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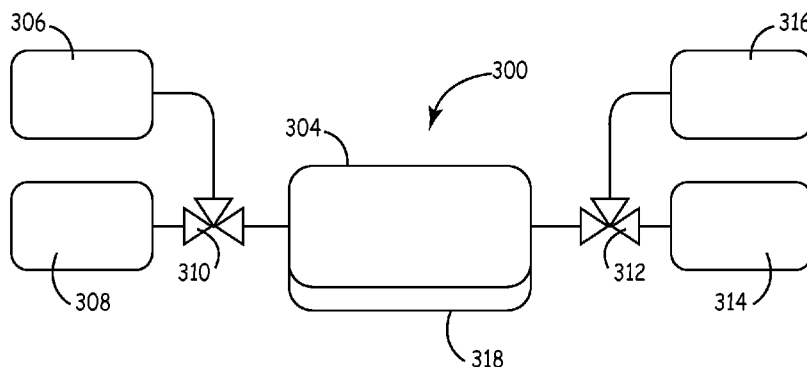


FIG. 3

(57) Abstract: The present invention relates to devices and methods for selectively removing contaminants from a crude product mixture. In an embodiment, the invention includes a method for removing free organic acids from a crude product mixture including contacting the crude product mixture with a metal oxide substrate, the metal oxide substrate having properties sufficient to bond with free organic acids in the crude product mixture, thereby removing free organic acids and forming a refined product mixture, and separating the refined product mixture from the metal oxide substrate. In an embodiment, the invention includes a device for removal of free organic acids from a crude product mixture including a first housing defining an interior volume, an input port, and an output port, and metal oxide media disposed within the first housing, the metal oxide media comprising a metal oxide selected from the group consisting of zirconia, alumina, hafnia, and titania. Other embodiments are also described herein.

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**DEVICES AND METHODS FOR SELECTIVE REMOVAL
OF CONTAMINANTS FROM A COMPOSITION**

This application is being filed as a PCT International Patent application on
5 February 13, 2008, in the name of SarTec Corporation, a U.S. national corporation,
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10 Alkyl Esters From Lipid Feed Stocks And Systems Including Same", filed February 13,
2007 and to U.S. Patent Application Serial Number 60/945,083, titled "Devices And
Methods For Selective Removal Of Organic Acids", filed June 19, 2007; the contents of
which are herein incorporated by reference.

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Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to devices and methods for purifying crude product
mixtures. Specifically, the invention relates to devices and methods for selectively
removing contaminants, such as organic acids, from a crude product mixture.

20

Background of the Invention

Many commercial production operations involve processing steps directed to the
removal of byproducts or contaminants from a product mixture. An example of this
occurs in the commercial process for producing soybean oil.

Soybean oil is usually produced through either a mechanical pressing process or a
25 solvent extraction process. Various preparative steps can occur in the process including
cleaning, drying and dehulling of the soybeans. After the soybeans are prepared, they can
be heated in order to coagulate the soy proteins to make the oil extraction process easier.
In the solvent extraction process, the soybeans are then cut into flakes which are put in

percolation extractors and immersed in a solvent, such as hexane. The soybean oil is solvated by the solvent and then separated from the flakes. The solvent is then separated from the soybean oil, such as with an evaporator. The solvent free crude soybean oil is then further purified (refined). In the mechanical pressing process, the soybeans are
5 typically crushed and pressed to yield a crude soybean oil which is then further purified.

Purification steps in both mechanical pressing processes and solvent extraction processes can include degumming (removing of phosphatides), alkali refining (washing with alkaline solution to remove free fatty acids, colorants, insoluble matter and gums) and bleaching (with activated earth or activated carbon to remove color and other impurities).
10 The alkali refining process (sometimes referred to as caustic refining) is frequently carried out by mixing a strong base, such as sodium hydroxide, into an aqueous solution and then combining the aqueous solution and the crude soybean oil and agitating the mixture. Free fatty acids in the crude soybean oil react (saponification) with the strong base to form a soap composition which is soluble in the aqueous phase and mostly insoluble in the oil
15 phase. The aqueous phase is then removed from the soybean oil carrying away the soap composition.

Alkali refining processes are effective for the removal of free fatty acids, but suffer from various disadvantages. First, alkali refining processes generally require the handling of very caustic strong bases, such as sodium hydroxide, creating safety issues and causing
20 significant wear on equipment. Second, such strong bases can be relatively expensive to use.

It will be appreciated that removal of free fatty acids is a process step that is part of many other industrial production processes. By way of example, biodiesel fuel is produced through a transesterification process that converts triglycerides into fatty acid
25 alkyl esters. This process is frequently carried out with either a strong base or strong acid.

In the context of the transesterification process processed with a strong base, the fatty acids react with the strong base to form a soap composition. Unfortunately, significant amounts of fatty acids are frequently present in biological feed stocks used to make biodiesel. As such, even after the transesterification reaction takes place, there can sometimes still be significant amounts of fatty acids present in the product mixture. However, guidelines for biodiesel fuel place strict limits on the concentration of fatty acids that can be present. As such, fatty acids need to be removed from biodiesel fuel made from certain types of feedstocks.

For at least these reasons, a need exists for new devices and methods for purifying crude product mixtures. Specifically, a need exists for new devices and methods for selectively removing organic acids from a crude product mixture.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention relates to devices and methods for selectively removing organic acids, such as fatty acids, from a crude product mixture. In an embodiment, the invention includes a method for removing free organic acids from a crude product mixture including contacting the crude product mixture with a metal oxide substrate, the metal oxide substrate having properties sufficient to bond with free organic acids in the crude product mixture, thereby removing free organic acids and forming a refined product mixture, and separating the refined product mixture from the metal oxide substrate.

In an embodiment, the invention includes a device for removal of free organic acids from a crude product mixture including a first housing defining an interior volume, an input port, and an output port, and metal oxide media disposed within the first housing, the metal oxide media comprising a metal oxide selected from the group consisting of zirconia, alumina, hafnia, and titania.

In an embodiment, the invention includes a method of producing a refined oil product from a plant material including mechanically pressing the plant material to separate out a crude oil product and contacting the crude oil product with a metal oxide media to remove organic acids from the crude oil product, thereby producing a refined oil product.

In an embodiment, the invention includes a system for producing a refined oil product including a mechanical press and a housing defining an interior volume, the housing configured to receive a crude oil product from the mechanical press and metal oxide media disposed within the interior volume, the metal oxide media including a metal oxide selected from the group consisting of zirconia, alumina, hafnia, and titania.

In an embodiment, the invention includes a system for producing a refined oil product including an evaporator configured to remove a solvent from a crude oil product mixture; and a housing defining an interior volume, the housing configured to receive the crude oil product mixture from the evaporator, metal oxide media disposed within the interior volume, the metal oxide media including a metal oxide selected from the group consisting of zirconia, alumina, hafnia, and titania.

In an embodiment, the invention includes a device for removal of free organic acids from a crude product mixture including a first housing defining an interior volume, an input port, and an output port; metal oxide media disposed within the first housing, the metal oxide media comprising a metal oxide selected from the group consisting of zirconia, alumina, hafnia, and titania; and a temperature control unit configured to maintain the temperature within the first housing within a first temperature range for a first period of time and within a second temperature range for a second period of time following the first period, the second range higher than the first range.

In an embodiment, the invention includes a system for producing a refined oil product including a production reactor for producing a crude oil product mixture from a lipid feedstock and an alcohol, the reactor comprising a lipid feedstock reservoir, and an alcohol reservoir; and an organic acid removal reactor in fluid communication with the
5 production reactor, the organic acid removal reactor comprising a housing defining an interior volume, the housing configured to receive the crude oil product mixture from the production reactor, metal oxide media disposed within the interior volume of the removal reactor housing, the metal oxide media comprising a metal oxide selected from the group consisting of zirconia, alumina, hafnia, and titania.

10 The above summary of the present invention is not intended to describe each discussed embodiment of the present invention. This is the purpose of the figures and the detailed description that follows.

Brief Description of the Figures

15 The invention may be more completely understood in connection with the following drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a block diagram of a contaminant removal device in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

20 FIG. 2 is a block diagram of a contaminant removal device in accordance with another embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 3 is a block diagram of a contaminant removal device in accordance with another embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 4 is a block diagram of a contaminant removal device in accordance with another embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 5 is a block diagram of a contaminant removal device in accordance with another embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 6 is a block diagram of a system for producing a refined oil product in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

5 FIG. 7 is a graph of free fatty acid concentrations in samples after processing with varying amounts of metal oxide media.

FIG. 8 is a graph of free fatty acid concentrations in samples after processing with varying amounts of metal oxide media.

10 FIG. 9 is a graph of free fatty acid concentrations in samples after processing with varying amounts of metal oxide media.

FIG. 10 is a graph of free fatty acid concentrations in samples after processing with varying amounts of metal oxide media.

FIG. 11 is a graph of free fatty acid concentrations in samples after processing with varying amounts of metal oxide media.

15 FIG. 12 is a graph of free fatty acid concentrations in samples after processing with varying amounts of metal oxide media.

FIG. 13 is a schematic diagram of an exemplary process and system in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

20 FIG. 14 is a schematic diagram of another exemplary process and system in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

FIG. 15 is a schematic diagram of another exemplary process and system in accordance with an embodiment of the invention.

25 While the invention is susceptible to various modifications and alternative forms, specifics thereof have been shown by way of example and drawings, and will be described in detail. It should be understood, however, that the invention is not limited to the

particular embodiments described. On the contrary, the intention is to cover modifications, equivalents, and alternatives falling within the spirit and scope of the invention.

5

Detailed Description of the Invention

The embodiments of the present invention described herein are not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the invention to the precise forms disclosed in the following detailed description. Rather, the embodiments are chosen and described so that others skilled in the art can appreciate and understand the principles and practices of the present invention.

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All publications and patents mentioned herein are hereby incorporated by reference. The publications and patents disclosed herein are provided solely for their disclosure. Nothing herein is to be construed as an admission that the inventors are not entitled to antedate any publication and/or patent, including any publication and/or patent cited herein.

15

As described above, the removal of contaminants, such as organic acids (including fatty acids), from chemical compositions is an important commercial process. As shown herein, metal oxide media containing acid/base surface properties such as Lewis acid sites, Bronsted base sites, and/or Bronsted acid sites can be used to selectively bind contaminants from mixed chemical compositions. After the contaminants are bound to the metal oxide, the purified chemical composition can be separated out, leaving behind the metal oxide media and bound contaminants, such as organic acids. In an embodiment, the invention includes a method for removing contaminants from a crude product mixture.

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The method can include the operation of contacting the crude product mixture with a metal oxide substrate, the metal oxide substrate having acid/base characteristics sufficient to

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bond with contaminants in the crude product mixture, thereby removing free organic acids

and forming a refined product mixture. The method can also include the operation of separating the refined product mixture from the metal oxide media.

Metal oxides media used with embodiments of the invention can include metal oxides with surfaces including Lewis acid sites, Bronsted base sites, and Bronsted acid sites. By definition, a Lewis acid is an electron pair acceptor. A Bronsted base is a proton acceptor and a Bronsted acid is a proton donor. Metal oxides of the invention can specifically include zirconia, alumina, titania and hafnia. Metal oxides of the invention can specifically include oxides of Group IV metals. Metal oxides of the invention can also include silica clad with a metal oxide selected from the group consisting of zirconia, alumina, titania, hafnia, zinc oxide, copper oxide, magnesium oxide and iron oxide. In some embodiments, metal oxides of the invention can include mixtures of metal oxides, such as mixtures of zirconia, alumina, titania and/or hafnia. In other embodiments, the metal oxides used can be substantially pure metal oxides, such as substantially pure zirconia, alumina, titania and/or hafnia. Of the various metal oxides that can be used with embodiments of the invention, zirconia, titania and hafnia are advantageous as they are very chemically and thermally stable and can withstand very high temperatures and pressures as well as extremes in pH.

Metal oxides of the invention can include metal oxide particles clad with carbon. Carbon clad metal oxide particles can be made using various techniques such as the procedures described in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,108,597; 5,254,262; 5,346,619; 5,271,833; and 5,182,016, the contents of which are herein incorporated by reference. Carbon cladding on metal oxide particles can render the surface of the particles more hydrophobic.

Metal oxide media of the invention can be made in various ways. As one example, a colloidal dispersion of zirconium dioxide can be spray dried to produce aggregated zirconium dioxide particles. Colloidal dispersions of zirconium dioxide are commercially

available from Nyacol Nano Technologies, Inc., Ashland, MA. The average diameter of particles produced using a spray drying technique can be varied by changing the spray drying conditions. Examples of spray drying techniques are described in U.S. Pat. No. 4,138,336 and U.S. Pat. No. 5,108,597, the content of both of which are herein

5 incorporated by reference. It will be appreciated that other methods can also be used to create metal oxide particles. One example is an oil emulsion technique as described in Robichaud et al., Technical Note, "An Improved Oil Emulsion Synthesis Method for Large, Porous Zirconia Particles for Packed- or Fluidized-Bed Protein Chromatography," Sep. Sci. Technol. 32, 2547-59 (1997). A second example is the formation of metal oxide

10 particles by polymer induced colloidal aggregation as described in M.J. Annen, R. Kizhappali, P.W. Carr, and A. McCormick, "Development of Porous Zirconia Spheres by Polymerization-Induced Colloid Aggregation-Effect of Polymerization Rate," J. Mater. Sci. 29, 6123-30 (1994). A polymer induced colloidal aggregation technique is also described in U.S. Pat. No. 5,540,834, the content of which is herein incorporated by

15 reference.

Metal oxide media used in embodiments of the invention can be sintered by heating them in a furnace or other heating device at a relatively high temperature. In some embodiments, the metal oxide is sintered at a temperature of 160° C or greater. In some

20 embodiments, the metal oxide is sintered at a temperature of 400° C or greater. In some embodiments, the metal oxide is sintered at a temperature of 600° C or greater. Sintering can be done for various amounts of time depending on the desired effect. Sintering can make metal oxide media more durable. In some embodiments, the metal oxide is sintered for more than about 30 minutes. In some embodiments, the metal oxide is sintered for more than about 3 hours. However, sintering also reduces the surface area. In some

25 embodiments, the metal oxide is sintered for less than about 1 week.

In some embodiments, the metal oxide media is in the form of particles. Particles within a desired size range can be specifically selected for use in embodiments herein. For example, particles can be sorted by size such as by air classification, elutriation, settling fractionation, or mechanical screening. In some embodiments, the size of the particles is greater than about 0.2 μm . In some embodiments, the size range selected is from about 0.2 μm to about 2 mm. In some embodiments, the size range selected is from about 1 μm to about 100 μm . In some embodiments, the size range selected is from about 5 μm to about 15 μm . In some embodiments, the size range selected is about 10 μm . In some embodiments, the size range selected is about 5 μm .

It can be desirable to maximize the surface area of the metal oxide media so that the amount of organic acids bound by the media is maximized. As such, in some embodiments, metal oxide media used with embodiments of the invention includes porous particles. By way of example, in some embodiments the metal oxide particles can have an average pore size of about 30 angstroms to about 2000 angstroms. However, in other embodiments, the metal oxide particles used are non-porous.

The Lewis acid sites on metal oxides of the invention can interact with Lewis basic compounds. Thus, Lewis basic compounds can be bonded to the surface of metal oxides of the invention. A Lewis base is an electron pair donor. Lewis basic compounds of the invention can include anions formed from the dissociation of acids such as hydrobromic acid, hydrochloric acid, hydroiodic acid, nitric acid, sulfuric acid, perchloric acid, boric acid, chloric acid, phosphoric acid, pyrophosphoric acid, methanethiol, chromic acid, permanganic acid, phytic acid and ethylenediamine tetramethyl phosphonic acid (EDTPA). Lewis basic compounds of the invention can also include hydroxide ion as formed from the dissociation of bases such as sodium hydroxide, potassium hydroxide, lithium hydroxide and the like.

The anion of an acid can be bonded to a metal oxide of the invention by refluxing the metal oxide in an acid solution. By way of example, metal oxide particles can be refluxed in a solution of sulfuric acid. Alternatively, the anion formed from dissociation of a base, such as the hydroxide ion formed from dissociation of sodium hydroxide, can be bonded to a metal oxide by refluxing in a base solution. By way of example, metal oxide particles can be refluxed in a solution of sodium hydroxide. The base or acid modification can be achieved under exposure to the acid or base in either batch or continuous flow conditions when disposed in a reactor housing at elevated temperature and pressure to speed up the adsorption/modification process. In some embodiments, fluoride ion, such as formed by the dissociation of sodium fluoride, can be bonded to the particles.

While not intending to be bound by theory, it is believed that the ability of metal oxides to remove contaminants is related to Lewis acid sites on the metal oxide binding with contaminants that have Lewis basic characteristics. As such, in some embodiments contaminants removed by systems herein include compounds with Lewis basic characteristics. While not limiting the scope herein, exemplary contaminants can include carboxylic acids, phosphates, sulfates, phenols, and the like. By way of further example, the contaminants can include those compounds with stronger Lewis base characteristics than the desired compounds in the composition that is being purified. Biodiesel fuel typically includes esters as desired compounds. As such, in some embodiments contaminants removed from a fuel composition can include all compounds having stronger Lewis base characteristics than the esters in the fuel composition. Organic acids removed with methods and devices of the invention can specifically include carboxylic acids. Organic acids removed with methods and devices of the invention can specifically include free fatty acids.

In some embodiments, at least some water is included in the composition to be purified because organic acids become strong Lewis bases when they are able to ionize, which is facilitated by the presence of water. In some embodiments, the water is already present in the composition to be purified. In other embodiments, some water may be added to the composition to be purified. In still other embodiments, sufficient water may already be present on the metal oxide.

In some embodiments, metal oxide particles can be packed into a housing, such as a column or bed. Disposing metal oxide particles in a housing is one approach to facilitating continuous flow processes. Many different techniques may be used for packing the metal oxide particles into a housing. The specific technique used may depend on factors such as the average particle size, the type of housing used, etc. Generally speaking, particles with an average size of about 1-20 microns can be packed under pressure and particles with an average size larger than 20 microns can be packed by dry-packing/tapping methods or by low pressure slurry packing. In some embodiments, the metal oxide particles of the invention can be impregnated into a membrane, such as a PTFE membrane.

In some embodiments, metal oxide media used with embodiments of the invention is not in particulate form. For example, a layer of a metal oxide can be disposed on a substrate in order to form media used with embodiments of the invention. The substrate can be a surface that is configured to contact the unrefined chemical composition during processing. In one approach, metal oxide media can be disposed as a layer over a surface of a housing that contacts the unrefined chemical composition. Alternatively, the metal oxide media can be embedded as a particulate in the surface of an element that is configured to contact the unrefined chemical composition during processing.

In various embodiments, the metal oxide media can be regenerated after it has reached saturation. For example, in some embodiments, the metal oxide media can withstand high temperatures and the bound organic acids can be burned off. Specifically, the metal oxide media can be exposed to high temperatures in the presence of oxygen and
5 bound organic acids can be combusted.

In other embodiments, the metal oxide media can be flushed with a supercritical alcohol, such as supercritical methanol, simultaneously removing bound fatty acids and esterifying them to form fatty acid methyl esters, a relatively high value by-product. Some examples of reactor systems including such elements will now be described in greater
10 detail.

Referring now to FIG. 1, an embodiment of an organic acid removal device 100 is shown in accordance with an embodiment of the invention. The organic acid removal device 100 includes a housing 104 defining an interior volume. Metal oxide media can be disposed within the interior volume of the housing 104. In some embodiments, metal
15 oxide media can be tightly packed within the interior volume of the housing 104. A crude product mixture (such as a crude vegetable oil or fatty acid methyl ester composition) containing free organic acids can be pumped into the housing 104 through a first conduit 102. After contacting the metal oxide media, free fatty acids in the crude product mixture become bound to the metal oxide media. The now refined product mixture then passes out
20 of the housing 104 through a second conduit 106.

As free organic acids are bound to the metal oxide media, the media can become saturated. As such, some embodiments of the invention include components and methods for regeneration of the metal oxide media. Referring now to FIG. 2, a block diagram of a free organic acid removal device 200 is shown in accordance with another embodiment of
25 the invention. A crude product mixture is pumped from a crude product reservoir 208.

The crude product mixture passes through a control valve 210 before passing into a housing 204 that holds metal oxide media. After contacting the metal oxide media, free organic acids in the crude product mixture become bound to the metal oxide media. The now refined product mixture then passes out of the housing 204 through a second control valve 212 and into a refined product reservoir 214.

When the metal oxide media becomes saturated, control valve 210 can be actuated to take the crude product reservoir 208 off-line and put a gas supply source 206 on-line. A gas, including at least a portion of oxygen, can be pumped from the gas supply source 206, through the control valve 210 and into the housing 204. Simultaneously, the housing 204 can be heated with a heating element 218. The combination of the gas and heat result in combustion of the bound organic acids, thereby returning the metal oxide media to a state where more free organic acids can be bound. Control valve 212 can be actuated so that the effluent gas, including combustion products, can pass through control valve 212 before passing out of the device through a vent 220. After the metal oxide media is regenerated, then both of the control valves 210, 212 can be actuated so that a crude product mixture can once again flow into the housing 204 for removal of free organic acids.

In some embodiments, organic acids, such as fatty acids, bound to the metal oxide media can be processed in order to produce a relatively high value by-product. By way of example, an alcohol can be used to both remove the bound fatty acids from the metal oxide media and also convert the fatty acids, through an esterification reaction, into fatty acid alkyl esters. As a specific example, methanol, under supercritical conditions, can be contacted with the metal oxide media in order to esterify the fatty acids producing fatty acid methyl esters.

Referring now to FIG. 3, a block diagram of an organic acid removal device 300 is shown in accordance with another embodiment of the invention. A crude product mixture

is pumped from a crude product reservoir 308. The crude product mixture passes through a control valve 310 before passing into a housing that holds metal oxide media. After contacting the metal oxide media, free fatty acids in the crude product mixture are bound to the metal oxide media. The now refined product mixture then passes out of the housing
5 304 through a second control valve 312 and into a refined product reservoir 314.

When the metal oxide media becomes saturated, control valve 310 can be actuated to take the crude product reservoir 308 off-line and put an alcohol supply tank 306 on-line. An alcohol, under subcritical or supercritical conditions, can be pumped from the alcohol supply tank 306, through the control valve 310 and into the housing 304. Simultaneously,
10 the housing 304 can be heated with a heating element 318, to aid in maintaining the supercritical conditions of the alcohol inside the housing 304. The alcohol esterifies the bound fatty acids and/or displaces the bound free fatty acid and removes them from the metal oxide media, thereby returning the metal oxide media to a state where more free fatty acids can be bound. Control valve 312 can be actuated so that the effluent fatty acid
15 alkyl esters can pass through control valve 312 before being collected in a tank 316. In some embodiments, residual methanol in the effluent fatty acid alkyl ester composition can be removed through a distillation process, or a similar separation process, and then recycled. After the metal oxide media is regenerated, then both of the control valves 310,
312 can be actuated so that a crude product mixture can once again flow into the housing
20 304 for removal of free fatty acids.

It can be advantageous to remove organic acids from crude product mixtures in a continuous or semi-continuous process. In some embodiments, the invention can include device and methods for both removing free fatty acids and regenerating the metal oxide media as part of a semi-continuous process. Referring now to FIG. 4, a block diagram of
25 an organic acid removal device 400 is shown in accordance with another embodiment of

the invention. In this embodiment, both a first housing 404 containing metal oxide media and a second housing 418 including metal oxide media are included. Control valves 410, 412, 420, and 422, can be actuated such that the crude product mixture is routed through one housing for organic acid removal while metal oxide media in the other housing is
5 being regenerated.

For example, a crude product mixture is pumped from a crude product reservoir 408 and passes through a control valve 420 before passing into a first housing 404 that holds metal oxide media. After contacting the metal oxide media, free organic acids in the crude product mixture become bound to the metal oxide media. The now refined product
10 mixture then passes out of the housing 404 through a second control valve 422 and into a refined product reservoir 414. Simultaneously, methanol or another displacing or reactive liquid, or a gas including oxygen, can be pumped from a storage reservoir 406 through a third control valve 410 and into a second housing 418 that hold metal oxide media. The bound organic acids can be removed from the metal oxide media, and thus the metal oxide
15 media can be regenerated by the displacing liquid or gas. In embodiments where methanol is used and the organic acid includes fatty acids, the resulting fatty acid methyl esters can be pumped through a fourth control valve 412, and into a storage tank 416, or passed along for further processing.

After the metal oxide media in the first housing 404 becomes saturated with
20 organic acids, the processes can be reversed. Specifically, valves 410, 412, 420, and 422 can be actuated in order to cause the crude product mixture to pass into housing 418 instead of housing 404. The refined product mixture can then pass from housing 418 to refined product reservoir 414. In addition, the methanol or oxygen containing gas can be passed through housing 404 instead of housing 418. In the case of methanol and fatty
25 acids, the resulting fatty acid alkyl esters can be passed into storage tank 416.

Various techniques can be used to determine when the metal oxide media is saturated and, therefore, when it is time to regenerate the same. In some embodiments, this can be accomplished through a calculation of the binding capacity of the metal oxide media used and the concentration of organic acids in the crude product mixture.

5 Hypothetically, if it is known that a gram of the metal oxide can bind the amount of organic acids contained in one liter of a particular crude product mixture, then, at maximum, a liter of the crude product mixture can be run through an organic acid removal device for every gram of metal oxide media in the device, before the metal oxide media is saturated.

10 In some embodiments, a sensor can be used in order to determine the concentration of organic acids in the refined composition after contacting the metal oxide media. If the concentration of organic acids is observed to rise, then this can be taken as an indication that the metal oxide media being used has become saturated. Various types of sensors can be used to detect or estimate concentrations of organic acids. By way of example, various
15 chromatographic techniques can be used to assess organic acid concentrations. In another embodiment, a pH sensor can be used. In general, a refined product mixture will exhibit a pH that is more alkaline than an otherwise identical product mixture having a greater concentration of organic acids. As such, changes in the pH of the product mixture coming out of the housing containing the metal oxide media can be used to indicate when the
20 metal oxide media has become saturated. An exemplary pH sensor is described in U.S. Pat. No. 4,582,589, the content of which is herein incorporated by reference. However, it will be appreciated that many other types of pH sensors and analyzers (HPLC, GC, IR, NMR, MS) can be used. The analyzer can either be installed online or employed offline for FFA determination of the system effluent.

Referring now to FIG. 5, a block diagram of an organic acid removal device 500 is shown in accordance with another embodiment of the invention. A crude product mixture is pumped from a crude product reservoir 508. The crude product mixture passes through a control valve 510 before passing into a housing 504 that holds metal oxide media. After
5 contacting the metal oxide media, free fatty acids in the crude product mixture become bound to the metal oxide media. The now refined product mixture then passes out of the housing 504 and through a sensor unit 518. The sensor unit 518 can be used to evaluate when the metal oxide media needs to be regenerated. For example, the sensor unit 518 can include a pH sensor and can monitor the pH of the refined product mixture passing out of
10 the housing 504. The refined product mixture can then pass through second control valve 512 and into a refined product reservoir 514.

When the metal oxide media becomes saturated, as indicated by the sensor unit 518, the control valve 510 can be actuated to take the crude product reservoir 508 off-line and put an alcohol supply tank 506 on-line. An alcohol, under supercritical conditions,
15 can be pumped from the alcohol supply tank 506, through the control valve 510 and into the housing 504, esterifying the bound fatty acids and removing them from the metal oxide media, thereby returning the metal oxide media to a state where more free fatty acids can be bound. Control valve 512 can be actuated so that the effluent fatty acid alkyl esters can pass through control valve 512 before being collected in a tank 516. After the metal oxide
20 media is regenerated, then both of the control valves 510, 512 can be actuated so that a crude product mixture can once again flow into the housing 504 for removal of free fatty acids.

It will be appreciated that the percentage of organic acids removed by the metal oxide media will depend on various factors including the residence time of the crude
25 product mixture within the housing, the temperature of the crude product mixture, and the

binding capacity of the metal oxide media. However, it will be appreciated that by adjusting parameters associated with the process, the amount of free organic acids removed from the crude product mixture can be controlled. In some embodiments, at least about 50% of the free organic acids in a crude product mixture are removed after refining the same with a free organic acid removal device as described herein. In some 5 embodiments, at least about 90% of the free organic acids in a crude product mixture are removed after refining the same with a free organic acid removal device as described herein. In some embodiments, at least about 99% of the free organic acids in a crude product mixture are removed after refining the same with a free organic acid removal 10 device as described herein.

In some embodiments, the reaction mixture reaches the desired level of completion after one pass over a metal oxide media bed or packing. However, in other embodiments, the effluent flow may be rerouted over the same metal oxide media or routed over another metal oxide media bed or packing so that a larger percentage of free organic acids are 15 removed.

In some embodiments, two different metal oxides (such as zirconia and titania) can be separately formed but then disposed together within a single housing. In such an approach, the crude product mixture passing over metal oxide media can be simultaneously exposed to both metal oxides.

20 In some embodiments, devices for removal of contaminants as described herein can be used in conjunction with equipment for producing oil products. For example in some embodiments, devices or systems for removal of contaminants as included herein can be coupled with a biodiesel production plant. Exemplary methods and systems of producing biodiesel fuel that can be used as part of various embodiments herein are

described in U.S. Pat. Appl. No. 11/833,839, the content of which is herein incorporated by reference in its entirety.

In some embodiments, devices or systems for removal of contaminants can be used in conjunction with equipment such as mechanical presses, solvent extraction tanks, evaporators, and the like. For example, in a process for producing a refined oil product from a raw material various preparative steps can occur first including cleaning, drying and, in the case of a plant produce with hulls, dehulling. After the raw material is prepared, it can optionally be heated in order to coagulate proteins to make the oil extraction process easier.

10 In the solvent extraction process, the raw material can be cut into flakes which are put in percolation extractors and immersed in a solvent, such as hexane. The crude oil is solvated by the solvent and then separated from the flakes. The solvent is then separated from the crude oil, such as with an evaporator. The crude oil can then be passed through a device for the removal of organic acids as described herein.

15 In the mechanical pressing process, the raw material is typically crushed and then pressed in a mechanical press to yield a crude oil. The crude oil can then be passed through a device for the removal of organic acids as described herein.

In some embodiments, other purification steps can also be taken including degumming (removing of phosphatides) and bleaching (with activated earth or activated carbon to remove color and other impurities).

20 Referring now to FIG. 6, a system for producing a refined oil product in accordance with an embodiment of the invention is schematically illustrated. The system 600 includes a preprocessing module 602 configured to prepare a raw material for oil extraction. The preprocessing module 602 can include washing stations, drying ovens, dehulling mills, chopping stations, crushing devices, flaking devices, and the like. Then

the raw material can pass on to an oil extraction module 604. In some embodiments, the oil extraction module 604 can include a mechanical press. In other embodiments, the oil extraction module 604 can include a percolation extractor and a solvent evaporator. Then the resulting crude oil can be passed through a device 606 for the removal of organic acids
5 as described herein. In an embodiment, the device 606 can include a housing defining an interior volume with metal oxide media disposed therein. Then, in some embodiments, the refined oil product can pass through a sensor module 608 configured to determine the amount of organic acids remaining in the refined oil product. In some embodiments, the refined oil product can be passed along for further processing. In other embodiments, the
10 refined oil product can be collected in a refined oil storage tank 610.

Crude Product Mixtures (Feed Stocks)

Devices and methods of the invention can be used as part of the process of producing and/or refining various types of organic acid containing plant, animal, and
15 microbe feed stocks. By way of example, devices and methods of the invention can be used in the process of producing and/or refining rapeseed oil, soybean oil, canola oil, cottonseed oil, grape seed oil, mustard seed oil, corn oil, linseed oil, safflower oil, sunflower oil, poppy-seed oil, pecan oil, walnut oil, oat oil, peanut oil, rice bran oil, camellia oil, castor oil, olive oil, palm oil, coconut oil, rice oil, algae oil, seaweed oil, and
20 Chinese Tallow tree oil. Crude product mixtures processed with embodiments of the invention can also include components of argan, avocado, babassu palm, balanites, borneo tallow nut, brazil nut, calendula, camelina, caryocar, cashew nut, chinese vegetable tallow, cocoa, coffee, cohune palm, coriander, cucurbitaceae, euphorbia, hemp, illipe, jatropha, jojoba, kenaf, kusum, macadamia nuts, mango seed, noog abyssinia, nutmeg, opium
25 poppy, perilla, pili nut, pumpkin seed, rice bran, sacha inche, seje, sesame, shea nut,

switch grass, teased, allanblackia, almond, chaulmoogra, cuphea, jatropa curgas, karanja seed, neem, papaya, tonka bean, tung, ucuuba, cajuput, clausena anisata, davana, galbanum natural oleoresin, german chamomile, hexastylis, high-geraniol monarda, juniapa-hinojo sabalero, lupine, melissa officinalis, milfoil, ninde, patchouli, tarragon, and
5 wormwood.

Many different crude product mixtures derived from animals can be processed with embodiments of the invention. By way of example, animal-based crude product mixtures can include choice white grease, lard (pork fat), tallow (beef fat), fish oil, and poultry fat. Many different crude product mixtures derived from microorganisms (Eukaryotes,
10 Bacteria and Archaea) can be processed with embodiments of the invention. By way of example, microbe-based crude product mixtures can include the L-glycerol lipids of Archaea and algae and diatom oils.

In some embodiments, crude product mixtures used herein can be derived from both plant and animal sources such as yellow grease, white grease, and brown grease,
15 soapstock and acidulated soapstock. By way of example, yellow, white or brown grease can include frying oils from deep fryers and can thus include fats of both plant and animal origin. Crude product mixtures can specifically include used cooking oil. Brown grease (also known as trap grease) can include fats extracted from sewage systems and can thus include fats of both plant and animal origin.

20 It will be appreciated that devices and methods herein can also be used to process and/or refine (or “polish”) fuel compositions, such as fatty acid methyl ester compositions. For example, in some embodiments, devices and methods herein can be used to polish biodiesel compositions.

The present invention may be better understood with reference to the following examples. These examples are intended to be representative of specific embodiments of the invention, and are not intended as limiting the scope of the invention.

Examples

5 Example 1: Formation of Zirconia Particles

A colloidal dispersion of zirconium oxide (NYACOL™ ZR 100/20) (Nyacol Nano Technologies, Inc., Ashland, MA), containing 20 wt. % ZrO₂ primarily at about 100 nm particles was spray dried. As the dispersion dried, the particles interacted strongly with one another to provide aggregated ZrO₂ particles. The dried aggregated particles that were
 10 obtained were examined under an optical microscope and observed to consist mostly of spherules from about 0.5 μm to about 15 μm in diameter.

The dried spherules were then sintered by heating them in a furnace at a temperature of 750° C for 6 hours. The spherules were air classified, and the fraction having a size of approximately 10 μm was subsequently isolated. The particles were all
 15 washed in sodium hydroxide (1.0 M), followed by water, nitric acid (1.0 M), water and then dried under vacuum at 110° C. BET nitrogen porosimetry was performed in order to further characterize the sintered spherules. The physical characteristics of the spherules were as listed below in Table 2.

20

TABLE 2

Surface area (m ² /g)	22.1
Pore volume (mL/g)	0.13
Pore diameter (angstrom)	240
Internal Porosity	0.44
Average size (micron)	10.23
Size Standard Deviation (μm)	2.62
D90/D10 (Size Distribution)	1.82

Example 2: Formation of Base/Acid Modified Zirconia Particles

1000 g of zirconia particles, prepared according to Example 1, were put into a polyethylene bottle. 1.5 liters of deionized water was put into it and shaken strongly. Half of the suspension was put into a 4000 ml glass Erlenmeyer flask, 2000 ml of deionized
5 water was added into it and the mixture was sonicated under vacuum for 30 minutes to get the water into the pores of the particles. The suspension was then put into 20 L bucket. The same procedure was repeated on the other half of the suspension. The particles were transferred to a plastic container. The particles were rinsed with a carbonate free 0.5 M NaOH solution. Then the suspension was stirred for 8 hours.

10 The NaOH solution was then decanted and then the particles were rinsed twice with carbonate free purified water (2 L in total). The water was then removed. 0.5 M HNO₃ was added to the particles at a ratio of 10:1 (v/m). The suspension was then shaken for 8 hours.

The nitric acid solution was then removed. The particles were then rinsed three
15 times with deionized water 3-4 times until reaching a pH=5-6. The particles were filtered and then rinsed with ethanol. The particles were placed in a clean container and dried under vacuum at 120° C for 5 hours.

Example 3: Adsorption of Fatty Acids in Biodiesel Using Base/Acid Modified Zirconia

20 10 g, 5 g, 2.5 g, and 1.0 g samples of base/acid modified zirconia (zirconium dioxide) particles as formed in Example 2 were added to 50 mL centrifuge tubes, respectively. 10 g of a biodiesel composition, known to contain 4% fatty acids, were put into each tube. The tubes were shaken to suspend the particles, sonicated for 10 minutes, and then put under vacuum for 5 minutes each. The samples were held at room
25 temperature for 10 minutes. Finally, the samples were centrifuged at 3750 rpm for 5

minutes. An acid titration was then performed on 5 g of each treated sample according to ASTM Method D664-04.

The above experimental procedure was then duplicated. The results of both trials are shown in FIG. 7. As FIG. 7 shows, the reproducibility between the two trials was very good. The average binding capacity of fatty acids on zirconia was 12.6 mg/g, which is equivalent to 1.76 micromol/m².

Example 4: Formation of Base Modified Zirconia Particles

1 liter of 2.0 M sodium hydroxide was placed in a 2 liter plastic Erlenmeyer flask. 10 110 g of 5-15 diameter μm bare zirconia, prepared as described in Example 1, was put into the flask. The particle suspension was sonicated for 10 minutes under vacuum and then swirled for 2 hours at ambient temperature. The particles were then allowed to settle and the base solution was decanted. Then, 1.4 liters of HPLC-grade water was added to the flask followed by settling decanting. Then, 200 mL of HPLC-grade water was added back 15 to the flask and the particles were collected on a nylon filter with 0.45 micron pores. The collected particles were then washed with 2 aliquots of 200 mL HPLC-grade water followed by 3 aliquots of 200mL of HPLC-grade methanol. Air was then passed through the particles until they were free-flowing.

20 Example 5: Adsorption of Fatty Acids in Biodiesel Using Base Modified Zirconia

10 g of base modified zirconia (zirconium dioxide) particles as formed in Example 4 was added to 50 mL centrifuge tube. 10 g of a biodiesel composition, known to contain 4% fatty acids, was put into the tube. The tube was shaken to suspend the particles, sonicated for 10 minutes, and then put under vacuum for 5 minutes. The sample was held 25 at room temperature for 10 minutes. Finally, the sample was centrifuged at 3750 rpm for 5

minutes. An acid titration was then performed on 5 g of the sample according to ASTM Method D664-04.

The results show that the average binding capacity of fatty acids on zirconia is 13.2 mg/g, which is close to results obtained on base modified zirconia.

5

Example 6: Adsorption of Fatty Acids in Biodiesel Using Unmodified Titania

10 g, 5 g, 2.5 g, and 1.0 g samples of unmodified titania particles (20 μ m diameter/100 \AA average pore size, ZirChrom Separations, Inc, Anoka, MN) were added to 50 mL centrifuge tubes, respectively. 10 g of a biodiesel composition, known to contain 4% fatty acids, were put into each tube. The tubes were shaken to suspend the particles, sonicated for 10 minutes, and then put under vacuum for 5 minutes each. The samples were held at room temperature for 10 minutes. Finally, the samples were centrifuged at 3750 rpm for 5 minutes. An acid titration was then performed on 5 g of each treated sample based on ASTM methods. The adsorption results are shown in FIG. 8. The average binding capacity of fatty acids on unmodified titania was calculated to be 11.7 mg/g.

15

Example 7: Heat Treatment of Fatty Acid Saturated Zirconia Particles

The fatty acid saturated zirconia particles from Example 3 were collected by filtration with a 0.45 μ m membrane. The particles were washed with 3x150 mL hexane to remove the residual biodiesel composition. The particles were then dried under vacuum.

20

The dried particles were then heated to 845 °F in the presence of oxygen for four hours to combust the fatty acids on the zirconia surface. Then the regenerated particles were cooled down to room temperature.

25

Example 8: Adsorption of Fatty Acids in Biodiesel by Using Regenerated Zirconia

Particles

10 g, 5 g, 2.5 g, and 1.0 g samples of regenerated zirconia particles as formed in Example 7 were added to 50 mL centrifuge tubes, respectively. 10 g of a biodiesel composition, known to contain 4.1 % fatty acids, were put into each tube. The tubes were shaken to suspend the particles, sonicated for 10 minutes, and then put under vacuum for 5 minutes each. The samples were held at room temperature for 10 minutes. Finally, the samples were centrifuged at 3750 rpm for 5 minutes. An acid titration was then performed on 5 g of each treated sample according to ASTM method D664-04. The adsorption results are shown in FIG. 9. The average binding capacity of fatty acids on regenerated zirconia was calculated to be 13.2 mg/g, which is very close to the binding capacity value (12.6mg/g) obtained in example 3. The data suggest that saturated metal oxide particles can be completely regenerated by heat-treatment.

15 Example 9: Adsorption of Fatty Acids in Biodiesel Using Basic Alumina

10 g, 5 g, 2.5 g, and 1.0 g samples of unmodified basic alumina particles (150 mesh diameter/58Å average pore size, surface area 155 m²/g, pH 9.5±0.5 in H₂O, Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO) were added to 50 mL centrifuge tubes, respectively. 10 g of a biodiesel composition, known to contain 4.2% fatty acids, was put into each centrifuge tube. The tubes were shaken to suspend the particles, sonicated for 10 minutes, and then put under vacuum for 5 minutes each. The samples were held at room temperature for 10 minutes. Finally, the samples were centrifuged at 3750 rpm for 5 minutes. An acid titration was then performed on 5 g of each treated sample based on ASTM methods (ASTM METHOD D664-04). The adsorption results are shown in FIG. 10. The average

static binding capacity of fatty acids on basic alumina was calculated to be about 158.9 mg/g.

Example 10: Adsorption of Fatty Acids in Biodiesel Using Neutral Alumina

5 10 g, 5 g, 2.5 g, and 1.0 g samples of unmodified neutral alumina particles (150 mesh diameter/58Å average pore size, 155 m²/g surface area, pH 7.0±0.5 in H₂O, Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO) were added to 50 mL centrifuge tubes, respectively. 10 g of a biodiesel composition, known to contain 4.2% fatty acids, were put into each tube. The tubes were shaken to suspend the particles, sonicated for 10 minutes, and then put under
10 vacuum for 5 minutes each. The samples were held at room temperature for 10 minutes. Finally, the samples were centrifuged at 3750 rpm for 5 minutes. An acid titration was then performed on 5 g of each treated sample based on ASTM methods (ASTM METHOD D664-04). The adsorption results are shown in FIG. 11. The average static binding capacity of fatty acids on neutral alumina was calculated to be about 149.2 mg/g.

15

Example 11: Adsorption of Fatty Acids in Biodiesel Using Acidic Alumina

 10 g, 5 g, 2.5 g, and 1.0 g samples of unmodified acidic alumina particles (150 mesh diameter/58Å average pore size, 155 m²/g surface area, pH 4.5±0.5 in H₂O, Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO) were added to 50 mL centrifuge tubes, respectively. 10 g of a
20 biodiesel composition, known to contain 4.2% fatty acids, were put into each tube. The tubes were shaken to suspend the particles, sonicated for 10 minutes, and then put under vacuum for 5 minutes each. The samples were held at room temperature for 10 minutes. Finally, the samples were centrifuged at 3,750 rpm for 5 minutes. An acid titration was then performed on 5 g of each treated sample based on ASTM methods (ASTM METHOD

D664-04). The adsorption results are shown in FIG. 12. The average static binding capacity of fatty acids on acidic alumina was calculated to be about 107.1 mg/g.

Example 12: Continuous Removal of Fatty Acids in Biodiesel Using Unmodified Titania

5 (A) Loading Step

A system was set up for the removal of fatty acids as shown in FIG. 13. The system included a high-pressure pump 1306 that drew from a biodiesel reservoir 1302 at 5 ml/min or 10 ml/min. The biodiesel reservoir was continuously sparged with nitrogen to remove dissolved oxygen from the biodiesel feedstock. The biodiesel was pumped through a
10 preheater 1310 before entering a fixed bed reactor 1312 (50 cm length with 21.2 mm i.d.) packed with 234.33 g of unmodified titania (80 μ m diameter/60 \AA average pore size, ZirChrom Separations, Inc, Anoka, MN) to adsorb the fatty acids in the biodiesel. However, the loading step was performed at ambient temperature (\approx 20 degrees Celsius). After the reactor, the biodiesel passed through a heat exchanger 1314 and a back pressure
15 regulator 1316. The treated biodiesel was then collected in a 100 mL plastic bottle at every 10 minutes. The collected samples were distilled at 75 $^{\circ}$ C under 500 mbar pressure to remove residual methanol. An acid titration was then performed on 5 g of each distilled sample based on ASTM methods (ASTM METHOD D664-04) to obtain an acid number.

(B) Washing Step

20 Methanol was used to displace the adsorbed fatty acids from the titania and regenerate the system. The system included a second high-pressure pump 1308 that drew from a methanol reservoir 1304 that was continuously sparged with nitrogen to remove dissolved oxygen from the methanol feedstock. The flow rates were 5 ml/min or 10 ml/min. The methanol passed through a preheater 1310 before entering the reactor 1312.
25 After the reactor, it passed through a heat exchanger 1314. After the heat exchanger 1314,

the methanol with washed fatty acids from the reactor passed through the backpressure regulator 1316 which prevented methanol from boiling in the reactor 1312. The “cooled” liquid (methanol plus fatty acids) was collected in a flask. The collected sample was distilled at 75° C under 500 mbar pressure to remove methanol. An acid titration was then performed on 5 g of each distilled sample based on ASTM methods to obtain an acid number. All biodiesel samples met ASTM acid number specifications for biodiesel fuel after removal of free fatty acids by the system.

Table 3 shows the conditions used for the experiments and the results obtained. Eight separate trials were run on the same titania. Loading capacities (milligrams of free fatty acids (FFA’s) per gram of titania) for each trial was nearly constant indicating that the system may be used for repeated removal of free fatty acids from biodiesel fuel. The recoveries of the biodiesel ranged from 99.3% to 100.1%. This example shows that a metal oxide material can be used to remove free fatty acids from a biodiesel composition with excellent reproducibility and almost complete recovery.

15

TABLE 3

Trial #	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Reactor Diameter (mm)	21.2	21.2	21.2	21.2	21.2	21.2	21.2	21.2
Reactor Length (mm)	500	500	500	500	500	500	500	500
Preheater Setting Temp. at Washing Step (Celsius)	303	303	303	303	303	303	303	306
Actual Temperature at Inlet of Reactor (Celsius)	302	301	301	301	302	302	302	302

Actual Temperature at Outlet of Reactor (Celsius)	112	113	105	110	119	114	118	176
Flow Rate (ml/min)	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	10
Backpressure (PSI)	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000	2000
Initial Biodiesel Weight (g)	65.2	69.5	64.1	69.05	129.73	147.36	217.81	218.1
Collected Biodiesel at Loading Step (g)	61.35	65.3	60.23	65.1	123.13	140.51	209.74	211.42
Collected Biodiesel at Washing Step (g)	3.4	3.75	3.85	3.65	5.62	5.86	7.35	6.91
Recovery (%)	99.31%	99.35%	99.97%	99.57%	99.24%	99.33%	99.67%	100.11%
Initial FFA (%)	5.35%	5.35%	5.35%	5.35%	5.35%	5.35%	5.35%	5.35%
FFA Weight (g)	3.49	3.72	3.43	3.69	6.94	7.88	11.65	11.67
Capacity of System (mg/g)	25.6	24.8	25	26	24	25	27	29.5
Acid Number for Treated Samples	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.06	0.03	0.16	0.18

Example 13: Continuous Removal of Fatty Acids in Biodiesel Using Basic Alumina

(A) Loading Step

- 5 A system was set up for removal of fatty acids as shown in FIG. 13. In this example the high-pressure pump for the biodiesel reservoir was operated at 15 ml/min. The fixed bed reactor (50 cm length with 21.2 mm i.d.) was packed with 234.33 g of basic alumina particles (150 mesh diameter/58Å average pore size, surface area 155 m²/g, pH 9.5±0.5 in H₂O, Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO). The loading step was performed at ambient

temperature. The treated biodiesel was collected in a 100 mL plastic bottle at every 10 minutes. The collected samples were distilled at 75 °C under 500 mbar to remove residual methanol. An acid titration was then performed on 5 g of each distilled sample based on ASTM methods (ASTM METHOD D664-04) to obtain an acid number. Results are

5 shown in Table 4 below.

(B) Washing Step

Methanol was used to displace the adsorbed fatty acids from the alumina and regenerate the system. The high-pressure pump for the methanol reservoir was operated at 15 ml/min. The methanol passed through the preheater, reactor, and heat exchanger.

10 After the heat exchanger, the methanol with washed fatty acids from the reactor passed through the backpressure regulator. The “cooled” liquid (methanol plus fatty acids) was collected in a flask. The collected sample was distilled at 75° C under 500 mbar pressure to remove methanol. An acid titration was then performed on 5 g of each distilled sample based on ASTM methods to obtain an acid number (ASTM METHOD D664-04).

15 Table 4 shows the conditions used for the experiments and also the reproducibility of the experiments. Four replicate trials were run on the same alumina reactor. All loading capacities were nearly identical. The recovery of the biodiesel from the four trials ranged from 98.62% to 101.1% indicating full recovery within experimental error. The reproducibility of the regeneration of the system was excellent. All biodiesel samples

20 treated by the system were found to meet ASTM acid number requirements for biodiesel fuel with the exception of Trial #1. However, it was determined that the amount of fatty acids used in Trial #1 exceeded the capacity of the system based on the amount of alumina used.

TABLE 4

Trial #	1	2	3	4
Reactor Diameter	21.2	21.2	21.2	21.2

(mm)				
Reactor Length (mm)	500	500	500	500
Preheater Setting Temp. at Washing Step (Celsius)	303	303	303	303
Actual Temperature at Inlet of Reactor (Celsius)	302	301	301	301
Actual Temperature at Outlet of Reactor (Celsius)	112	113	105	110
Flow Rate (ml/min)	15	15	15	15
Backpressure (PSI)	2000	2000	2000	2000
Initial Biodiesel Weight (g)	1002.38	412.61	334.69	338.62
Collected Biodiesel at Loading Step (g)	968.01	394.46	317.52	304.68
Collected Biodiesel at Washing Step (g)	20.53	22.51	17.02	30.54
Recovery (%)	98.62%	101.06%	99.97%	99.57%
Initial FFA (%)	5.35%	5.35%	5.35%	5.35%
FFA Weight (g)	53.63	22.07	17.91	18.12
Capacity of System (mg/g)	107.3	117.7	98.5	124.5
Acid Number for Treated Samples	3.36	0.14	0.03	0.03

Example 14: Continuous Removal of Fatty Acids in Biodiesel Production Process

A system for continuously producing biodiesel and removing free fatty acids from the resulting product mixture was set up as shown in FIGS. 14 and 15. FIG. 14 shows the use of two high pressure Waters 590 HPLC pumps 1408 and 1412 obtained from Waters Corporation (Milford, MA). One pump 1408 drew from a lipid reservoir 1402. The other pump 1412 drew from an alcohol supply reservoir 1410. Both the lipid reservoir 1402 and the alcohol supply reservoir 1410 were continuously sparged with nitrogen to minimize the effect of dissolved oxygen on the system. The oil feedstock was first filtered by passing the liquid under high pressure through a blank stainless steel 1 cm i.d. x 15 cm long filter tube 1406 fitted with two 2 micron stainless steel frits before it entered the heat

exchanger 1414 and before it was combined with methanol. Both the alcohol and lipid feedstock streams were pumped into a heat exchanger 1414 that was formed by welding together two 1/8th inch o.d. stainless steel tubes (Alltech Associates, Deerfield, IL) with silver solder where the heat from the hot effluent from the reactor is exchanged with the two incoming reactant streams (methanol and lipid). After the heat exchanger 1414 the two reactant streams were combined using a “T” and then passed through an electrically driven preheater 1416 that was capable of bringing the mixture to the desired set point temperature before it enters the independently thermo-stated fixed bed catalytic reactor 1418 (“production reactor”). Temperature control was achieved using EZ-Zone PM Watlow (St. Louis, MO) temperature controllers. The preheater 1416 consisted of wound stainless steel HPLC tubing in a grooved aluminum cylindrical block with an 800 watt Watlow heater in the center of the cylinder. The backpressure of the system was maintained through the use of a backpressure regulator 1420 obtained from Tescom (Elk River, MN).

A fatty acid removal system, as shown in FIG. 15, was then used to “polish” the biodiesel to meet ASTM specifications. Specifically, the fatty acid removal system included an organic acid removal reactor 1512 (500mm length by 21.2mm i.d.) packed with 150 mesh/58 Å aluminum oxide particles (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO). It was set up vertically with the flow from the bottom to top. The fatty acid removal system was regenerated online by passing nitrogen from a nitrogen supply tank 1506 through the removal reactor 1512 to move the biodiesel and alcohol out, followed by passing air from an air supply tank 1508 through the removal reactor 1512 it to burn/oxidize the residual adsorbed fatty acids and residual biodiesel and methanol. The liquid that was displaced by nitrogen and then air was then cooled and spontaneously separated into two distinct phases; the top phase is primarily comprised of methanol, water and glycerol and the

bottom layer is primarily comprised of biodiesel fuel. Phases were separated in a separation weir 1422. The polished biodiesel was distilled 1424 under vacuum (10 mbar) to remove the residual alcohols and volatiles. The residual alcohols were returned to the alcohol supply tank 1410. Any residual glycerol was then separated off leaving polished
 5 biodiesel fuel collected in a finished product reservoir 1426.

Table 5 shows the typical conditions of the fatty acid removal system used for polishing the biodiesel and regeneration conditions including heating, and cooling steps.

TABLE 5

Step	Setting Temp. (Celsius)	Inlet Temp. (Celsius)	Middle Temp. (Celsius)	Outlet Temp. (Celsius)	Sampling Time (min.)	N2 Flow (ml/min)	Air Flow (ml/min)	Notes
Heating	450	25	25	24	0	100		Flushing
Heating	450	78	232	196	5	100		Flushing
Heating	450	150	460	403	10	1500		Flushing
Heating	450	139	473	438	15		1700	Burning
Heating	450	150	473	450	18		1700	Burning
Heating	450	348	469	453	20		1700	Burning
Heating	450	333	463	453	21		1700	Burning
Heating	450	405	459	453	23		1700	Burning
Heating	450	306	452	451	27		1700	Burning
Heating	450	282	453	450	28		1700	Burning
Heating	450	257	528	449	30		1700	Burning
Heating	450	238	521	451	31		1700	Burning
Cooling	OFF	232	510	503	32	100		Flushing
Cooling	OFF	35	50	56	82			Flushing

10

Acid number of the samples was determined in accordance with ASTM D664-04.

Table 6 shows the high reproducibility of fatty acid removal system and its ability to produce biodiesel that meets the ASTM acid number specification (according to ASTM D6751-07a acid number can be no more than 0.5). Some of the samples that passed the
 15 ASTM acid number test (acid number no greater than 0.5) were then blended and sent to a third party (FuelOnly, Inc. (ISO9000, Vancouver, WA)) for the full battery of ASTM tests

applicable to biodiesel under ASTM D6751-07a. This testing revealed that the blended samples passed ASTM specifications for biodiesel fuel.

TABLE 6

Expt. #	Feed Stock	Alcohol	Biodiesel Type	Biodiesel Reactor Temp	Acid Number		Biodiesel Collected	Collection Time (min)	Flow Rate	Passed ASTM Acid #?
					Before	After				
1	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	18.00	0.58	93.5	30	3.12	No
2	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	16.29	0.35	104.45	31	3.37	Yes
3	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	16.10	0.11	103.94	31	3.35	Yes
4	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	16.10	0.68	104.83	30.5	3.44	No
5	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	16.10	0.11	110.94	31.5	3.52	Yes
6	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	15.87	0.11	105.52	30	3.52	Yes
7	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	15.87	0.34	103.9	30	3.46	Yes
8	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	15.87	0.11	104.01	30	3.47	Yes
9	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	15.94	0	113.97	33	3.45	Yes
10	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	15.94	0.46	107.54	30.5	3.53	Yes
11	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	15.94	0	104.46	30	3.48	Yes
12	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	15.99	0	106.11	30	3.54	Yes
13	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	15.99	0.56	107.31	30.5	3.52	No
14	Corn Oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	340	19.43	1.81	104.91	21.5	4.88	No
15	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	6.04	0	162.19	50.25	3.23	Yes
16	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	6.04	0	86.76	27	3.21	Yes
17	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	6.04	0.35	35.64	11	3.24	Yes
18	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	6.04	0	121.13	36	3.36	Yes
19	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	6.04	0.23	47.94	15	3.20	Yes
20	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	6.04	0.71	36.8	10	3.68	No
21	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	6.04	0.12	160.07	35	4.57	Yes

22	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	6.04	0.23	69.51	20	3.48	Yes
23	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	6.04	0.35	31.48	10	3.15	Yes
24	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	6.04	0.92	31.5	10	3.15	No
25	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	6.04	0	163.71	50	3.27	Yes
26	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	6.04	0.12	113.95	35	3.26	Yes
27	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	6.04	0.93	33.54	10	3.35	No
28	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	4.19	0	123.07	35	3.52	Yes
29	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	4.19	0	80.3	25	3.21	Yes
30	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	4.19	0.12	97.67	25	3.91	Yes
31	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	360	4.19	1.62	65.59	20	3.28	No
32	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	362	9.67	0.12	181.43	35	5.18	Yes
33	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	362	9.67	0.46	168.42	35	4.81	Yes
34	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	355	8.62	0.12	166.64	35.5	4.69	Yes
35	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	355	8.62	0.47	47.43	10	4.74	Yes
36	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	355	8.62	2.8	49.77	11	4.52	No
37	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	355	8.62	0	161.85	35	4.62	Yes
38	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	355	8.62	2.1	55.89	10	5.59	No
39	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	355	8.62	0.12	163.32	35	4.67	Yes
40	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	355	8.62	0.46	45.07	10	4.51	Yes
41	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	355	8.62	2.8	51.47	10	5.15	No
42	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	355	8.62	0.11	167	35	4.77	Yes
43	Corn Oil	Butanol	Butyl esters	355	8.62	2.54	46.76	10	4.68	No
44	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.64	0.00	88.56	20	4.428	Yes
45	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.64	0.00	43.23	10	4.323	Yes
46	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.64	0.00	43.92	10	4.392	Yes
47	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.64	0.23	92.32	20	4.616	Yes

48	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.64	0.23	44.1	10	4.41	Yes
49	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.64	0.46	44.46	10	4.446	Yes
50	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.64	0.12	165.76	35	4.736	Yes
51	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.64	0.12	66	15	4.4	Yes
52	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.64	1.98	44.05	10	4.405	No
53	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.64	0.11	90.96	20	4.548	Yes
54	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.64	0.23	47.77	10	4.777	Yes
55	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.64	2.80	45.92	10	4.592	No
56	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.82	0.00	87.43	20.00	4.37	Yes
57	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.82	0.00	42.87	10.00	4.29	Yes
58	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.82	0.00	42.68	10.00	4.27	Yes
59	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.82	0.23	91.88	20.00	4.59	Yes
60	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.82	0.38	44.24	10.00	4.42	Yes
61	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.82	0.46	44.85	10.00	4.49	Yes
62	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.82	0.00	82.88	20.00	4.14	Yes
63	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.82	0.00	45.10	10.00	4.51	Yes
64	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.82	0.00	49.38	11.50	4.29	Yes
65	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.82	0.00	88.89	20.00	4.44	Yes
66	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.82	0.00	47.67	11.00	4.33	Yes
67	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	8.82	0.58	44.91	10.00	4.49	No
68	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	9.15	0.12	98.53	20.5	4.81	Yes
69	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	9.15	0.12	43.87	10	4.39	Yes
70	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	9.15	0.70	44.31	10	4.43	No
71	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	9.15	0.12	92.39	20	4.62	Yes
72	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	9.15	0.00	44.34	10	4.43	Yes
73	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	9.15	0.12	45.49	10	4.55	Yes

74	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	9.15	0.12	80.61	20	4.03	Yes
75	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	9.15	0.12	56.21	10	5.62	Yes
76	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	340	9.15	0.70	43.48	10	4.35	No
77	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	350	12.51	0.12	96.77	21.5	4.50	Yes
78	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	350	12.51	0.00	46.08	10.5	4.39	Yes
79	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	350	12.51	1.99	48.99	10	4.90	No
80	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	380	12.64	0.12	97.24	23	4.23	Yes
81	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	380	12.64	0.59	44.43	10	4.44	No
82	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	380	12.64	0.11	88.75	20	4.44	Yes
83	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	380	12.64	1.75	43.79	10	4.38	No
84	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	380	12.64	0.23	89.91	20	4.50	Yes
85	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	380	12.64	0.23	40.94	10	4.09	Yes
86	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	380	12.64	1.96	44.47	10	4.45	No
87	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	380	12.64	0.12	89.23	20	4.46	Yes
88	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	380	12.64	0.70	42.73	10	4.27	No
89	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	365	8.64	0.00	84.56	20	4.23	Yes
90	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	365	8.64	0.00	41.55	10	4.16	Yes
91	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	365	8.64	0.00	41.97	10	4.20	Yes
92	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	365	8.61	0.00	83.84	20	4.19	Yes
93	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	365	8.61	0.00	41.02	10	4.10	Yes
94	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	365	8.61	0.35	42.78	10	4.28	Yes
95	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	365	8.44	0.00	89.15	20	4.46	Yes
96	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	365	8.44	0.00	41.31	10	4.13	Yes
97	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	365	8.44	0.00	43.79	10	4.38	Yes
98	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	365	8.51	0.00	88.49	20	4.42	Yes
99	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	365	8.51	0.11	41.23	10	4.12	Yes

100	Corn Oil	Propanol	Propyl esters	365	8.51	0.23	43.07	10	4.31	Yes
101	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	330	8.59	0.34	112.21	20	5.61	Yes
102	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	330	8.59	0.34	54.56	10	5.46	Yes
103	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	330	8.59	0.92	58.34	10	5.83	No
104	Corn Oil	200 Proof (HPLC)	Ethyl esters	340	12.89	0.34	118.01	20	5.90	Yes
105	Corn Oil	200 Proof (HPLC)	Ethyl esters	340	12.91	0.34	125.44	20	6.27	Yes
106	Corn Oil	200 Proof (HPLC)	Ethyl esters	340	12.87	0.11	119.28	20	5.96	Yes
107	Corn Oil	200 Proof (HPLC)	Ethyl esters	340	12.87	0.35	116.04	20	5.80	Yes
108	Corn Oil	200 Proof (HPLC)	Ethyl esters	340	12.87	0.22	120.39	20	6.02	Yes
109	Corn Oil	200 Proof (HPLC)	Ethyl esters	340	18.31	0.57	122.05	20	6.10	No
110	Corn Oil	200 Proof (HPLC)	Ethyl esters	340	18.31	0.30	122.95	20	6.15	Yes
111	Corn Oil	200 Proof (HPLC)	Ethyl esters	340	18.55	0.40	99.47	20	4.97	Yes
112	Corn Oil	200 Proof (HPLC)	Ethyl esters	340	18.04	0.30	93.64	22	4.26	Yes
113	Corn Oil	200 Proof (HPLC)	Ethyl esters	340	13.82	0.11	122.54	20	6.13	Yes
114	Corn Oil	200 Proof (HPLC)	Ethyl esters	340	13.68	0.11	138.86	20	6.94	Yes
115	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.19	0.11	214.89	35	6.14	Yes
116	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.19	0.58	87.16	15	5.81	No
117	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.22	0.11	225.69	35	6.45	Yes
118	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.22	0.46	87.23	15	5.82	Yes
119	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.22	1.95	56.88	10	5.69	No
120	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.27	0.11	211.93	35	6.06	Yes
121	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.27	1.59	95.55	15	6.37	No
122	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.33	0.23	211.59	35	6.05	Yes
123	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.33	1.03	89.01	15.5	5.74	No
124	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.33	0.21	201.16	35	5.75	Yes
125	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.33	0.79	78.62	15	5.24	No

126	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.95	0.24	209.69	35	5.99	Yes
127	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.95	0.35	90.78	15	6.05	Yes
128	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.95	1.74	61.47	10	6.15	No
129	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	4.53	0.23	221.55	35	6.33	Yes
130	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	4.53	0.24	91.46	15	6.10	Yes
131	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	4.53	0.34	59.82	10	5.98	Yes
132	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	3.48	0.23	217.82	35	6.22	Yes
133	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	3.48	0.45	88.73	15	5.92	Yes
134	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	3.48	2.53	61.39	10	6.14	No
135	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	5.00	0.11	210.56	35	6.02	Yes
136	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	5.00	0.23	88.44	15	5.90	Yes
137	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	5.00	0.66	61.62	10	6.16	No
138	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	8.05	0.12	124.52	20	6.23	Yes
139	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	8.05	0.11	60.74	10	6.07	Yes
140	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	8.05	0.12	57.41	10	5.74	Yes
141	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	8.05	0.12	124.52	20	6.23	Yes
142	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	8.05	0.12	57.65	10	5.77	Yes
143	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	8.05	0.12	58.92	10	5.89	Yes
144	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.87	0.59	110.82	20	5.54	No
145	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.93	0.46	54.6	10	5.46	Yes
146	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	7.93	0.35	55.03	10	5.50	Yes
147	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	8.28	0.12	179.87	30	6.00	Yes
148	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	8.28	0.76	130.05	20	6.50	No
149	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	325	8.28	0.13	115.32	20	5.77	Yes
150	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	340	15.06	0.24	202.66	30	6.76	Yes
151	Corn Oil	Methanol	Methyl esters	340	12.83	0.45	251.64	40	6.29	Yes

152	Soapstock	Methanol	Methyl esters	320	12.07	0.23	206.92	35	5.91	Yes
153	Soapstock	Methanol	Methyl esters	320	12.07	0.93	180.92	30	6.03	No
154	Soapstock	Methanol	Methyl esters	310	2.42	0.34	135.64	25	5.43	Yes
155	Soapstock	Methanol	Methyl esters	310	5.69	0.22	113.48	20	5.67	Yes
156	Soapstock	Methanol	Methyl esters	310	5.69	0.23	113.97	20	5.70	Yes
157	Soapstock	Methanol	Methyl esters	310	5.69	0.00	112.26	20	5.61	Yes
158	Soapstock	Methanol	Methyl esters	310	5.69	0.35	111.51	20	5.58	Yes
159	Soapstock	Methanol	Methyl esters	310	5.69	1.06	57.37	10	5.74	No

Example 15: Scale-Up of Continuous Removal of Fatty Acids in Biodiesel Production

Process

5 For this example, the same biodiesel production process was used as described in Example 14 above. However, in this example the fatty acid removal reactor removal reactor (300mm length by 38.1mm i.d.) was packed with 150 mesh/58 Å alumina particles (Sigma-Aldrich, St. Louis, MO). Also, the fatty acid removal reactor was placed horizontally instead of vertically as described in Example 14. The fatty acid removal

10 reactor was regenerated online by pushing nitrogen through the polisher to displace the biodiesel and alcohol followed by passing air through the polisher at elevated temperature (e.g. 500°C) to burn/oxidize the adsorbed fatty acids off of the polisher. The polished biodiesel was distilled under vacuum (10 mbar) to remove any residual alcohols and other volatiles. Table 7 below shows the typical regeneration conditions of the fatty acid

15 removal system.

TABLE 7

Step	Setting Temp. 1 (Celsius)	Actual Temp. 1 (Celsius)	Setting Temp. 2 (Celsius)	Actual Temp. 2 (Celsius)	Inlet Temp. (Celsius)	Middle Temp. (Celsius)	Outlet Temp. (Celsius)	Sampling Time (min.)	N2 Flow (ml/min)	Air Flow (ml/min)	Notes
Heating	500	25	500	25	25	25	25	0	10		Flushing
Heating	500	464	500	501	88	580	126	20	22.5		Flushing
Heating	500	484	500	550	107	598	272	30	23		Flushing
Heating	500	488	500	562	112	600	307	35		16	Burning
Heating	500	496	500	569	118	601	339	37		16	Burning
Heating	500	511	500	560	124	601	361	39		16	Burning
Heating	500	508	500	559	128	596	380	41		16	Burning
Heating	500	508	500	559	132	592	404	42		16	Burning
Heating	500	502	500	560	133	590	428	45		16	Burning
Cooling	OFF	501	OFF	563	135	589	444	46	5		Flushing
Cooling	OFF	126	OFF	227	111	101	241	80	5		Flushing
Cooling	OFF	47	OFF	77	44	60	89	120	5		Flushing

Table 8 below shows that the fatty acid removal system performs quite well to polish biodiesel in order for it to meet the ASTM specification for acid number (acid number not greater than 0.5). Some of the samples that passed the ASTM acid number test were then blended and sent to a third party (FuelOnly, Inc. (ISO9000, Vancouver, WA)) for the full battery of ASTM tests applicable to biodiesel under ASTM D6751-07a. This testing revealed that the blended samples passed ASTM specifications for biodiesel fuel.

10

TABLE 8

Expt. #	Feed Stock	Alcohol	Biodiesel Type	Biodiesel Reactor Temp	Acid Number		Biodiesel Collected	Collection Time (min)	Flow Rate	Passed ASTM Acid #?
					Before	After				
160	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	390	18.33	0	91.65	40.5	2.26	Yes
161	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	390	18.33	0	133.53	40	3.34	Yes
162	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	390	18.35	0.12	33.92	10	3.39	Yes
163	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	390	18.35	0.12	33.02	10	3.30	Yes
164	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.88	0.24	141.68	40.5	3.50	Yes

165	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.88	0.12	131.3	40	3.28	Yes
166	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.88	0.12	66.08	20	3.30	Yes
167	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.88	0.24	35.1	10	3.51	Yes
168	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	18.71	0.12	138.35	40	3.46	Yes
169	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	18.71	0.12	131.49	40	3.29	Yes
170	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	18.71	0.24	65.87	20	3.29	Yes
171	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	18.71	0.12	67.14	20	3.36	Yes
172	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	18.71	0.24	65.92	20	3.30	Yes
173	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	18.71	0.24	65.6	20	3.28	Yes
174	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	18.71	1.31	70.18	21	3.34	No
175	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.46	0.00	137.45	40	3.44	Yes
176	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.46	0.12	131.45	40.5	3.25	Yes
177	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.46	0.12	65.13	20	3.26	Yes
178	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.46	0.12	65.58	20	3.28	Yes
179	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.46	0.00	64.57	20	3.23	Yes
180	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.46	0.24	65.47	20	3.27	Yes
181	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.46	0.96	33.24	10	3.32	No
182	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.46	2.15	34.77	10	3.48	No
183	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.2	0.00	137.88	40	3.45	Yes
184	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.2	0.12	137.35	40	3.43	Yes
185	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.2	0.12	135.1	42	3.22	Yes
186	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.2	0.12	66.18	20	3.31	Yes
187	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.2	0.47	65.92	20	3.30	Yes
188	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.2	1.43	33.23	10	3.32	No
189	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.48	0.36	130.68	40	3.27	Yes
190	Corn oil	190 Proof Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	17.48	1.80	39.55	12	3.30	No

191	Corn oil	Recovered Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	21.57	0.11	137.94	40	3.45	Yes
192	Corn oil	Recovered Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	21.57	0.33	121.31	40	3.03	Yes
193	Corn oil	Recovered Ethanol	Ethyl esters	400	21.57	3.03	63.37	20	3.17	No

The invention has been described with reference to various specific and preferred embodiments and techniques. However, it should be understood that many variations and modifications may be made while remaining within the spirit and scope of the invention.

5 It should be noted that, as used in this specification and the appended claims, the singular forms "a," "an," and "the" include plural referents unless the content clearly dictates otherwise. Thus, for example, reference to a composition containing "a compound" includes a mixture of two or more compounds. It should also be noted that the term "or" is generally employed in its sense including "and/or" unless the content clearly
10 dictates otherwise.

It should also be noted that, as used in this specification and the appended claims, the phrase "configured" describes a system, device, or other structure that is constructed or configured to perform a particular task or adopt a particular configuration. The phrase "configured" can be used interchangeably with other similar phrases such as arranged and
15 configured, constructed and arranged, constructed, manufactured and arranged, and the like.

All publications and patent applications in this specification are indicative of the level of ordinary skill in the art to which this invention pertains. All publications and patent applications are herein incorporated by reference to the same extent as if each
20 individual publication or patent application was specifically and individually indicated by reference.

The Claims Are:

1. A method for removing organic acids from a crude product mixture comprising:
contacting the crude product mixture with a metal oxide substrate, wherein free
5 organic acids in the crude product mixture bind to the metal oxide substrate, thereby removing
free organic acids and forming a refined product mixture; and
separating the refined product mixture from the metal oxide substrate.
2. The method of claim 1, the metal oxide substrate comprising Lewis acid sites and
10 Lewis base sites sufficient to bond with free organic acids.
3. The method of claim 1, the metal oxide substrate comprising Bronsted base sites
sufficient to bond with free organic acids.
- 15 4. The method of claim 1, the metal oxide substrate comprising Bronsted acid sites
sufficient to bond with free organic acids.
5. The method of claim 1, further comprising removing organic acids bound to the metal
oxide substrate by combustion.
20
6. The method of claim 1, the organic acids comprising fatty acids, further comprising
removing fatty acids bound to the metal oxide substrate by contacting the metal oxide
substrate with a C₁-C₆ alcohol at supercritical conditions, thereby forming a fatty acid alkyl
ester product composition.

7. The method of claim 6, the C₁-C₆ alcohol comprising methanol.
8. The method of claim 1, the crude product mixture comprising an organic acid
5 containing material selected from the group consisting of rapeseed oil, soybean oil, canola oil, cottonseed oil, grape seed oil, mustard seed oil, corn oil, linseed oil, safflower oil, sunflower oil, poppy-seed oil, pecan oil, walnut oil, oat oil, peanut oil, rice bran oil, camellia oil, castor oil, and olive oil, palm oil, coconut oil, rice oil, algae oil, seaweed oil, and Chinese Tallow tree oil.
- 10
9. The method of claim 1, the crude product mixture comprising a fatty acid alkyl ester composition.
10. The method of claim 1, wherein at least about 95% of the free organic acids in the
15 crude product mixture bind to the metal oxide substrate.
11. The method of claim 1, the metal oxide comprising a porous metal oxide.
12. The method of claim 1, wherein the metal oxide is selected from the group consisting
20 of zirconia, alumina, hafnia and titania.
13. The method of claim 12, the metal oxide comprising zirconia.

14. The method of claim 1, the metal oxide substrate comprising a particulate metal oxide, the particulate metal oxide comprising an average particle size of about 0.2 microns to about 1 millimeter.

5 15. The method of claim 1, the metal oxide substrate disposed within a housing, the operation of contacting the crude product mixture with a metal oxide substrate comprising pumping the crude product mixture into the housing.

16. The method of claim 1, wherein the step of contacting the crude product mixture with
10 a metal oxide substrate was performed as a temperature less than about 100 degrees Celsius.

17. A device for removal of free organic acids from a crude product mixture comprising:
a first housing defining an interior volume, an input port, and an output port;
metal oxide media disposed within the first housing, the metal oxide media comprising
15 a metal oxide selected from the group consisting of zirconia, alumina, hafnia, and titania; and
a temperature control unit configured to maintain the temperature within the first
housing within a first temperature range for a first period of time and within a second
temperature range for a second period of time following the first period, the second range
higher than the first range.

20

18. The device of claim 17, the metal oxide media packed within the interior volume of the first housing.

19. The device of claim 17, further comprising a sensor in fluid communication with the output port, the sensor configured to determine the concentration of organic acids in a sample composition.

5 20. A system for producing a refined oil product comprising:

a production reactor for producing a crude oil product mixture, the reactor comprising a lipid reservoir, and an alcohol reservoir; and

an organic acid removal reactor in fluid communication with the production reactor, the organic acid removal reactor comprising a housing defining an interior volume, the

10 housing configured to receive the crude oil product mixture from the production reactor, metal oxide media disposed within the interior volume of the removal reactor housing, the metal oxide media comprising a metal oxide selected from the group consisting of zirconia, alumina, hafnia, and titania.

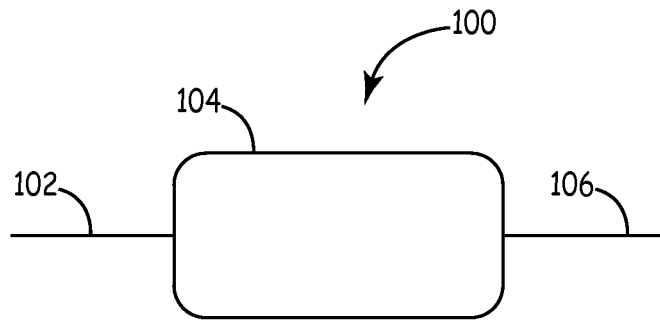


FIG. 1

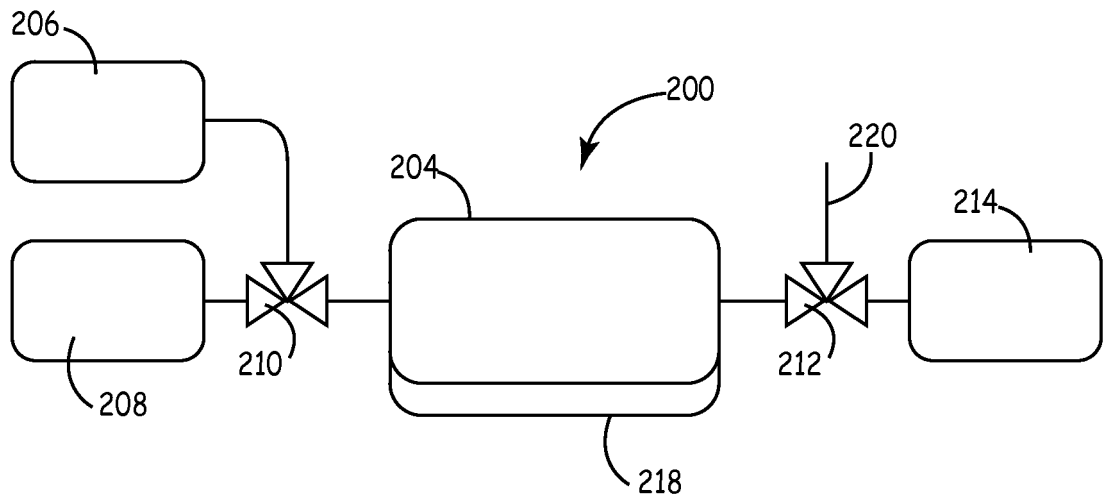


FIG. 2

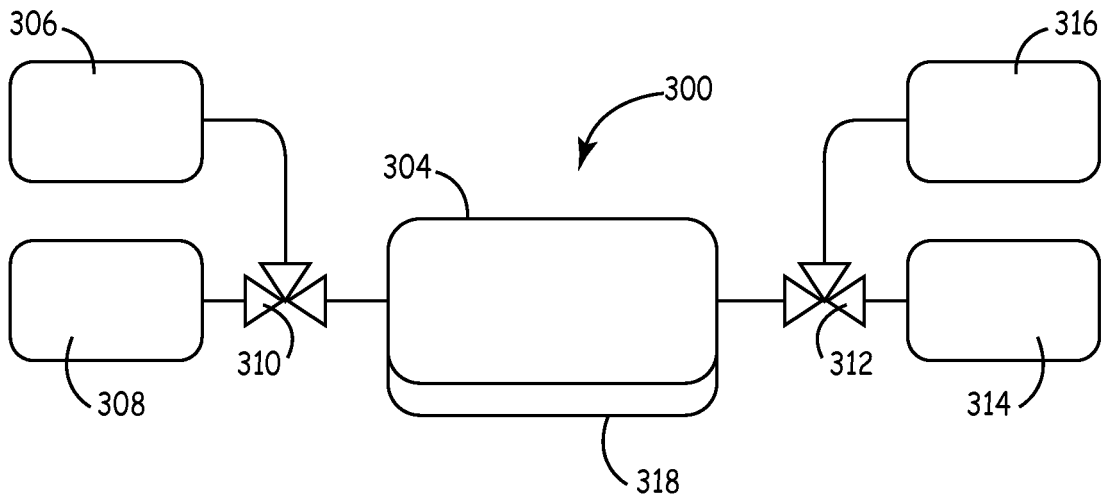


FIG. 3

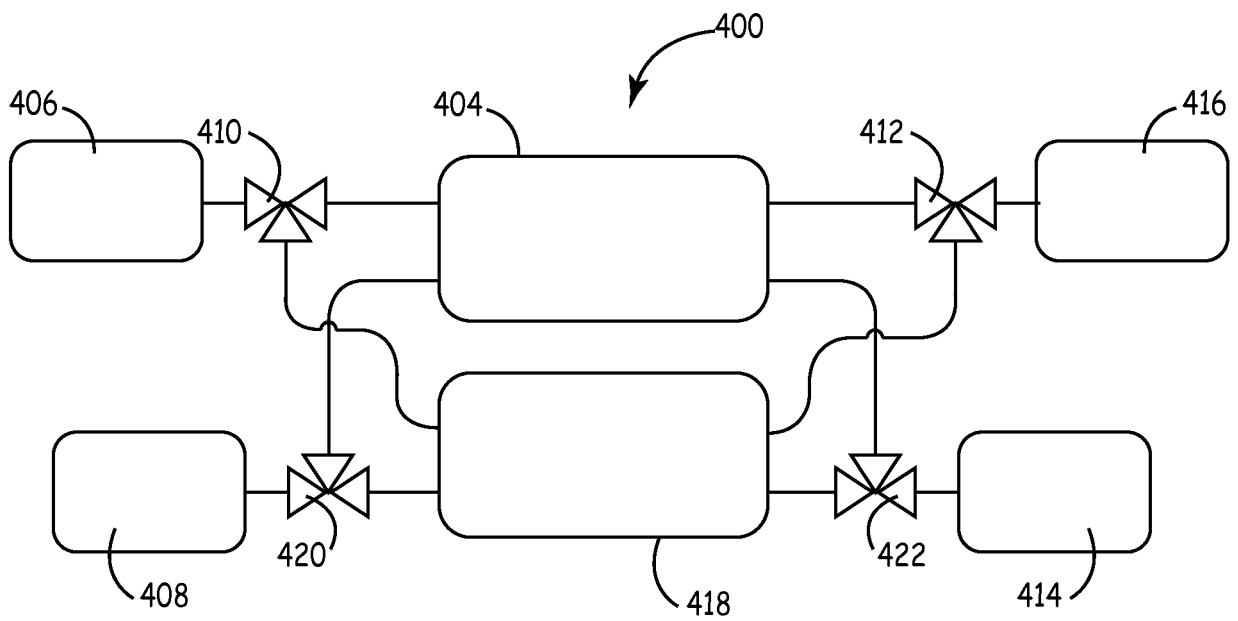


FIG. 4

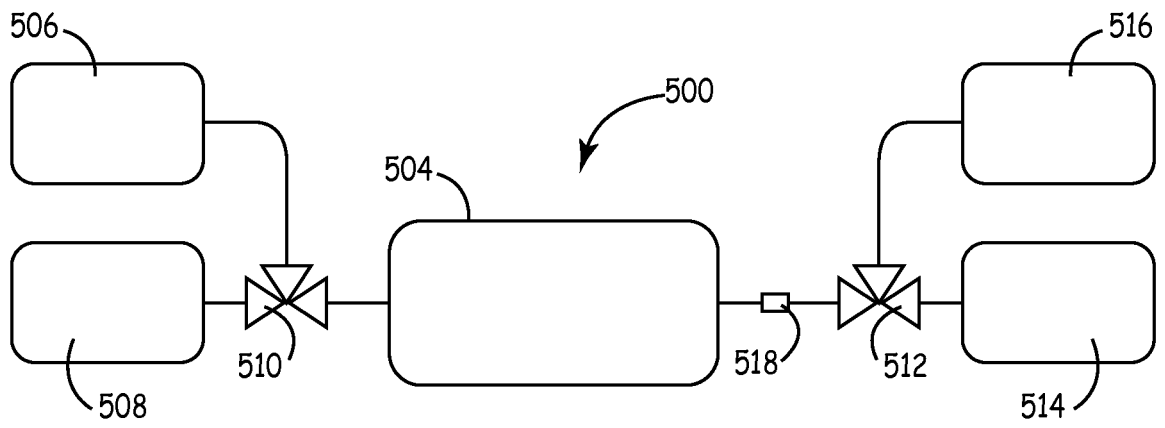


FIG. 5

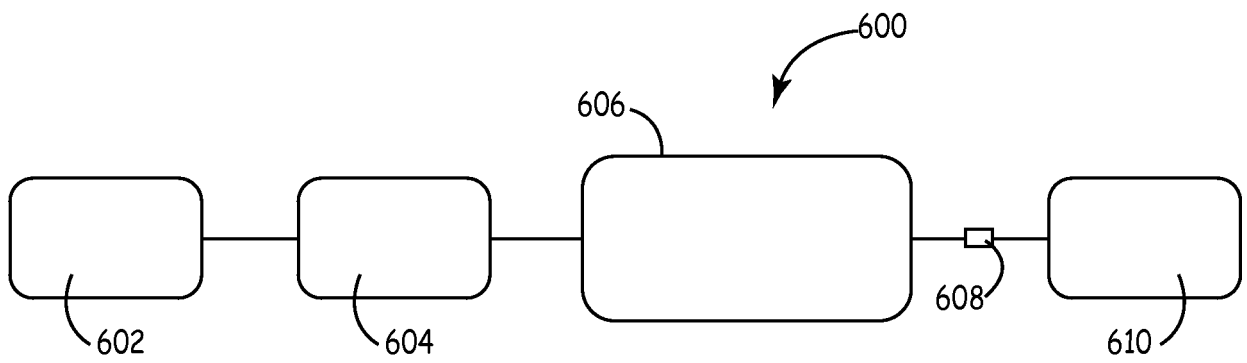


FIG. 6

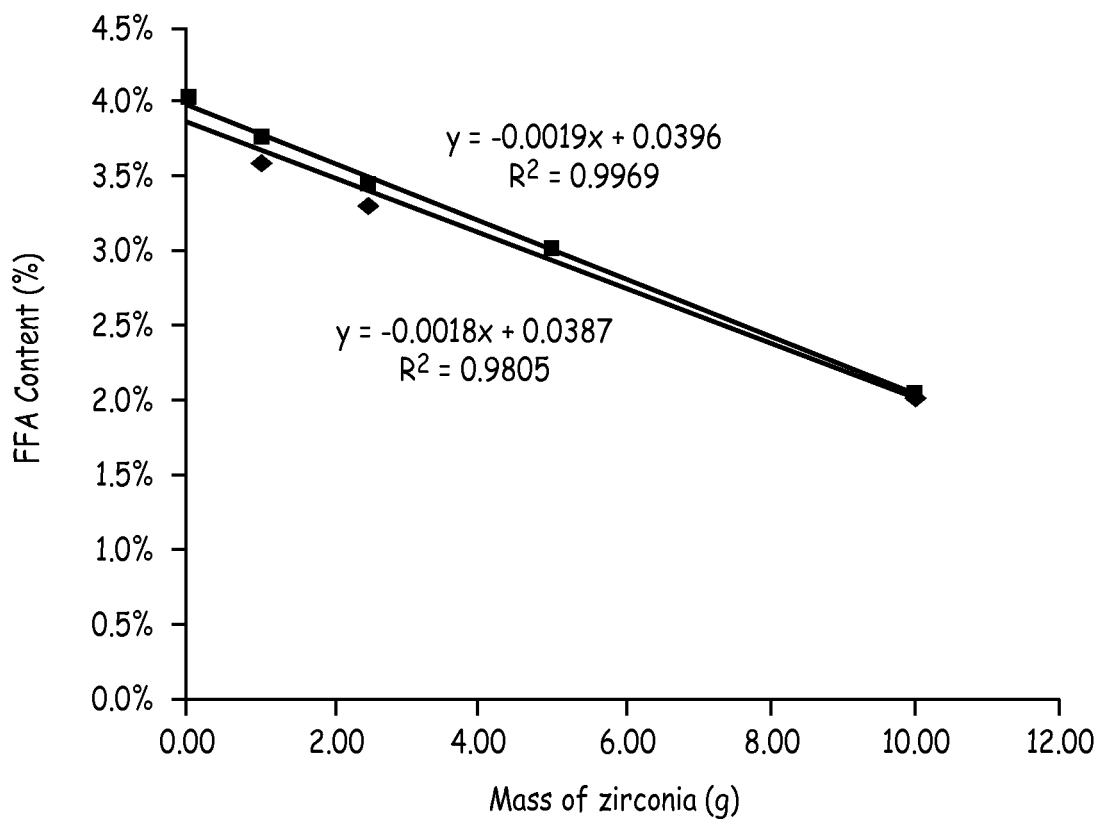


FIG. 7

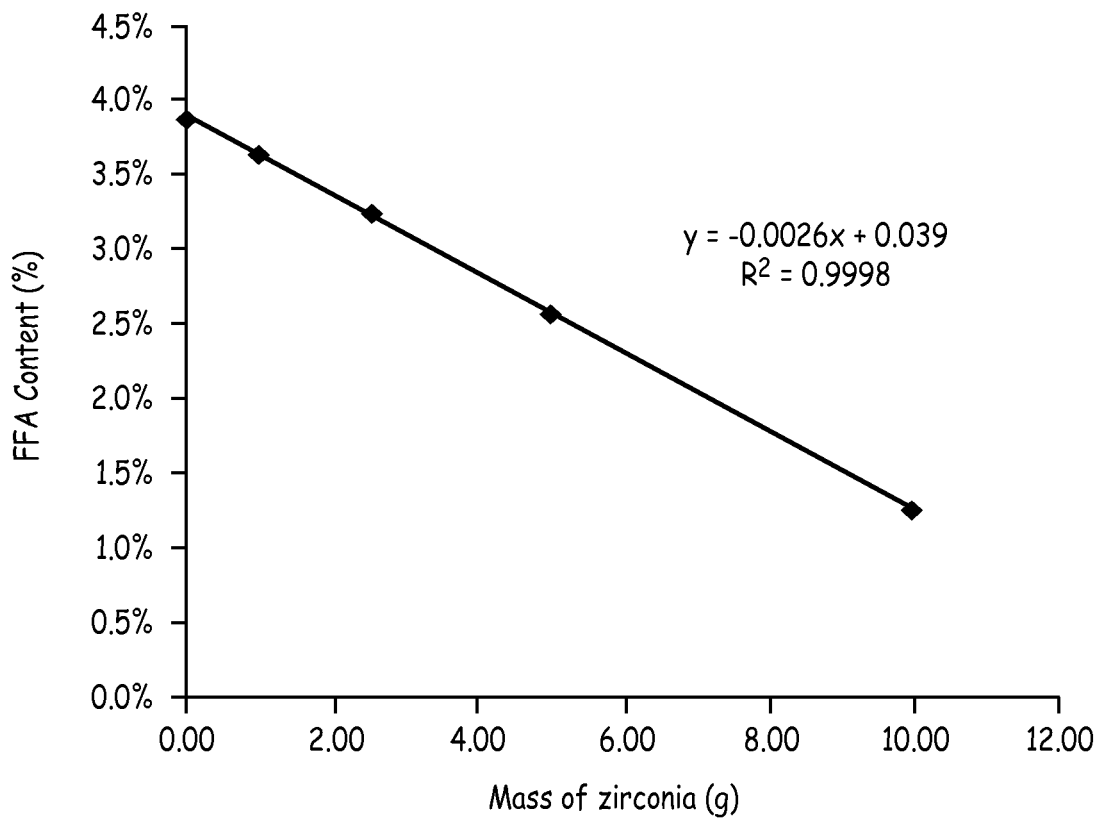


FIG. 8

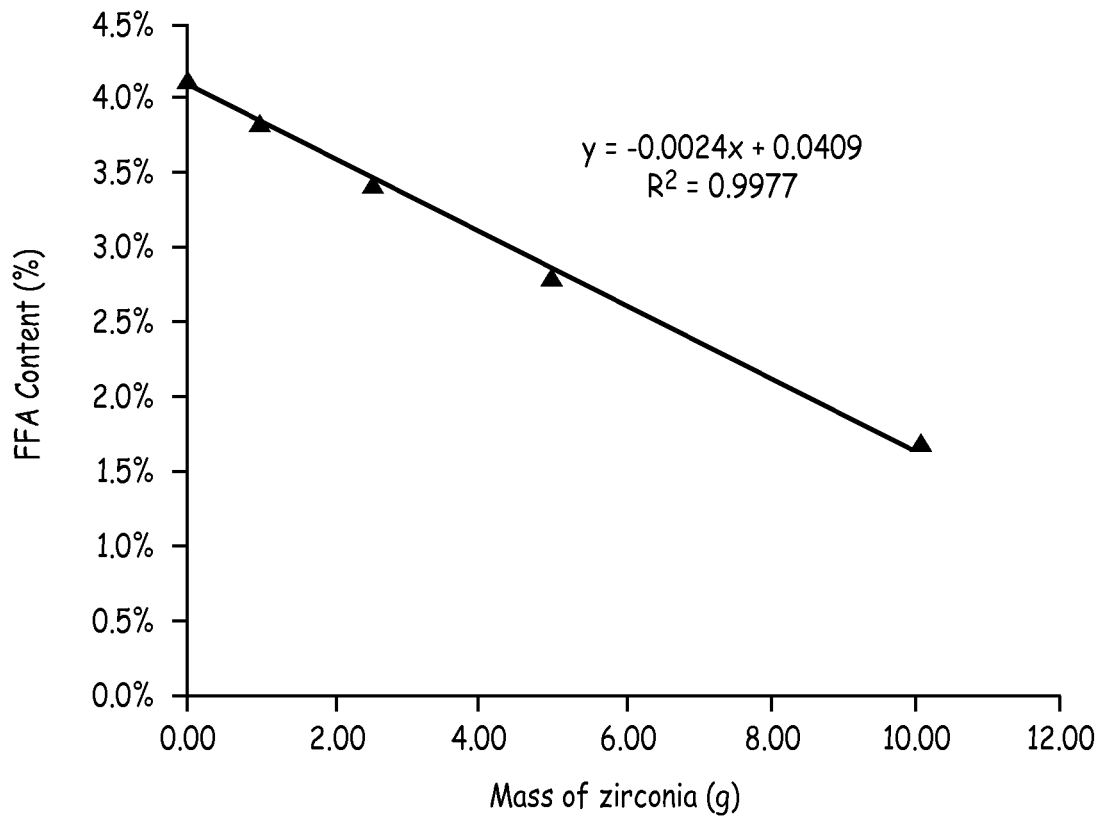


FIG. 9

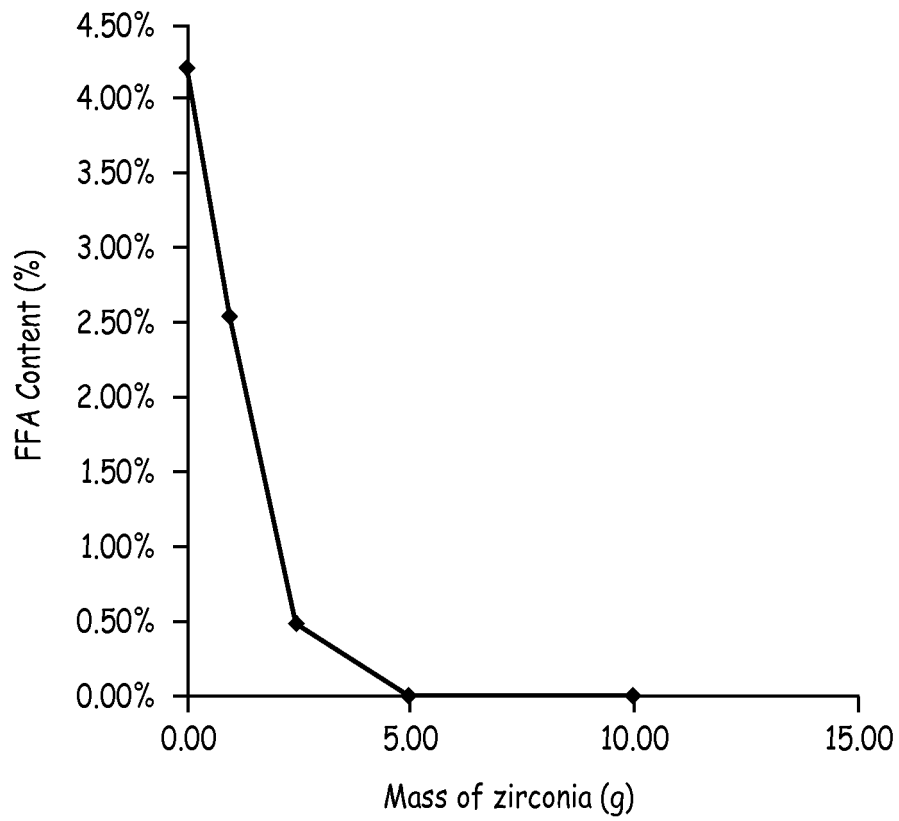


FIG. 10

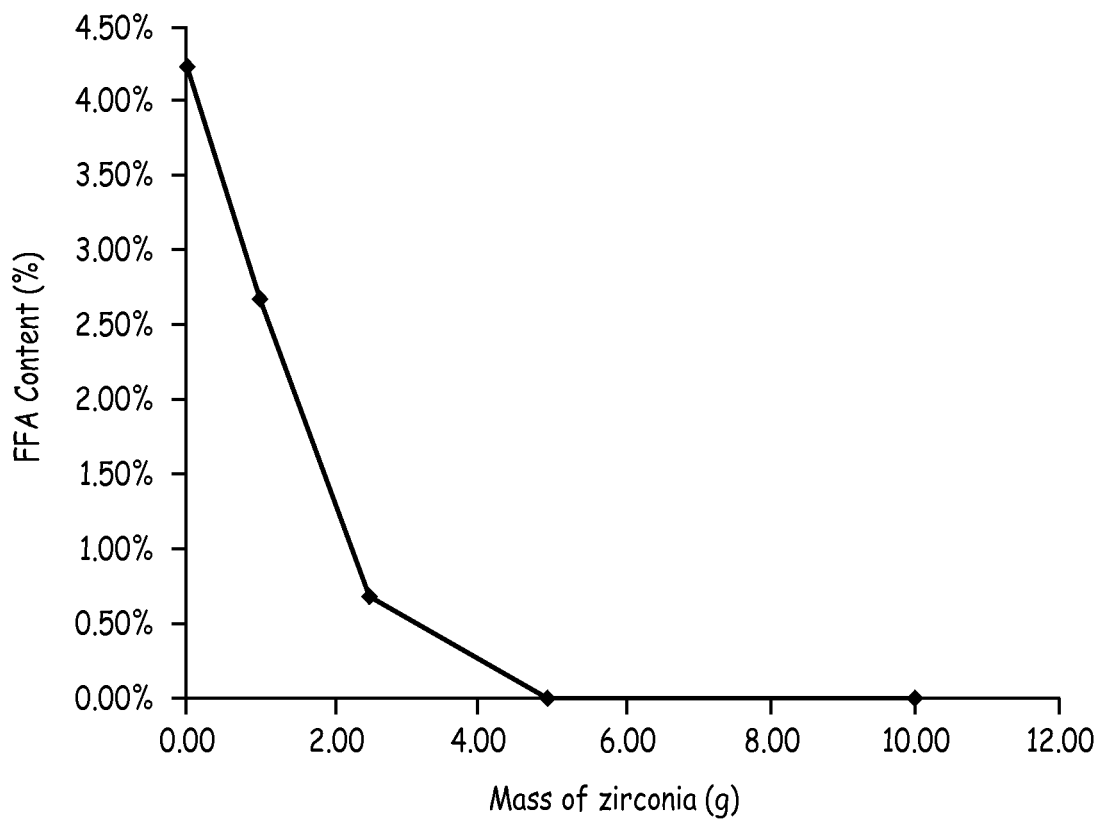


FIG. 11

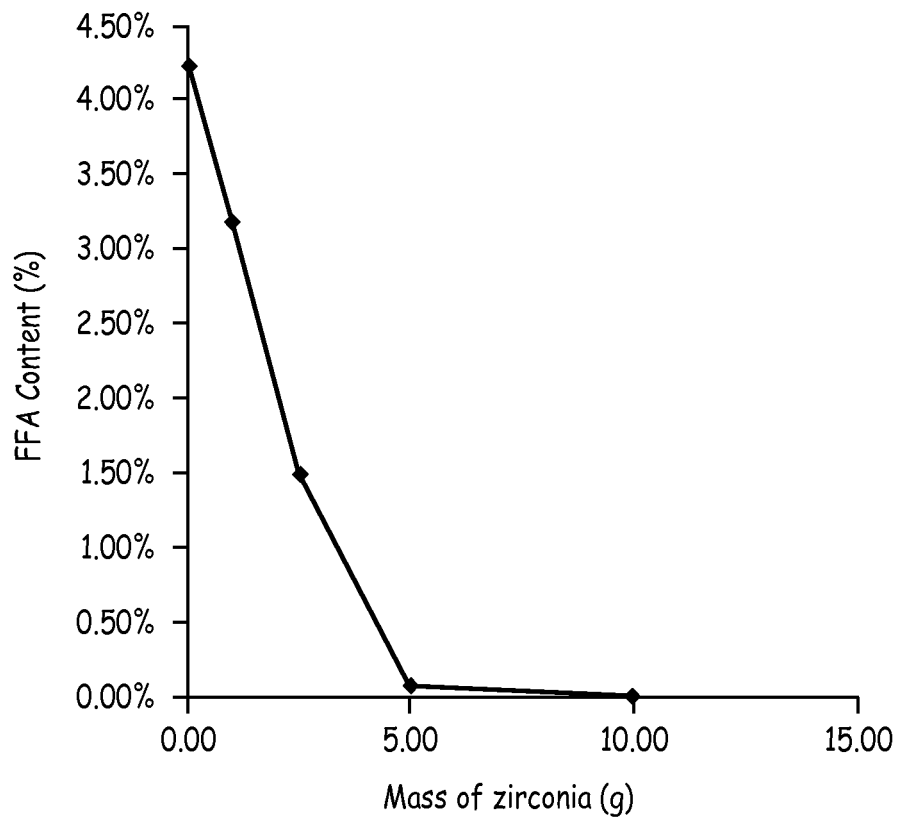


FIG. 12

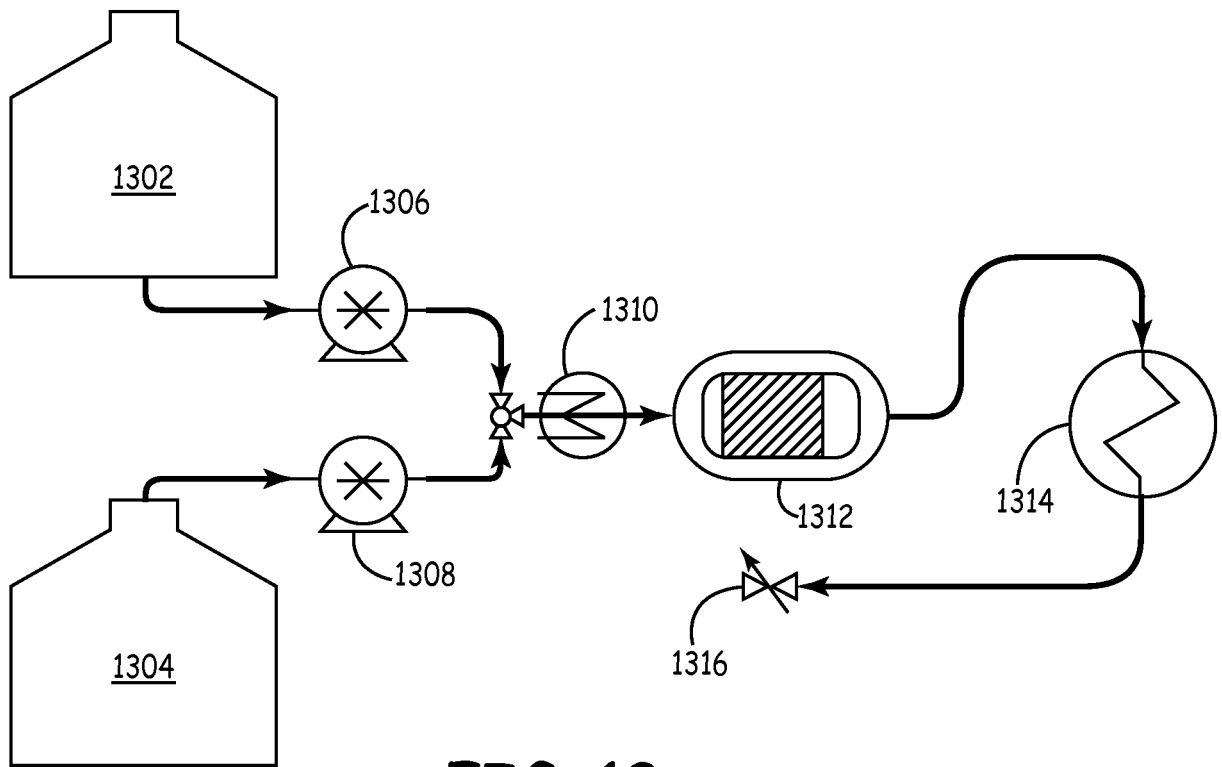


FIG. 13

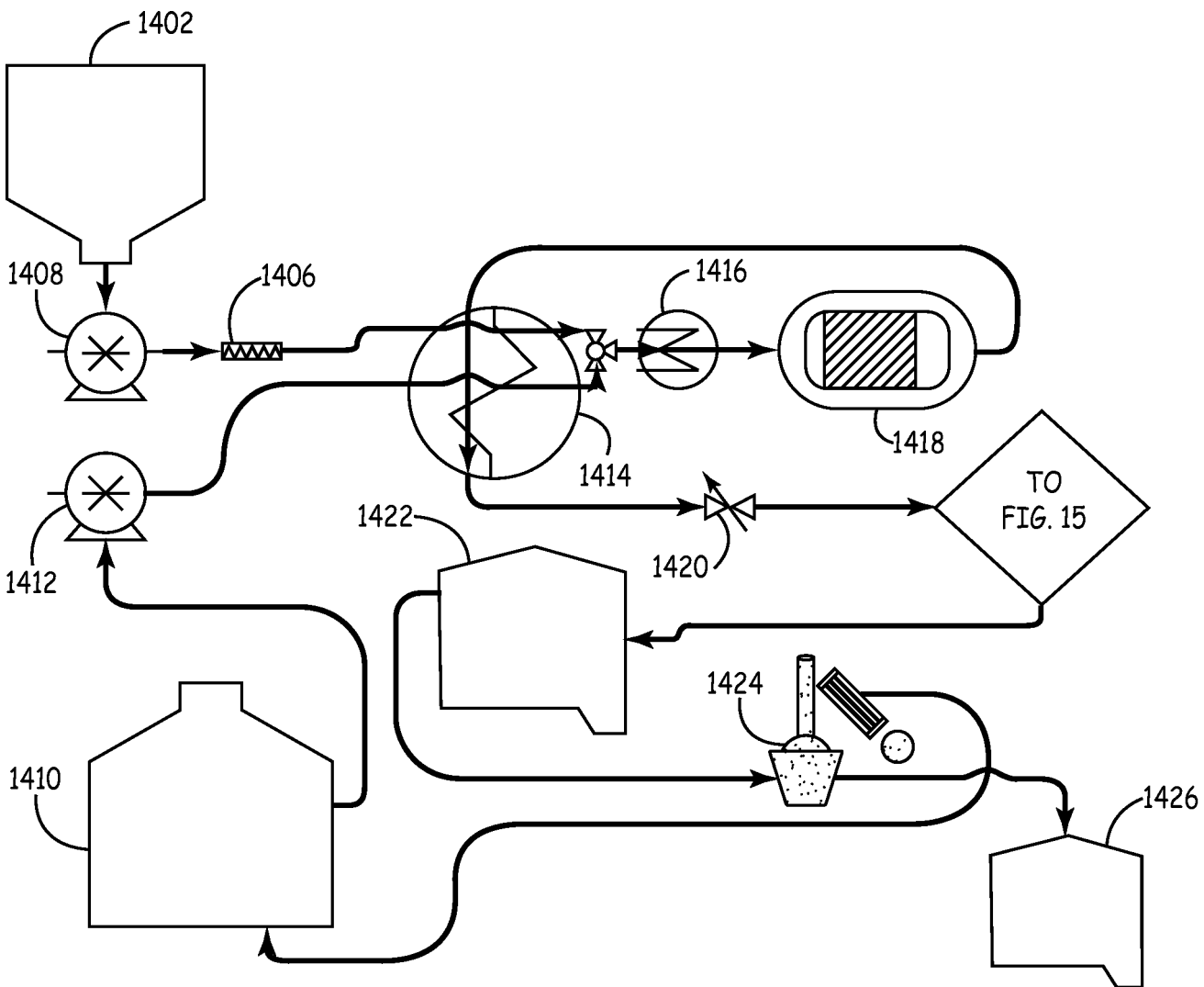


FIG. 14

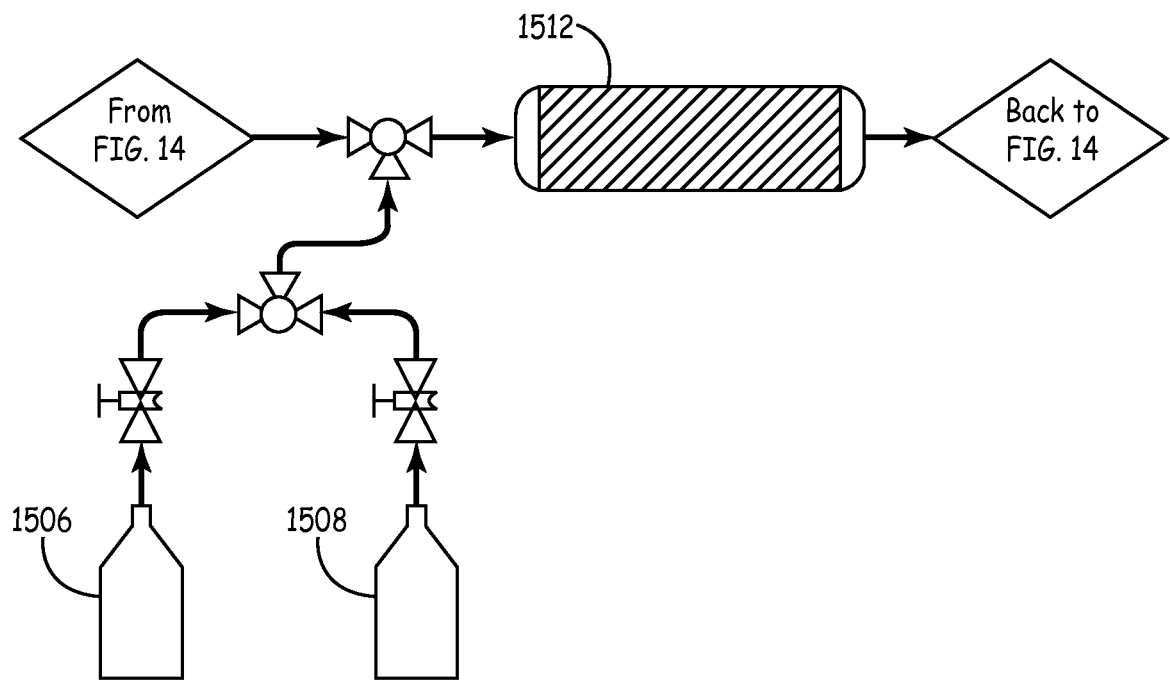


FIG. 15

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No
PCT/US2008/053883

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

INV. C11B3/10 C11C3/00 C10L1/02 B01J20/06

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)
C11B C11C C10L B01J

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, WPI Data, BIOSIS, FSTA, COMPENDEX

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
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Y	page 2, line 3 - line 15; claim 1; examples 1,3,4 page 4, line 6 - line 17	6,7
X	EP 0 507 217 A (GRACE W R & CO [US]) 7 October 1992 (1992-10-07) page 3, line 17 - page 4, line 47; claims 1-6; example IV; table IV	1,3,8, 10-12,16
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Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.

See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents :

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- *&* document member of the same patent family

Date of the actual completion of the international search

25 June 2008

Date of mailing of the international search report

09/07/2008

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Saettel, Damien

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No

PCT/US2008/053883

C(Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

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Y	page 6, line 12 - page 8, line 20; claims 1,5,8,9; figure 1 -----	6,7
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