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(54) **SEED CARRIER WITH PIVOTING CONVEYOR**

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See application file for complete search history.

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(*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this patent is extended or adjusted under 35 U.S.C. 154(b) by 0 days.

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(60) Provisional application No. 60/901,321, filed on Feb. 15, 2007.

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A01C 15/00 (2006.01)

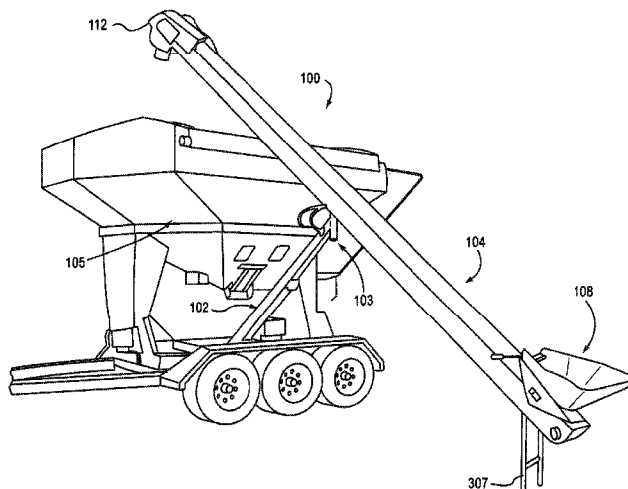
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A seed carrier includes a main hopper coupled with a frame via leg members. The main hopper has a discharge. A base plate is coupled with the frame. A support arm is rotatably coupled with the base plate at a first end. A belt driven conveyor having a conveyor hopper at a first end and a discharge at a second end is rotatably coupled with a second end of said support arm at an approximate center of gravity thereof. A latch mechanism is provided for detachably coupling the first end of the conveyor with the first end of the support arm such that the conveyor hopper is positioned below the main hopper discharge. When the conveyor is uncoupled from the first end of the support arm, the conveyor can rotate to a loading position wherein the discharge thereof can be positioned over the main hopper.

23 Claims, 11 Drawing Sheets



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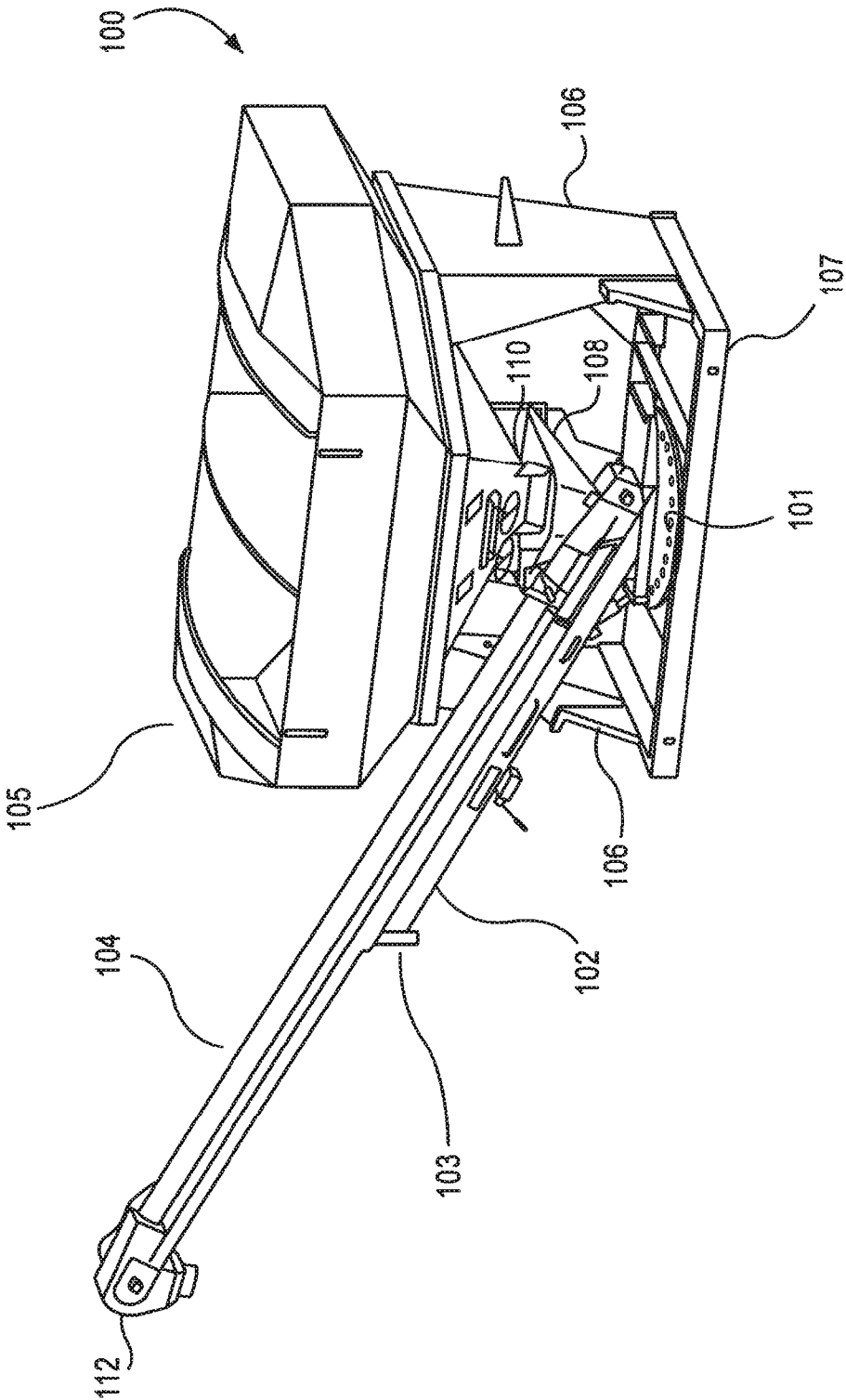


FIG. 1

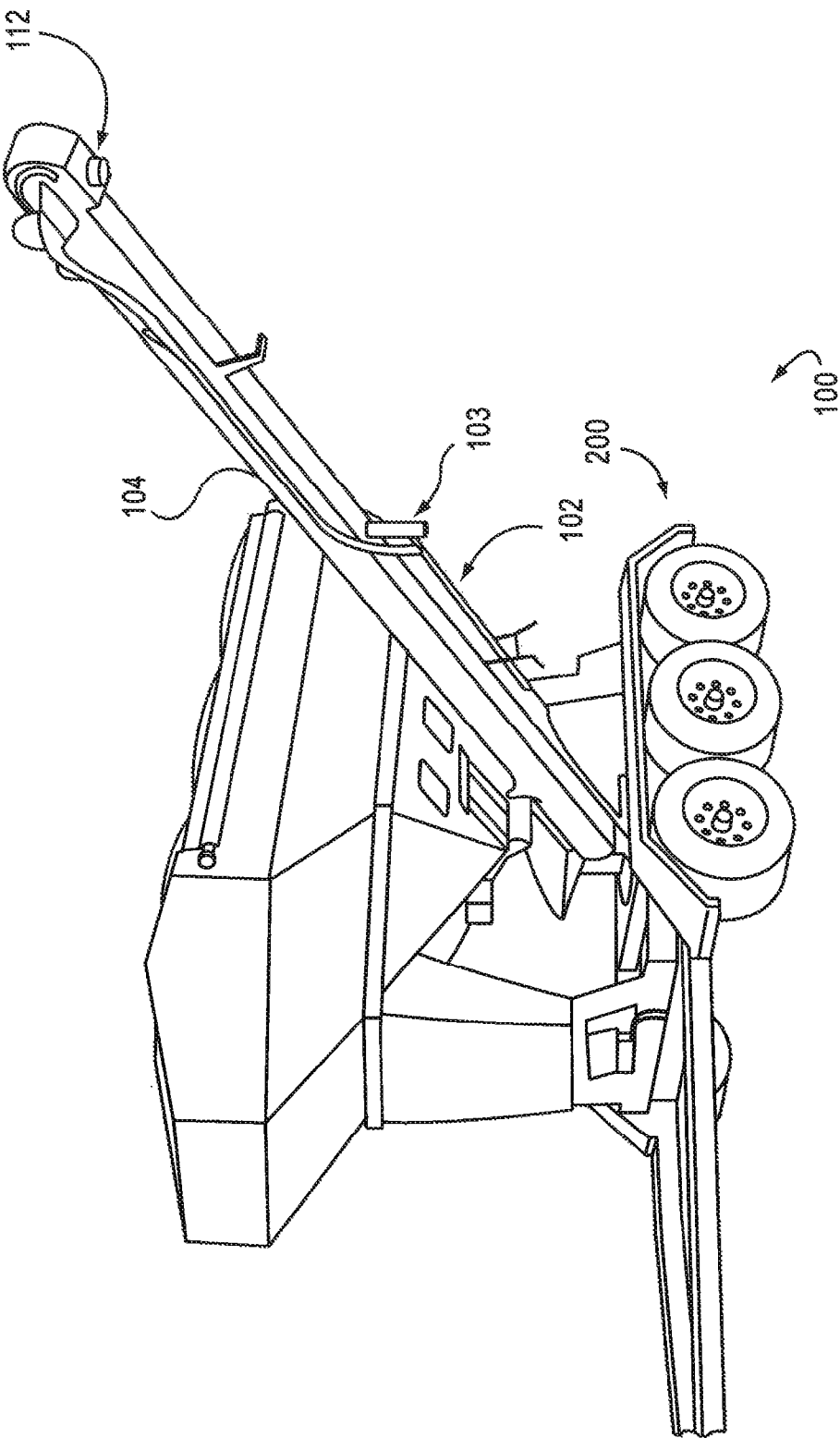
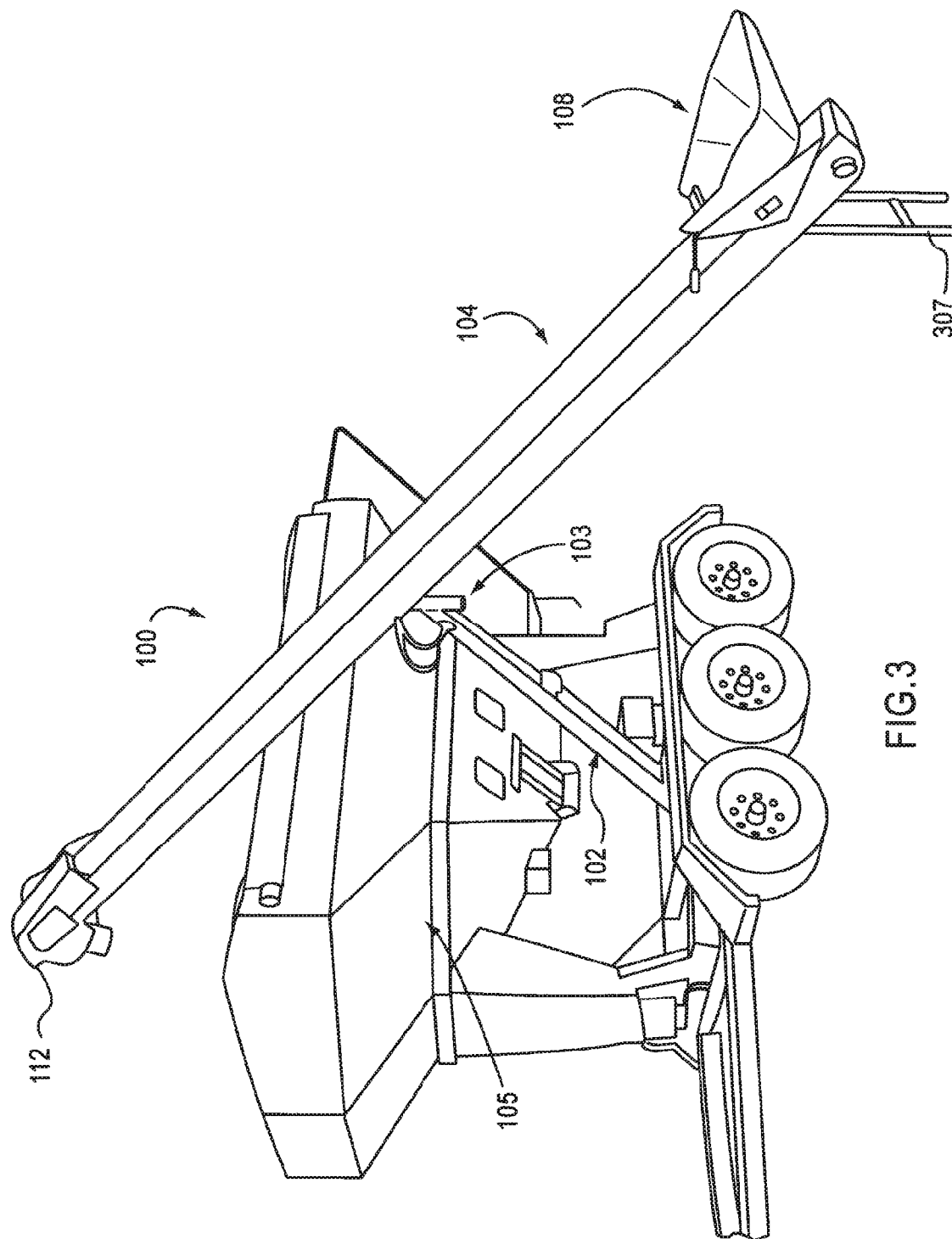


FIG. 2



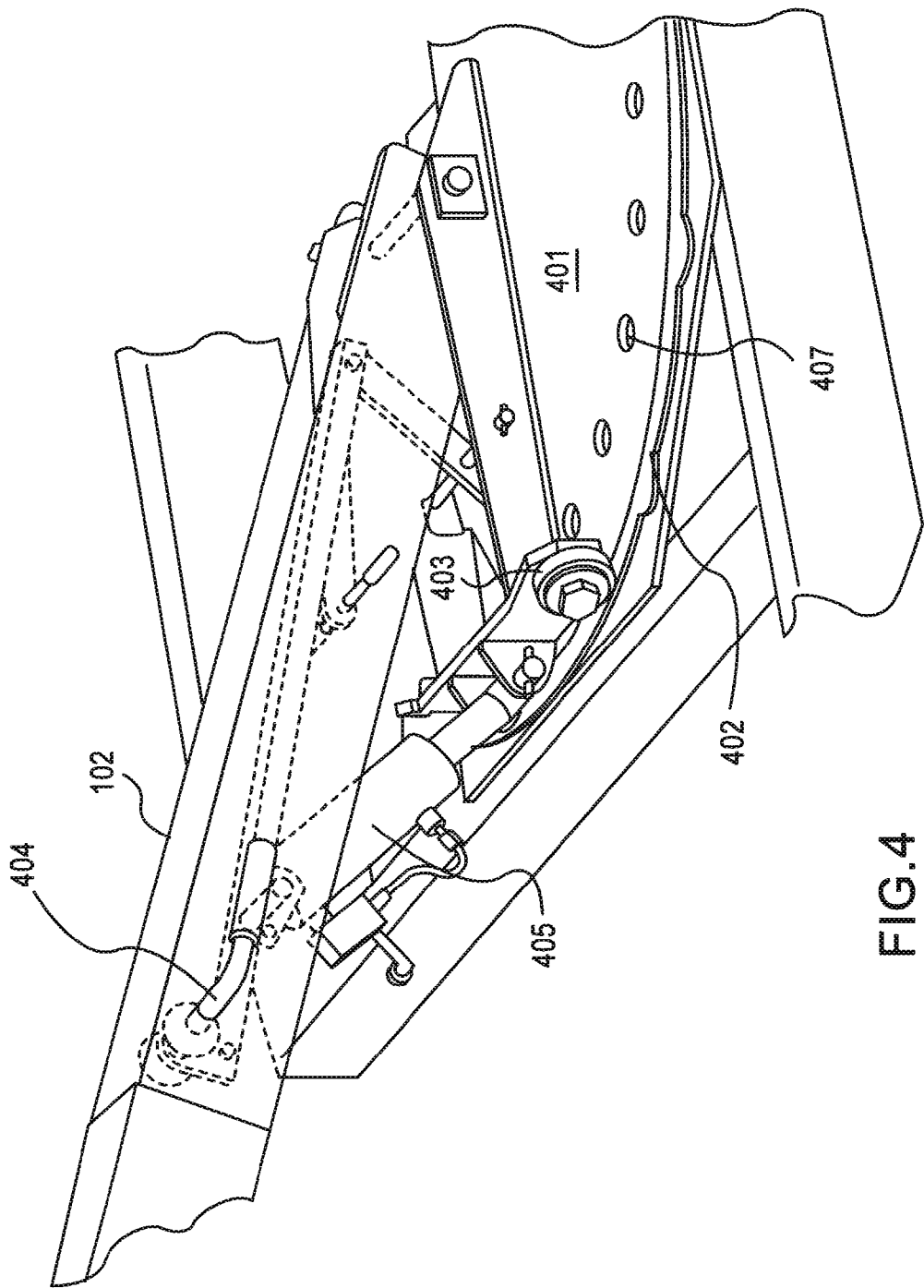


FIG.4

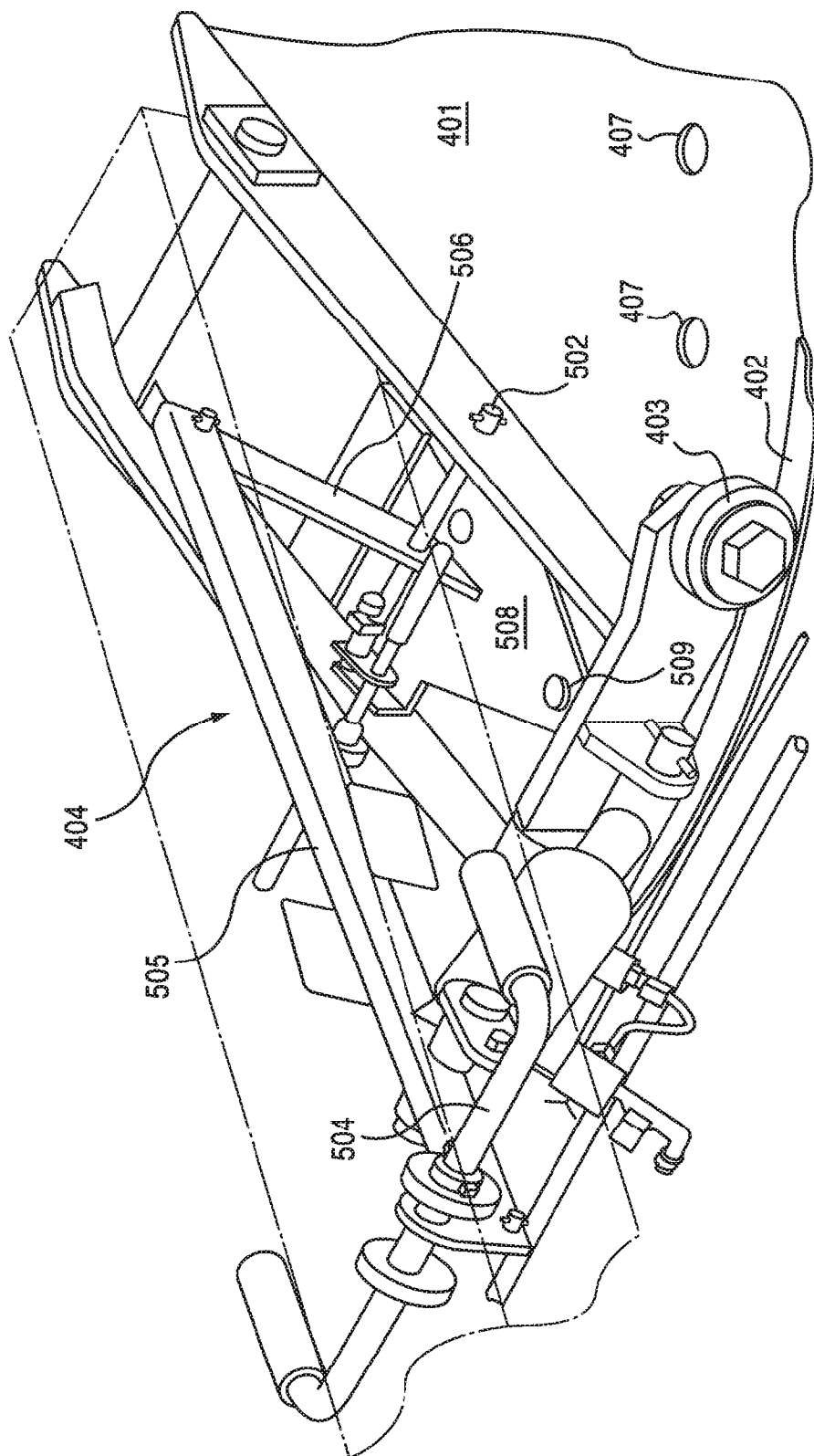


FIG. 5

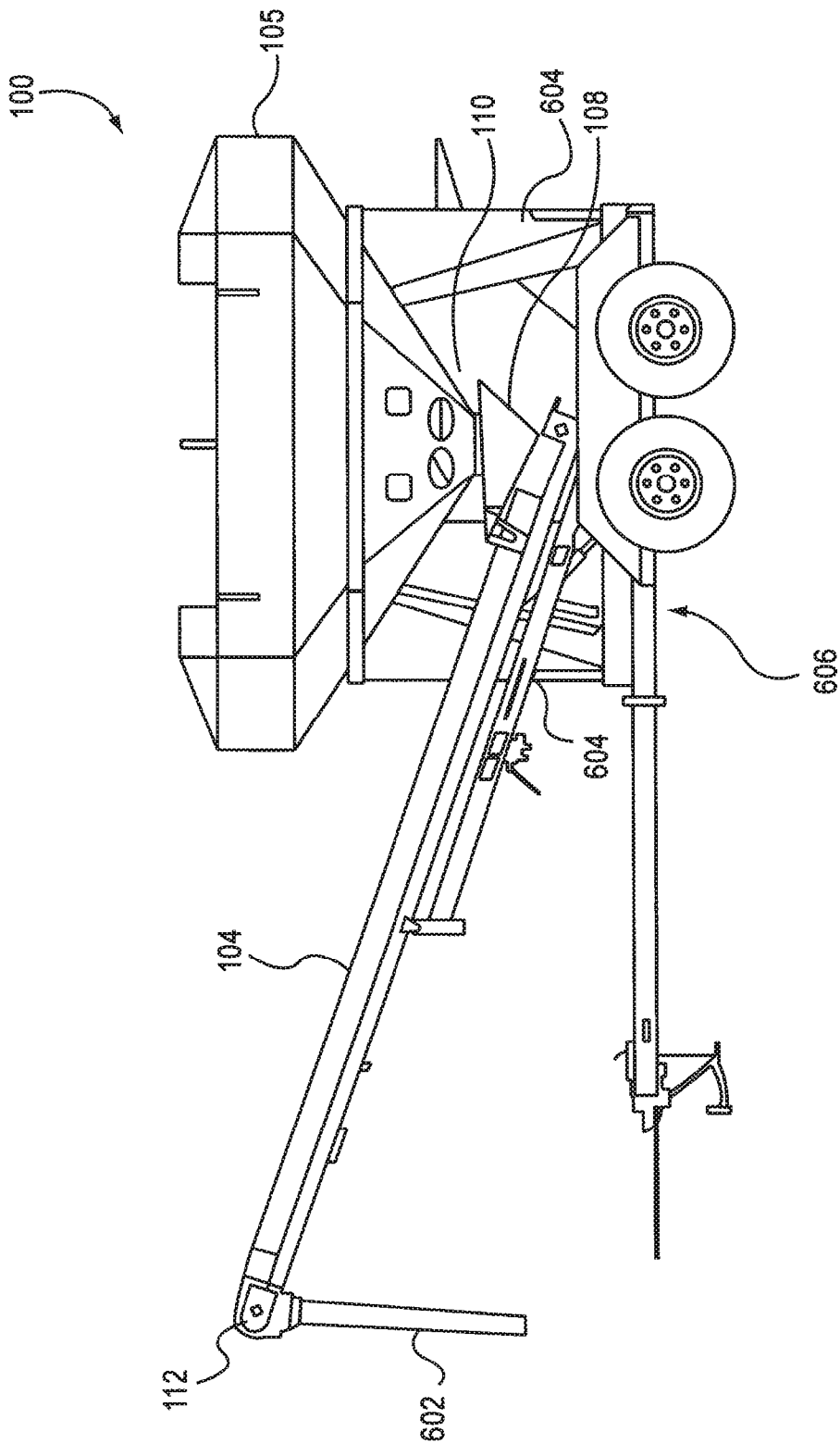


FIG. 6

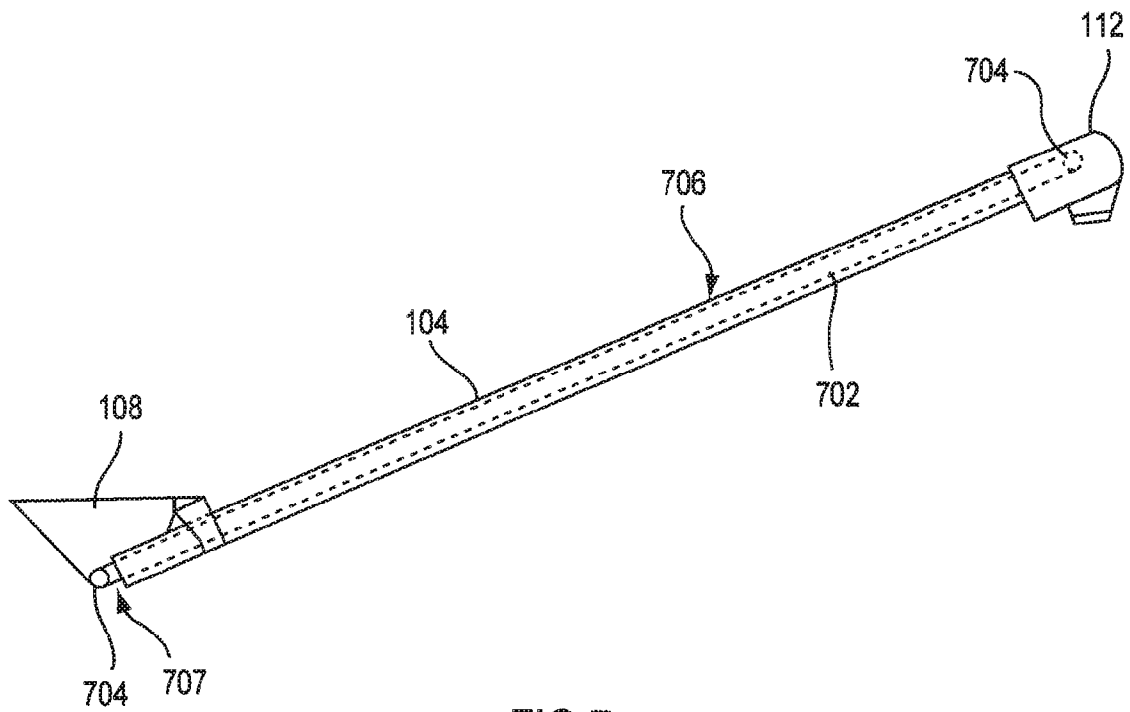


FIG. 7

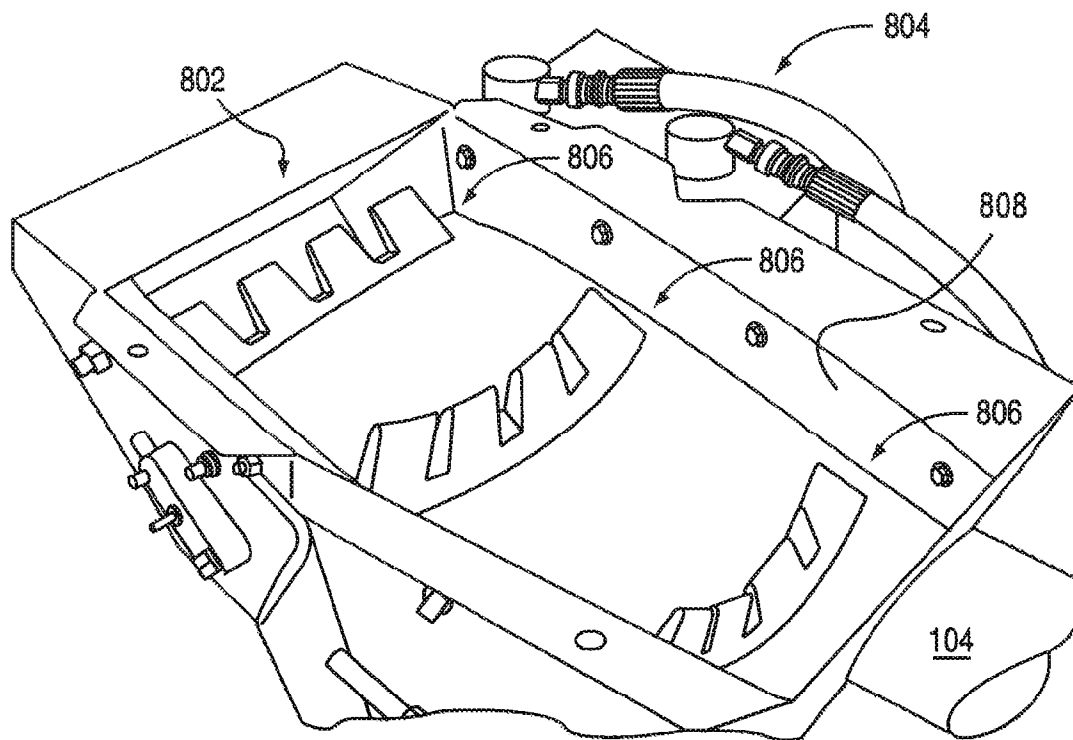


FIG.8

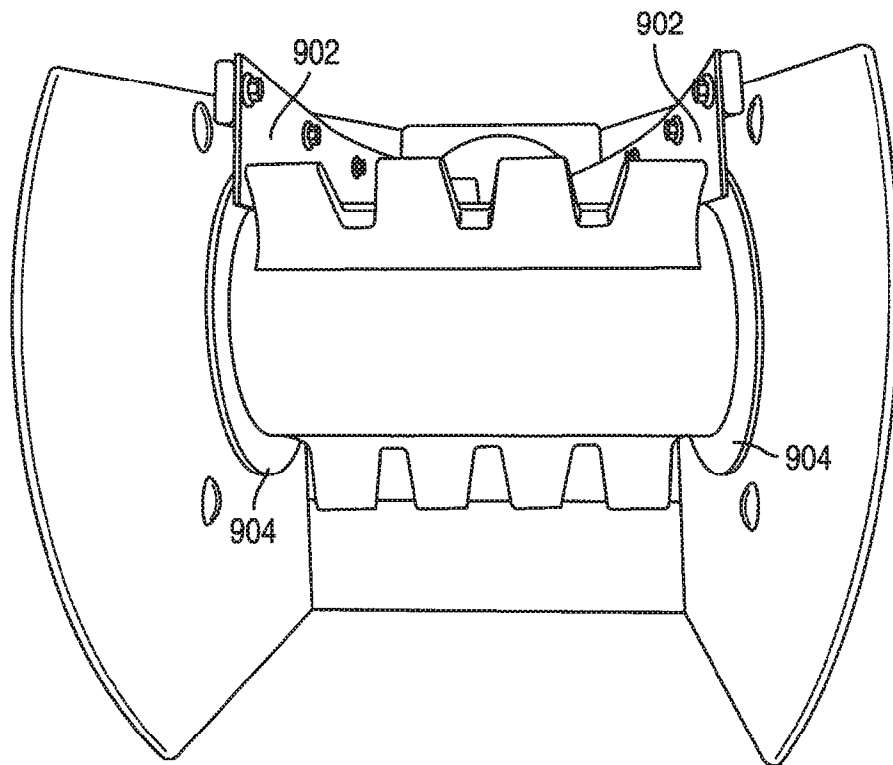
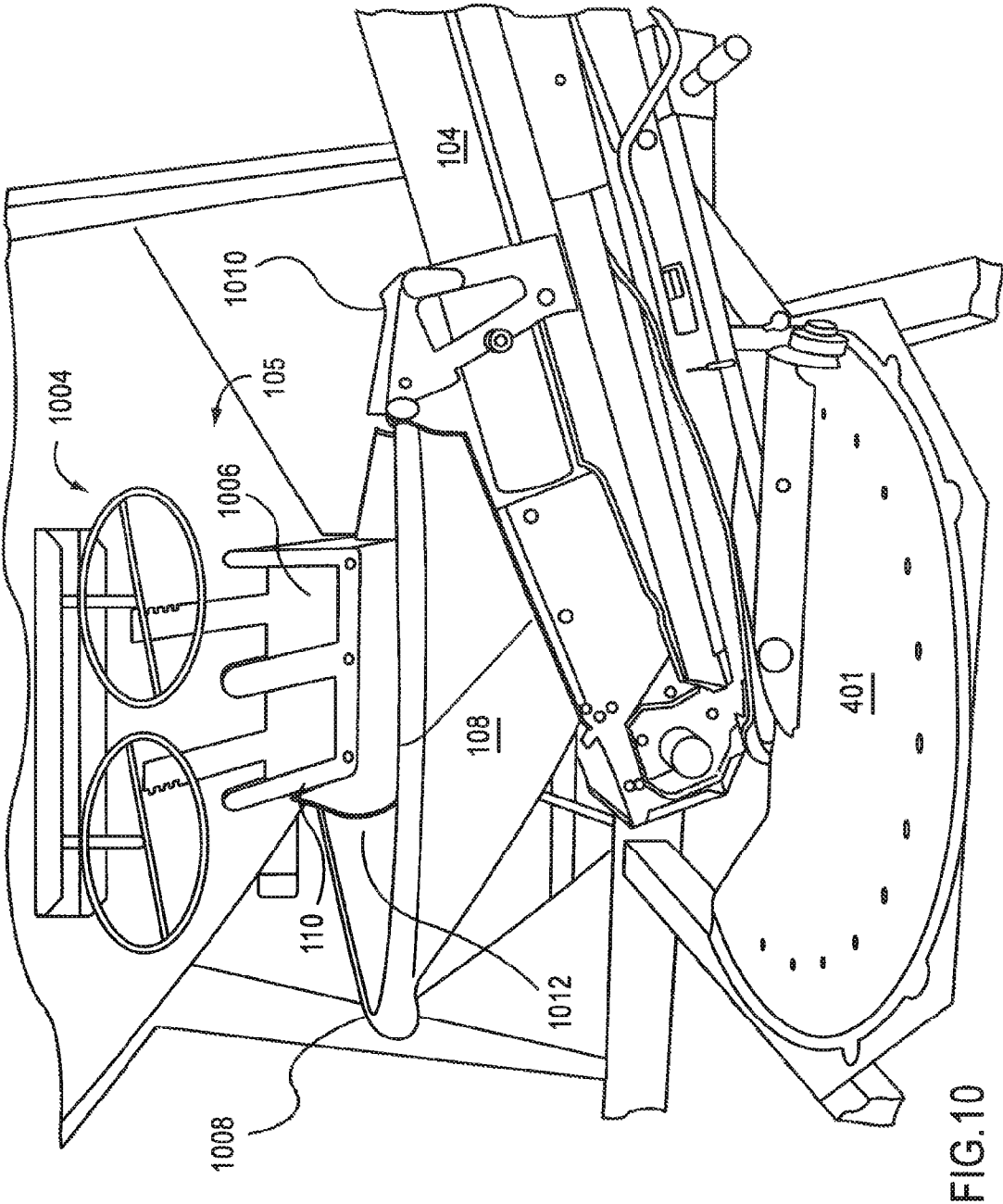


FIG.9



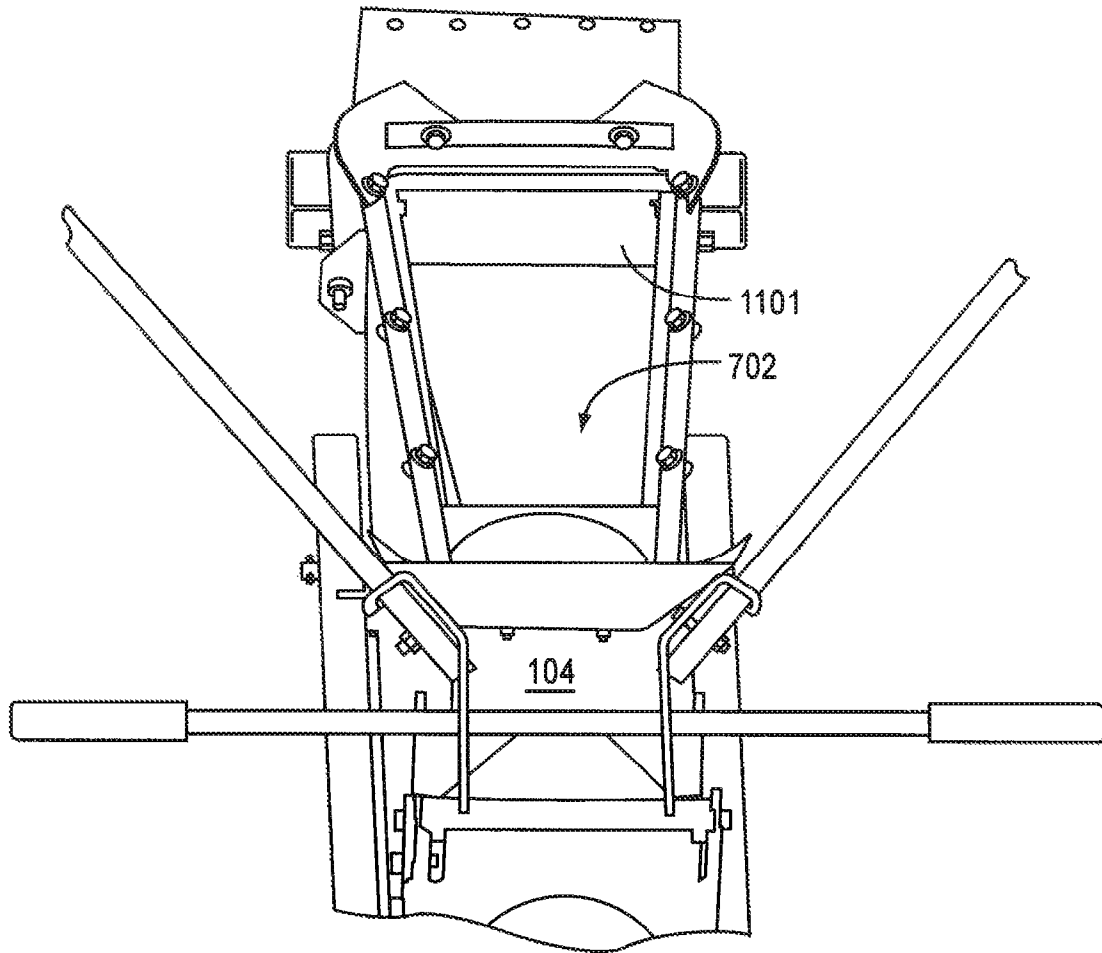


FIG.11

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SEED CARRIER WITH PIVOTING CONVEYOR

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

The present application claims priority to U.S. Ser. No. 12/031,867, filed Feb. 15, 2008, now patented, and claims priority to Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 60/901,321 filed on Feb. 15, 2007, the entire disclosure of which is incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates generally to a conveyor system for a grain or seed carrier. The conveyor system includes a novel pivot system that allows it to either load or unload a container by pivoting it into a loading or unloading position.

2. Description of the Related Art

Conveyor systems for moving grain, seed, etc. are well known. Auger systems are used to rapidly move grain such as feed or the like, while belt driven conveyors are often used for moving more expensive payload, such as seed.

One belt driven conveyor system includes a generally flat belt constructed from a flexible, sturdy material such as rubber or nylon. The conveyor is housed in a tube with rollers on both ends so that the belt may rotate in order to transmit material from one end to the other. Such conveyors are used for unloading seed carriers or the like. However, current conveyors have several problems.

First, current conveyors have the problem that the material being moved can be damaged by the rollers. Second, current conveyors do not have a full range of motion as implemented in seed carries. Third, current conveyors are only implemented for unloading.

There is a need for new and improved conveyor systems that allow a wagon to be unloaded and loaded using a single mechanism.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

According to an embodiment of the present invention, a seed tender or carrier is provided that includes a main hopper for holding seed and a conveyor for transferring seed to and from the main hopper.

According to an embodiment of the present invention, in an unloading position, one end of the conveyor may be positioned under the discharge of the main hopper and coupled with a pivoting support arm. In the unload position, the conveyor can be used to transfer seed from the main hopper to another location, such as to a planter, seeding unit, or the like. A pivot mechanism allows the conveyor to be rotated from under the box into a loading position in which the conveyor intake can rest on the ground or on a stand while the conveyor discharge is positioned to allow conveyed material to be discharged into the main hopper. In this loading position, the conveyor can be used to fill the main hopper.

According to an embodiment of the present invention, a conveyor hopper is provided on the intake side of the conveyor.

According to an embodiment of the present invention, the pivot mechanism allows the conveyor to swing from side to side to simplify unloading of the main hopper and the filling of planters, etc. The pivot mechanism can include a hydraulic cylinder that adjusts the vertical height of the conveyor discharge relative for different filling applications.

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According to an embodiment of the present invention, a pivot single pivot point can be provided at one end of the support arm to allow the conveyor to be rotated between the loading and unloading position. The conveyor may be balanced on the pivot point at a location near or at the center of gravity, thereby permitting the conveyor to be rotated with minimal effort on the part of the operator.

According to an embodiment of the present invention, the conveyor can be rotated through at least 180 degrees about a vertical axis and so that it may be positioned in either a forward or rearward transport position. This feature enables the tender to be pulled by different vehicles such as by a pick-up truck with the conveyor forward or by a grain truck with the conveyor rearward.

Further applications and advantages of various aspects and embodiments of the present invention are discussed below with reference to the drawing figures.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates a seed carrier according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 2 is a view of a seed carrier in an unloading position according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 3 is a view of a seed carrier in a loading position according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 4 is a view of a base system for the seed carrier according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 5 is a view of a lever mechanism for the base system according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 6 is a view of a seed carrier in a transport position according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 7 is a view of a belt conveyor for the seed carrier according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 8 is a view of the discharge end of a conveyor according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 9 is a forward view of a conveyor belt wrapping around a roller according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 10 is a view of the conveyor hopper in an unloading position according to an embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 11 illustrates the receiving end of the conveyor according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

While the present invention may be embodied in many different forms, a number of illustrative embodiments are described herein with the understanding that the present disclosure is to be considered as providing examples of the principles of the invention and such examples are not intended to limit the invention to preferred embodiments described herein and/or illustrated herein.

In embodiments of the present invention, the novel conveyor pivot system can be implemented with seed carrier or seeding machines. The following section describes non-limiting examples of illustrative seeding equipment according to embodiments of the present invention. It should be appreciated that the following examples are provided for illustration and the present invention is not intended to be limited to the embodiments described herein.

FIG. 1 is a diagram depicting a seed carrier having a tube conveyor according to an embodiment of the present invention. The seed carrier 100 includes a main hopper 105 coupled to a frame 107 by legs 106. A conveyor 104 is supported by a support arm 102 coupled with a pivoting mechanism 101

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fixed to the frame **107**. The conveyor **104** is pivotably coupled with the support arm by a coupling **103** at a point that is preferably near or at the center of gravity of the conveyor **104**. The conveyor **104** is also coupled to the support arm **102** by a latch (not shown) at the bottom of the conveyor. The latch allows the conveyor **104** to be uncoupled from the support arm **102** at the bottom so that the conveyor is free to rotate about the coupling **103**. By positioning the coupling **103** at or near the center of gravity of the conveyor **104**, the conveyor **104** balances on the pivoting coupling **103** such that little effort is required to rotate the conveyor **104**.

The conveyor **104** includes a conveyor hopper **108** at its base, which is shown in the unloading position below the gravity discharge **110** of the main hopper **105**. At the other end of the conveyor **104** is the discharge **112**. Seed can be gravity feed from the main hopper **105** into the conveyor hopper **108**, which can then be moved to the discharge **112** of the conveyor **104** by an internal elevator (not shown). In one embodiment, the elevator is a motor-driven belt type elevator coupled onto rollers at both ends of the conveyor.

The seed carrier **100** may be transported by conventional means such as on a trailer. FIG. 2 illustrates the seed carrier **100** on a three axle trailer **200** according to an embodiment of the present invention. As shown, the conveyor **104** is in the unloading position.

FIG. 3 illustrates the seed carrier **100** in the loading position. As shown, the conveyor **104** is uncoupled from the support arm **102** at its base and rotated **180** degrees about pivot coupling **103** so that the conveyor hopper **108** is positioned at a convenient location away from the carrier while the discharge **112** of the conveyor **104** is located over the main hopper **105**. A stand **307** is provided for holding the conveyor hopper **108** in place. The stand **307** may be integrated with the conveyor **104**.

Accordingly, in the loading position, grain, seed or like can be feed into the conveyor hopper **108** to be moved to the discharge **112** for filling the main hopper **105**.

FIG. 4 is a view of the pivoting base of the support arm **102**. As shown, the support arm **102** can be pivotably coupled to a base **401** at a center point so that the support arm **102** is rotatable about a vertical axis. Wheels **403** provide support and can run along a track **402** to facilitate the support arm's **102** motion about the perimeter of the base **401**. The support arm **102** can be locked into a selected position of the base **401** by engaging a pin (not shown) with one of a plurality of the holes **407** distributed around the base **401**. The pin is disengaged with a hole by actuating a lever mechanism **404**, which lifts the pin out of a hole. The lever mechanism **404** may be spring actuated to bias the pin toward the holes, so that simply releasing the lever will allow the pin to engage with one of the holes **407**. Also shown, a hydraulic piston **405** is coupled with the support arm **102** for adjusting the height of the support arm **102**.

FIG. 5 is an alternative view of the support arm base. As shown, lever mechanism **404** includes a handle **504** coupled with a cross-bars **505** and **506**. Cross-bar **506** is coupled to cross-bar **505** on one end and to a plate **508** having a pin **509** on the other end, and with a pivoting coupling **502** at a point near the plate. Rotating the handle **504** applies a downward force to crossbar **506** causing it to rotate about the coupling **502** to raise the plate **508** to disengage the pin **509**. While disengaged, the base **401** is free to rotate about its vertical axis. Springs may be provided for biasing the pin **509** toward the holes **407** for engaging therewith, or the pin **509** can be engaged by gravity.

FIG. 6 is a side view of a seed carrier **100** according to an embodiment of the present invention. As shown in FIG. 6, the

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conveyor **104** includes an elongated discharge spout **602** and is positioned in a transport position. Support members **604** may be mounted on or integral with the legs **106** for holding the conveyor **104** in a forward transport position as shown, or a rearward transport position. As shown, the carrier **100** is fixed to a dual axle trailer **606**.

FIG. 7 illustrates a basic belt driven conveyor according to an embodiment of the present invention. The conveyor **104** comprises a belt **702** that winds about a pair of rollers **704**. The rollers are positioned outside a tube section **706**, a first roller being positioned in the discharge **112** and a second roller being positioned below the conveyor hopper **108**. A motor (not shown) or other means for turning the rollers may be provided at either end of the conveyor. A void **707** exists below the rollers **704** to allow the belt **702** to travel on its return path.

FIG. 8 is a view of a conveyor belt according to an embodiment of the present invention. The discharge end of a conveyor is shown where a conveyor belt wraps around a motor driven roller **802**. The motor may be a hydraulic motor and therefore, hydraulic hoses **804** provide hydraulic fluid flow to and from the motor. Teeth **806** are provided to push grain or seed up the conveyor. As shown, the conveyor belt is cupped in the tube section but flattens out as it reaches the roller **802**. Channeling members (seals) **808** are provided on each side of the belt to form a seal and prevent grain or seed from falling off the edges of the belt as the belt begins to conform to the tubular portion of the conveyor **104**.

FIG. 9 is a front view of the belt as it travels over the roller **802**. Channeling members (seals) **902** are provided on each side of the belt to form a seal and prevent grain or seed from falling off the edges of the belt as the belt flattens at the roller. As shown, the channeling members **902** are fixed to the conveyor discharge **112** with bolts, but can be fixed by other means or can be integral with the discharge.

Discs **904** are provided at the rollers at the edge of the belt to provide additional channeling/sealing means. The discs **904** are preferably integral with the rollers or coupled therewith so that they may rotate.

FIG. 10 is a side view of the hopper end of the conveyor **104**. As shown, conveyor hopper **108** sits above in ingress to the conveyor **104**. When coupled to the support arm **102**, as shown, the conveyor hopper **108** is positioned below a discharge of the main hopper **106**. The discharge **110** may be opened by conventional means. As showed, a wheel handle mechanism **1004** is provided for opening the discharge doors **1006**.

The conveyor hopper **108** is preferably manufactured from light weight materials such as plastic, canvas, rubber or vinyl. As shown, the hopper **108** may include a mechanism for opening and closing the hopper. In this embodiment, flexible coupling or hinge is provided at one end **1008** of the hopper **108** and a mechanism **1010** is provided at the end of the hopper **108** and is coupled with the conveyor **104**, such that the hopper **108** may be made to have an appropriate fit with the discharge **110** of the main hopper **105**. A flap **1012** can be provided at the bottom of the discharge **110**.

FIG. 11 is a schematic view of the hopper end of the conveyor. As is shown, a brush seal **1101** can be located across the belt **702**. The brush seal **1101** retains the conveyed material within the hopper and does not allow the material to enter the void **707** (shown in FIG. 7) under the roller. Such an arrangement is desirable because it prevents the conveyed material from being subjected to mechanical agitation, which would result in damage to the conveyed material. The brush seal **1101** allows the conveyor teeth **806** to pass, but not the conveyed material.

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One will understand that hydraulic power can be provided by a towing vehicle, such as a tractor or the like or alternatively, hydraulic power can be provided on the tender and driving electrically from the towing vehicle, such as a truck.

Thus, a number of preferred embodiments have been fully described above with reference to the drawing figures. Although the invention has been described based upon these preferred embodiments, it would be apparent to those of skill in the art that certain modifications, variations, and alternative constructions could be made to the described embodiments within the spirit and scope of the invention.

We claim:

1. A seed or grain tender comprising:

a frame;

a main hopper mounted on said frame and having a main hopper discharge;

a base mounted below said main hopper discharge;

a support arm having first and second ends;

a first coupling connecting said first end of said support arm with said base, said first coupling being rotatable in relation to said base about a first vertical axis of rotation, and said first end of said support arm being rotatable in relation to said first coupling about a first horizontal axis of rotation;

a conveyor having a longitudinal axis and first and second ends, a conveyor hopper at said first end, a conveyor discharge at said second end, and an internal elevator for moving seed or grain from said conveyor hopper to said conveyor discharge; and

a second coupling connecting said second end of said support arm with said conveyor at an approximate center of gravity of said conveyor, said second coupling defining a second vertical axis of rotation that is not parallel to said conveyor longitudinal axis, and said conveyor being rotatable in relation to said second end of said support arm about said second vertical axis of rotation between an unloading position wherein said conveyor hopper is disposed below said main hopper discharge to receive agricultural product from said main hopper and a loading position wherein said conveyor discharge is disposed above said main hopper to dispense agricultural product into said main hopper.

2. The seed or grain tender of claim 1, wherein said first vertical axis of rotation extends through said main hopper discharge.

3. The seed or grain tender of claim 1, wherein said second vertical axis of rotation extends through said approximate center of gravity of said conveyor.

4. The seed or grain tender of claim 1, wherein said first horizontal axis extends through said first end of said support arm.

5. The seed or grain tender of claim 1, wherein said second end of said support arm terminates at or near said second coupling.

6. The seed or grain tender of claim 1, further comprising a hydraulic piston extending at an acute angle relative to a horizontal plane to connect with a portion of said support arm spaced from said first horizontal axis of rotation.

7. The seed or grain tender of claim 1, further comprising a stand coupled with said first end of said conveyor and movable between a stowed position allowing said conveyor hopper to be positioned below said main hopper discharge when said conveyor is in said unloading position and an extended position supporting said conveyor hopper above the ground when said conveyor is in said loading position.

8. A seed or grain tender comprising:

a frame;

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a main hopper mounted on said frame and having a main hopper discharge;

a base positioned below said main hopper;

a support arm having first and second ends;

a first coupling connecting said first end of said support arm with said base, said first coupling being rotatable about a first vertical axis of rotation, and said first end of said support arm being rotatable about a first horizontal axis of rotation;

a conveyor having a longitudinal axis and first and second ends, a conveyor hopper at said first end, and a conveyor discharge at said second end; and

a second coupling connecting said second end of said support arm with said conveyor at an approximate center of gravity of said conveyor, said second coupling defining a second vertical axis of rotation that is not parallel to said conveyor longitudinal axis, and said conveyor being rotatable about said second vertical axis of rotation between an unloading position wherein said conveyor hopper is disposed below said main hopper discharge to receive agricultural product from said main hopper and a loading position wherein said conveyor discharge is disposed above said main hopper to dispense agricultural product into said main hopper.

9. The seed or grain tender of claim 8, wherein said first vertical axis of rotation extends through said main hopper discharge.

10. The seed or grain tender of claim 8, wherein said second vertical axis of rotation extends through said approximate center of gravity of said conveyor.

11. The seed or grain tender of claim 8, wherein said first horizontal axis extends through said first end of said support arm.

12. The seed or grain tender of claim 8, wherein said second end of said support arm terminates at or near said second coupling.

13. The seed or grain tender of claim 8, wherein said conveyor includes an internal elevator for moving seed or grain from said conveyor hopper to said conveyor discharge.

14. The seed or grain tender of claim 8, further comprising a hydraulic piston extending at an acute angle relative to a horizontal plane to connect with a portion of said support arm spaced from said first horizontal axis of rotation.

15. The seed or grain tender of claim 8, further comprising a stand coupled with said first end of said conveyor and movable between a stowed position allowing said conveyor hopper to be positioned below said main hopper discharge when said conveyor is in said unloading position and an extended position supporting said conveyor hopper above the ground when said conveyor is in said loading position.

16. A seed or grain tender comprising:

a main hopper having a main hopper discharge;

a base positioned below said main hopper;

a support arm having first and second ends;

a first coupling connecting said first end of said support arm with said base, said first coupling being rotatable about a first vertical axis of rotation, and said first end of said support arm being rotatable about a first horizontal axis of rotation;

a conveyor having a longitudinal axis and first and second ends, a conveyor hopper at said first end, and a conveyor discharge at said second end; and

a second coupling connecting said second end of said support arm with said conveyor at an approximate center of gravity of said conveyor, said second coupling defining a first conveyor axis of rotation that is not parallel to said conveyor longitudinal axis, and said conveyor being

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rotatable about said first conveyor axis of rotation between an unloading position wherein said conveyor hopper is disposed below said main hopper discharge to receive agricultural product from said main hopper and a loading position wherein said conveyor discharge is disposed above said main hopper to dispense agricultural product into said main hopper.

17. The seed or grain tender of claim 16, wherein said first vertical axis of rotation extends through said main hopper discharge.

18. The seed or grain tender of claim 16, wherein said first conveyor axis of rotation extends through said approximate center of gravity of said conveyor.

19. The seed or grain tender of claim 16, wherein said first horizontal axis extends through said first end of said support arm.

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20. The seed or grain tender of claim 16, wherein said second end of said support arm terminates at or near said second coupling.

21. The seed or grain tender of claim 16, wherein said conveyor includes an internal elevator for moving seed or grain from said conveyor hopper to said conveyor discharge.

22. The seed or grain tender of claim 16, further comprising a hydraulic piston extending at an acute angle relative to a horizontal plane to connect with a portion of said support arm spaced from said first horizontal axis of rotation.

23. The seed or grain tender of claim 16, further comprising a stand coupled with said first end of said conveyor and movable between a stowed position allowing said conveyor hopper to be positioned below said main hopper discharge when said conveyor is in said unloading position and an extended position supporting said conveyor hopper above the ground when said conveyor is in said loading position.

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