure combination which may be used in the cutting, serving and storage of such produce.

According to the present invention there is provided a storage and serving tray and closure combination suitable for holding consumable foodstuffs and comprising a tray having a bottom wall integral with an upwardly extending side wall, said bottom wall being integrally constructed to include a plurality of raised ribs and channel-like portions therebetween such that when the combination is in use the ribs may support the foodstuff and the channel-like portions may collect any fluids exuded thereby, said tray having an outwardly extending peripheral ledge with a downwardly projecting peripheral sealing member depending therefrom which terminates in an outwardly extending peripheral lip all of which are integral with said side and bottom walls, and a closure having a top wall and downwardly extending side walls, said downwardly extending side walls including a peripheral sealing flange having an inner surface arranged such that the closure may be placed on the tray with said inner surface sealingly engaging the outer surface of said sealing member, the closure having an outwardly protruding peripheral rim adjacent the sealing flange, which rim is positioned such that it is proximate to the outwardly extending peripheral ledge of said tray when said closure is placed in sealing relation thereon.

It is preferred that the bottom wall of

the tray includes a well adjacent to one side thereof, which well communicates with the channel-like portions such that when the combination is in use fluid may flow from said channel-like portions into said well.

In one embodiment of the invention the tray is generally rectangular in shape. In this embodiment it is preferred that said ribs are longitudinally orientated in said tray.

It is still further preferred that an extension of said tray side wall protrudes downwardly below said tray bottom wall to such an extent that upon inversion of said tray the closure may be placed on the inverted tray with said extension positioning the closure with its peripheral sealing flange resting on said outwardly extending peripheral lip which terminates said peripheral sealing member, thus producing a convertible double purpose container.

The invention also provides a method for storing foodstuffs, which method comprises keeping the foodstuffs in a storage and serving tray and closure combination in accordance with the invention.

A specific embodiment of the invention and a variant thereof will now be described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings in which:—

Figure 1 is an exploded top perspective view of a storage and serving container,

Figure 2 is a side elevational view of the container showing the tray and closure as assembled,

Figure 3 is a cross-section of the assembled container taken long line 3—3 of Figure 2,

Figure 4 is a cross-section of the assembled container taken along line 4—4 of Figure 3,

Figure 5 is a partial cross-sectional view of the assembled container depicting the engagement between the sealing flange and sealing member of the closure and tray, respectively,

Figure 6 is a top plan view of a variant form of the container tray wherein a well is provided adjacent one side thereof, and,

Figure 7 is a cross-section of the con-

tainer tray taken along line 7-7 of Figure 6.

Referring now to Figure 1, the closure and tray of the container 10 may be seen in an exploded relationship. The closure 12 includes a dome-like top wall and side walls 16 and 18 which terminate in a peripheral sealing flange 20 (Figure 5) more fully described hereinbelow. As is obvious from the drawings, closure 12 slips onto the tray 22 over the outwardly extending peripheral ledge 24 and into engagement with peripheral sealing member 26.

With continued reference to Figure 1, note that the tray 22 is generally rectangular in shape and is integrally formed of a bottom wall 28 which is configured so that a plurality of longitudinally orientated raised ribs 30 protrude above channel-like portions 32 therebetween. These ribs therefore support the meat product or other foodstuff retained in the tray and any juices or fluids that may exude or drain therefrom are collected in the channels. Likewise, the meat itself is retained above and out of contact with such fluids by the ribs 30 and this also enables the free circulation of air about the underside of the tray contents.

The tray further includes an integral side wall 34 which extends upwardly a short distance above the bottom wall. This extension thus provides a boundary wall to retain the foodstuffs yet enables easy access thereto for cutting, garnishing and serving. Outwardly extending peripheral ledge 24 emanates from side wall 34, and, from ledge 24 peripheral sealing member 26 projects downwardly. The tray structure is completed by a lateral horizontally outwardly extending peripheral lip 36 projecting from the lower edge of sealing member 26.

It should be appreciated that the tray 22 shown in Figures 1, 3 and 4 is invertible and may therefore be used in either position to form a closed container. To achieve this double purpose effect, the tray side wall 34 is extended below the bottom wall 28 to form an extension 38. This extension 38 then serves to position properly the closure 12 over the inverted tray so that the terminal edge of flange 20 will seat on the underside of the peripheral lip 36.

Although in the inverted position there is no positive sealing effect between flange 20 and lip 36, the head space of the two combined elements is substantially reduced. Thus, in certain circumstances where space limitations become a factor, the inverted arrangement may be preferred.

Figures 6 and 7 depict a variant form of tray 22 which unlike that shown in Figures 1, 3 and 4 also includes a well 40. Such well is located in the bottom wall 28 adjacent one side of the tray and communicates with the channel-like portions 32. Therefore, the

fluids that may be collected in these channel-like portions 32 will drain towards and into the well and likewise will be collected there. This then provides a storage area for the fluids and same may be easily poured or otherwise removed from the tray with ease.

Referring now to Figure 5, one will better appreciate the sealing technique which is preferably employed with this container. As has been set forth above, the tray sealing member 26 and closure sealing flange 20 are so dimensioned that as the closure is positioned on the tray the inner surface of the sealing flange 20 and the outer surface of the sealing member 26 come into mating and sealing engagement. Further, as is apparent in Figures 1-5, between flange 20 and the closure side wall construction consisting of walls 16 and 18 there is positioned an outwardly protruding peripheral rim 42. This rim is positioned such that it will reside approximately opposite ledge 24 when the closure is in place on the tray 22. This positioning strengthens the closure yet allows flexibility to flange 20 so that same can resiliently contact all areas of the sealing member 26. Likewise, the rim 42 will produce a light binding effect on sealing member 26 at the outer extremity of ledge 24 to further create a viable seal.

An additional function of the noted ledge is to provide means for gripping the closure to remove same from the tray.

The tray and closure can be fabricated from any known plastics material. It is, however, preferred that the tray be relatively rigid and capable of withstanding the placement of hot perishables thereon.

This container includes a low profile tray that is suitably constructed to fulfil all of the requirements from storage to serving. For example, the shallow area of the tray is constructed so that the produce is mostly exposed for cutting or the like and yet is positively retained therein out of contact with the tray or container sealing surface. Further, the ribbed bottom wall structure provides an integral means for drainage of fluids from such produce and in one embodiment there is a well for collection thereof. Likewise, a closure is included in the present container for placement upon the tray to enable foodstuffs to be stored in the container. The closure includes a sealing flange that is arranged to mate with the sealing member on the tray to provide an effective moisture and odor barrier.

The container therefore is particularly directed to the storage of meat, roasts, ham, poultry and other foodstuffs wherein substantial portions of the perishable normally remain unconsumed at a single meal and thus require storage for a short period of time prior to subsequent use. The invention further facilitates the simple opening and

closing of the container and provides separate elements that are easily cleaned.

WHAT WE CLAIM IS:—

- 5 1. A storage and serving tray and closure combination suitable for holding consumable foodstuffs and comprising a tray having a bottom wall integral with an upwardly extending side wall, said bottom wall being integrally constructed to include a plurality of raised ribs and channel-like portions therebetween such that when the combination is in use the ribs may support the foodstuff and the channel-like portions may collect any fluids exuded thereby, said tray having an outwardly extending peripheral ledge with a downwardly projecting peripheral sealing member depending therefrom which terminates in an outwardly extending peripheral lip all of which are integral with said side and bottom walls, and a closure having a top wall and downwardly extending side walls, said downwardly extending side walls including a peripheral sealing flange having an inner surface arranged such that the closure may be placed on the tray with said inner surface sealingly engaging the outer surface of said sealing member, the closure having an outwardly protruding peripheral rim adjacent the sealing flange, which rim is positioned such that it is proximate to the outwardly extending peripheral ledge of said tray when said closure is placed in sealing relation thereon.
- 20 2. A storage and serving tray and closure combination as claimed in claim 1, wherein the bottom wall of said tray includes a well adjacent to one side thereof, which well communicates with said channel-

like portions such that when the combination is in use fluid may flow from said channel-like portions into said well.

3. A storage and serving tray and closure combination as claimed in claim 1 or claim 2, wherein said tray is generally rectangular in shape.

4. A storage and serving tray and closure combination as claimed in claim 3, wherein said raised ribs are longitudinally orientated in said tray.

5. A storage and serving tray and closure combination as claimed in any one of the preceding claims, wherein an extension of said tray side wall protrudes downwardly below said tray bottom wall to such an extent that upon inversion of said tray the closure may be placed on the inverted tray with said extension positioning the closure with its peripheral sealing flange resting on said outwardly extending peripheral lip which terminates said peripheral sealing member, thus producing a convertible double purpose container.

6. A storage and serving tray and closure combination substantially as hereinbefore described with reference to and as illustrated in Figures 1 to 5 or Figures 6 and 7 of the accompanying drawings.

7. A method for storing foodstuffs, which method comprises keeping the foodstuffs in a storage and serving tray and closure combination as claimed in any one of the preceding claims.

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