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Thompson

(10) **Patent No.: US 7,337,782 B2**
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(54) **PROCESS TO REMOVE PROTEIN AND OTHER BIOMOLECULES FROM TOBACCO EXTRACT OR SLURRY**

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(51) **Int. Cl.**
A24B 15/00 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.** **131/297**; 131/298; 131/309; 131/310

(58) **Field of Classification Search** 131/297, 131/298, 300, 309, 310, 356, 357
See application file for complete search history.

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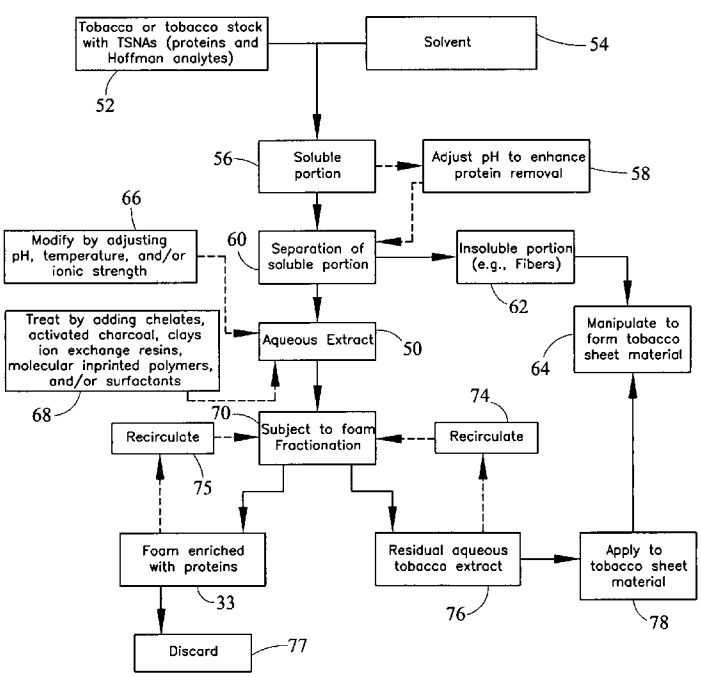
(57) **ABSTRACT**

A process is disclosed for removing proteins and other undesirable biomolecules from tobacco extract or slurry via foam fractionation, thereby concentrating the tobacco extract or slurry. The tobacco extract or slurry is treated and modified prior to being subjected to the foam fractionation to enhance the extent and efficiency of protein removal. After foam fractionation, the concentrated extract, sans proteins and other Hoffman analyte precursors, is applied to a tobacco sheet material, and the collected foam can be recirculated through foam fractionation for enhanced concentration.

36 Claims, 10 Drawing Sheets



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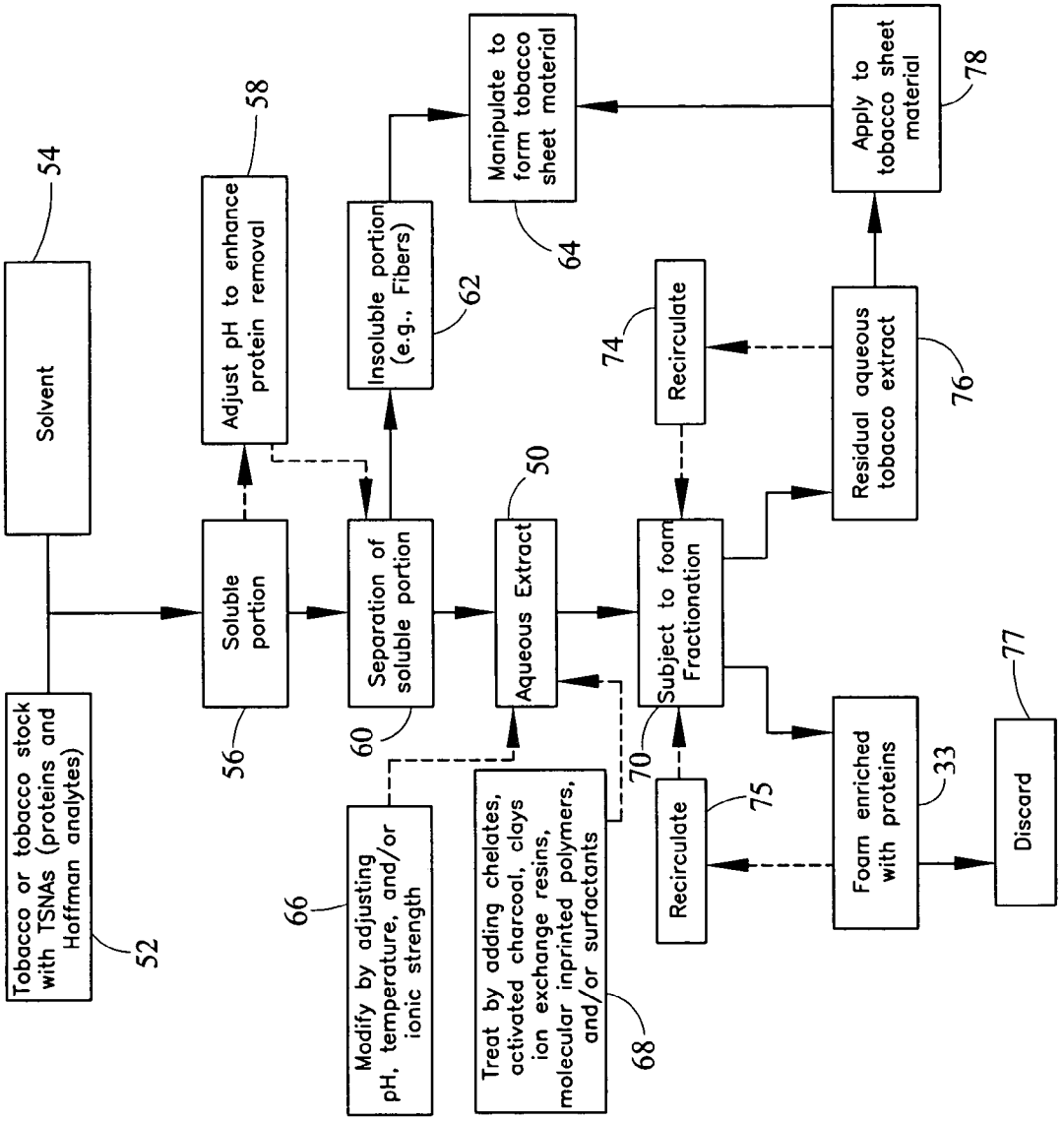
Tobacco or tobacco stock with TSNAs (proteins and Hoffman analytes)
52
Solvent
54
Soluble portion
56
Adjust pH to enhance protein removal
58
Separation of soluble portion
60
Insoluble portion (e.g., Fibers)
62
Manipulate to form tobacco sheet material
64
Aqueous Extract
50
Modify by adjusting pH, temperature, and/or ionic strength
66
Treat by adding chelates, activated charcoal, clays ion exchange resins, molecular inprinted polymers, and/or surfactants
68
Subject to foam Fractionation
70
Recirculate
75
Recirculate
74
Residual aqueous tobacco extract
76
Apply to tobacco sheet material
78
Foam enriched with proteins
33
Discard
77

FIG. 1

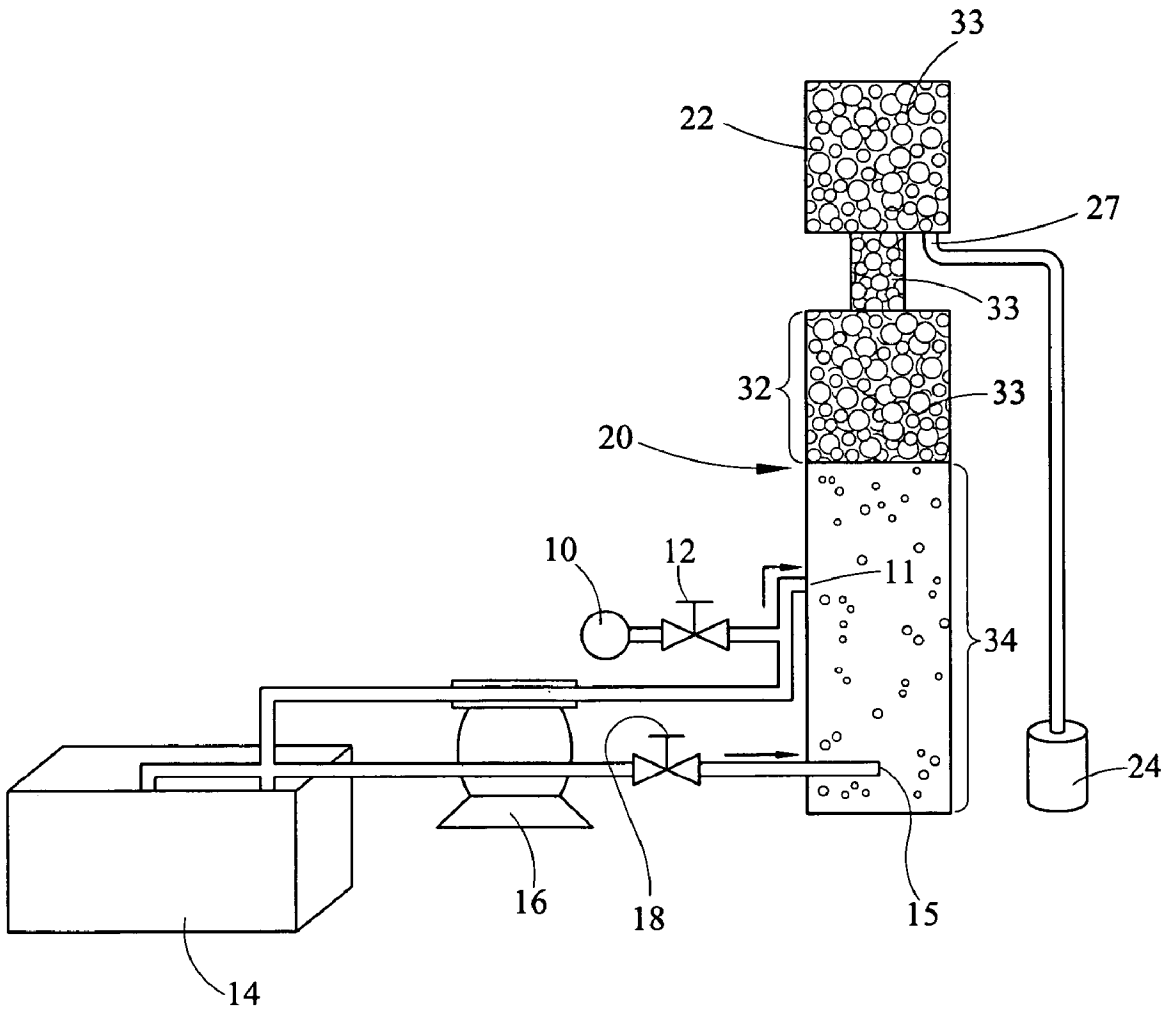

FIG. 2

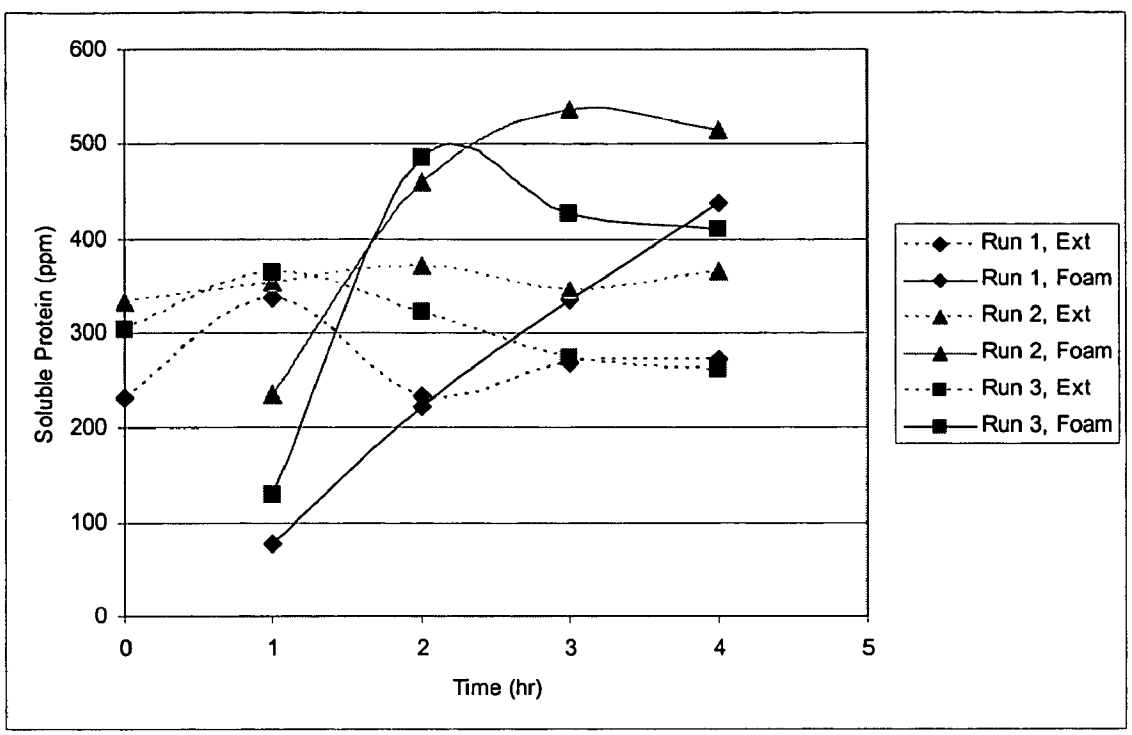
600
500
400
300
200
100
0
Soluble Protein (ppm)
0
1
2
3
4
5
Time (hr)
Run 1, Ext
Run 1, Foam
Run 2, Ext
Run 2, Foam
Run 3, Ext
Run 3, Foam

FIG. 3

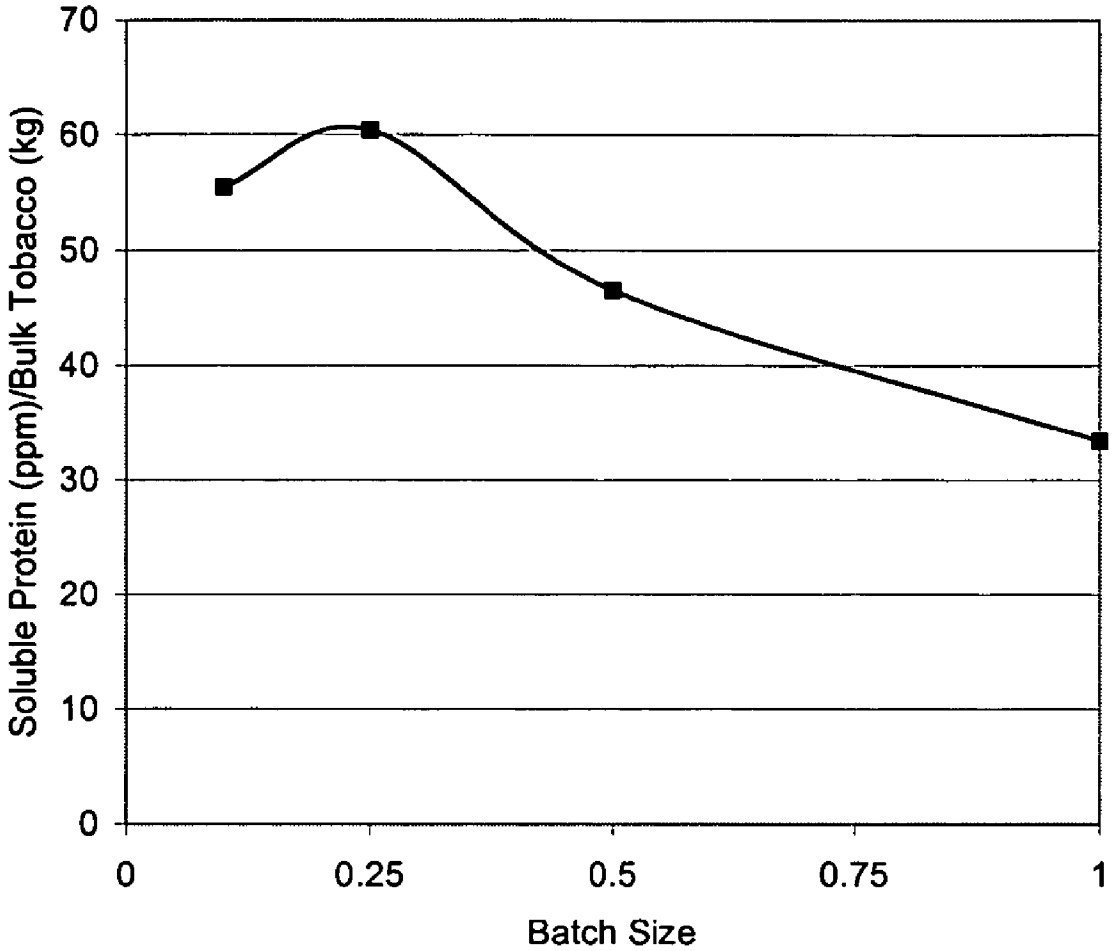
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Soluble Protein (ppm)/Bulk Tobacco (kg)
0
0.25
0.5
0.75
1
Batch Size

FIG. 4

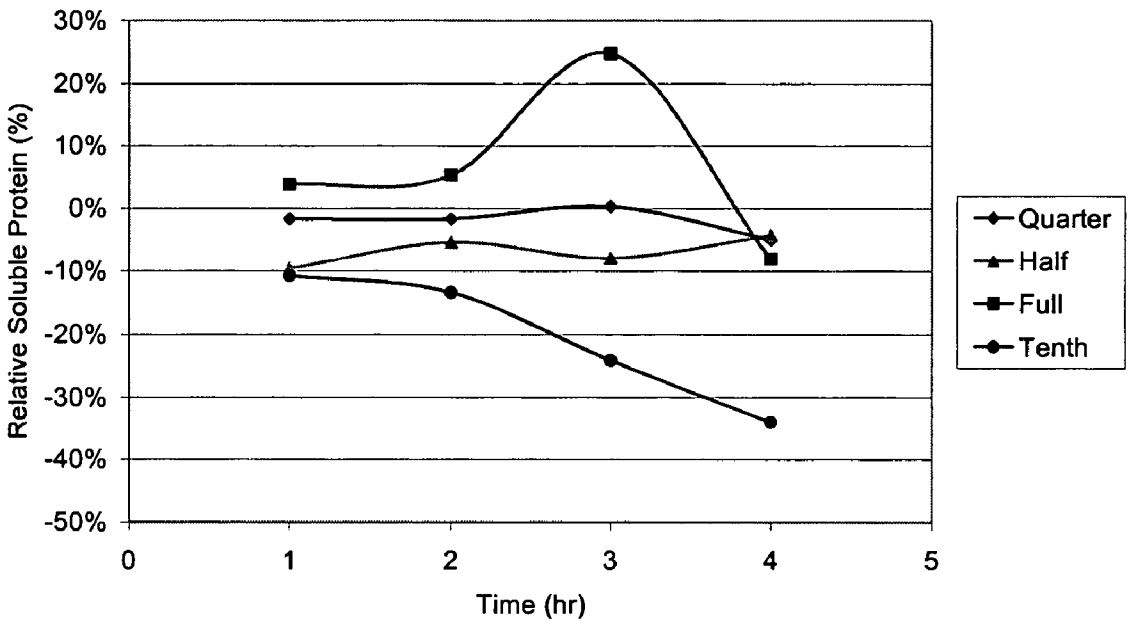
30%
20%
10%
0%
-10%
-20%
-30%
-40%
-50%
Relative Soluble Protein (%)
0
1
2
3
4
5
Time (hr)
Quarter
Half
Full
Tenth

FIG. 5

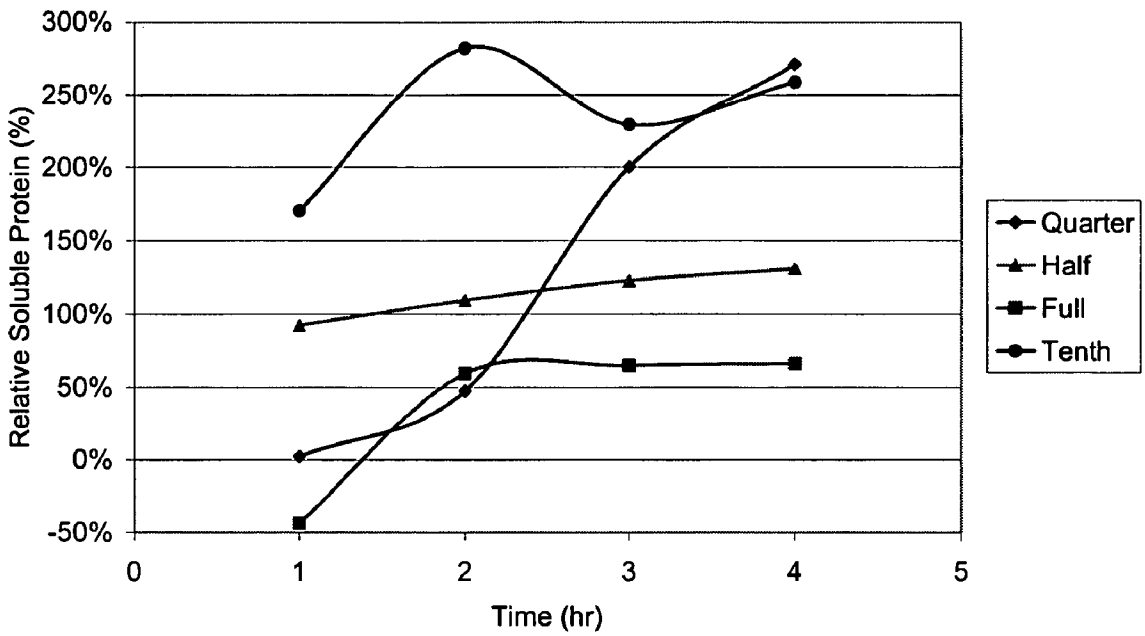
300%
250%
200%
150%
100%
50%
0%
-50%
Relative Soluble Protein (%)
0
1
2
3
4
5
Time (hr)
Quarter
Half
Full
Tenth

FIG. 6

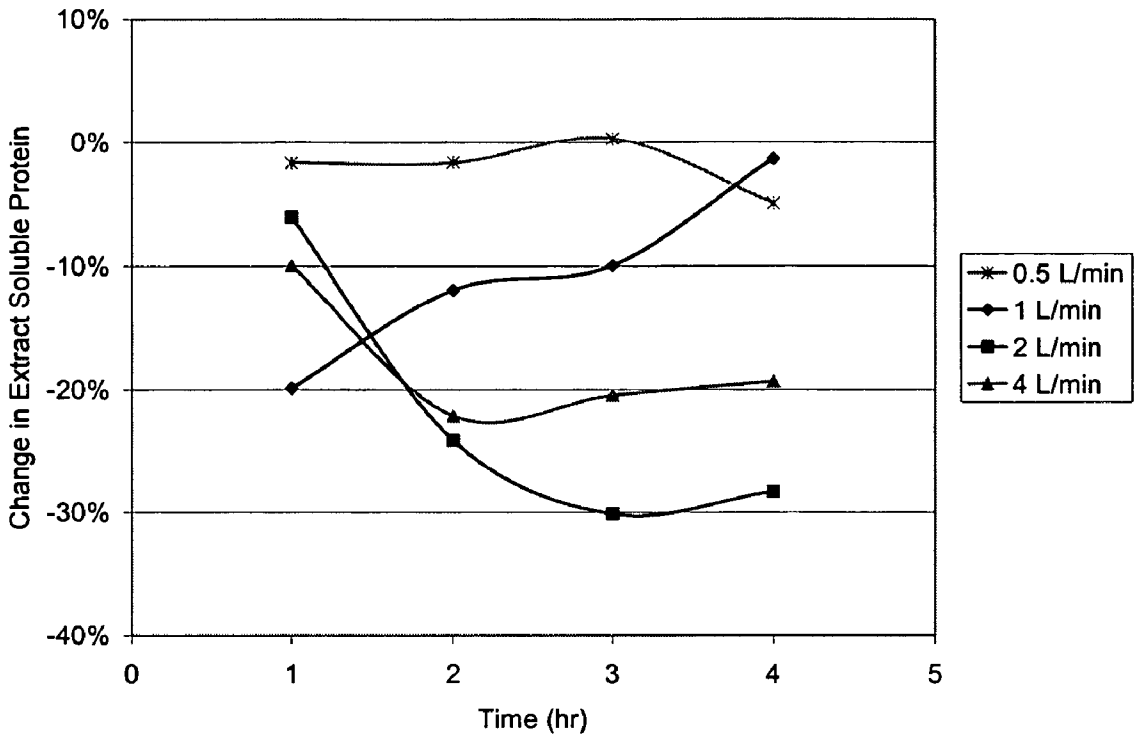
10%
0%
-10%
-20%
-30%
-40%
Change in Extract Soluble Protein
0
1
2
3
4
5
Time (hr)
0.5 L/min
1 L/min
2 L/min
4 L/min

FIG. 7

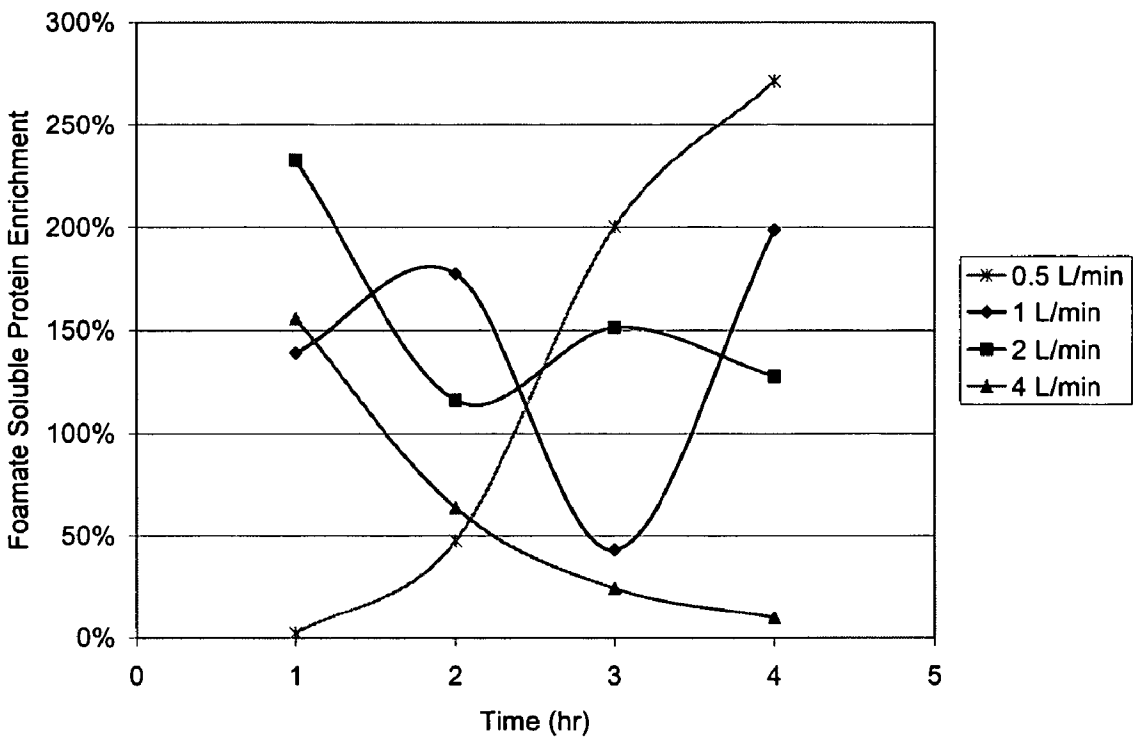
300%
250%
200%
150%
100%
50%
0%
Foamate Soluble Protein Enrichment
0
1
2
3
4
5
Time (hr)
0.5 L/min
1 L/min
2 L/min
4 L/min

FIG. 8

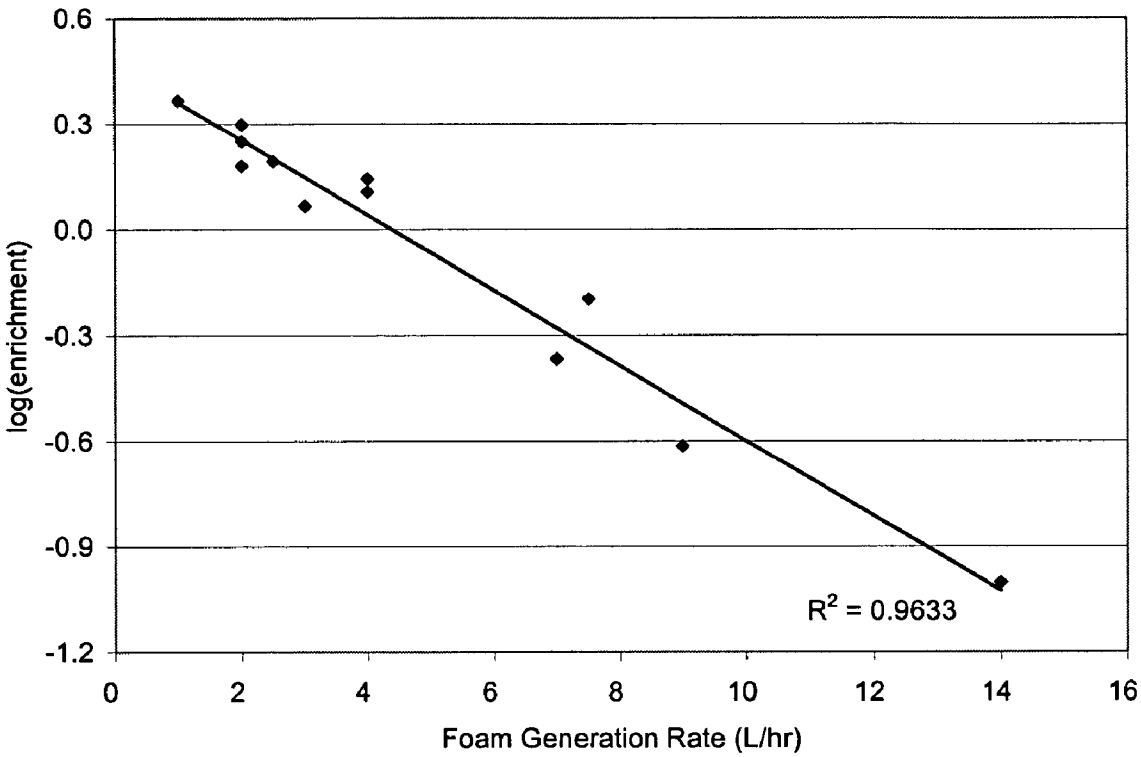
0.6
0.3
0.0
-0.3
-0.6
-0.9
-1.2
log(enrichment)
R^2 = 0.9633
0
2
4
6
8
10
12
14
16
Foam Generation Rate (L/hr)

FIG. 9

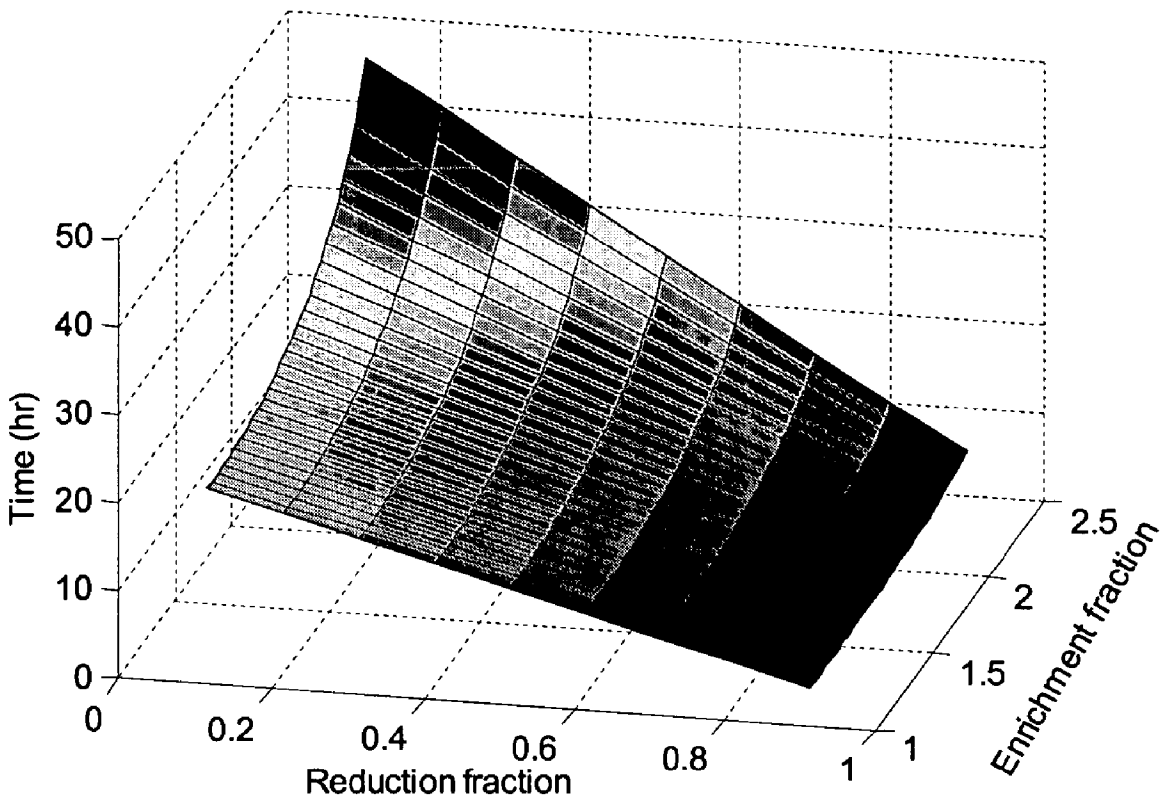

FIG. 10

PROCESS TO REMOVE PROTEIN AND OTHER BIOMOLECULES FROM TOBACCO EXTRACT OR SLURRY

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

STATEMENT REGARDING FEDERALLY SPONSORED RESEARCH OR DEVELOPMENT

Not applicable.

REFERENCE TO A "SEQUENTIAL LISTING," A TABLE, OR A COMPUTER PROGRAM LISTING APPENDIX SUBMITTED ON A COMPACT DISC

Not applicable.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a method of using foam fractionation to remove proteins and other undesirable molecules from aqueous tobacco extract. More particularly, the present invention relates to a method of treating and modifying aqueous tobacco extract to enhance the extent and efficiency of the removal of proteins and other undesirable molecules from aqueous tobacco extract.

2. Description of the Related Art

Adsorptive bubble separation techniques, also known as foam fractionation, for separating and removing soluble compounds, are known in the art. The techniques have been applied to the separation of proteins, ions, metals, surfactants, and other particles such as activated carbons, clays, and plastics. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 5,653,867, issued to Jody, et al., teaches a method for separating acrylonitrile butadiene styrene (ABS) plastics from high impact polystyrene (HIPS). The extent and efficiency of separation are enhanced by selectively modifying the effective density of the HIPS using a solution having the appropriate density, surface tension, and pH, such as acetic acid and water or hydrochloric acid, salt, surfactant, and water. Further, U.S. Pat. No. 5,629,424, issued to Armstrong, et al., teaches an adsorptive bubble separation process, whereby a solution of optically active isomers and a chiral collector having a chiral center and a structure capable of interacting with an enantiomer or a diastereomer is formed, and a gas is bubbled through the solution to form bubbles having the chiral collector and the enantiomer or diastereomer adsorbed thereto. The bubbles are collected and allowed to collapse to form a liquid fraction separate from the solution, thereby producing an enriched concentration of the enantiomer or diastereomer. Also, U.S. Pat. No. 3,969,336, issued to Criswell, teaches a method of separating and concentrating soluble proteins from a whey protein solution via foam fractionation, and U.S. Pat. No. 5,951,875 and PCT WO 98/28082, both issued to Kanel, et al., teach a system for dewatering (i.e., concentrating) ruptured algal cells via adsorptive bubble separation techniques.

Thus, a process is needed to remove soluble proteins from aqueous tobacco extract via foam fractionation, combined with the treatment and/or modification of the tobacco extract to enhance the extent and efficiency of chemical removal, and further combined with the application of the resultant treated tobacco extract to tobacco sheet material.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The instant invention provides a process for the removal of soluble proteins and other biomolecules, combined with modification of the extract conditions (e.g., pH, temperature, and/or ionic strength) or treatment of the extract (e.g., adjusting pH and/or adding chelates, activated charcoals, clays, ion exchange resins, molecular imprinted polymers, and/or surfactants) to enhance the extent and efficiency of protein and biomolecule separation from the tobacco extract, further combined with the application of the resultant modified and/or treated tobacco extract to tobacco sheet material. Reducing the level of proteins in paper reconstituted tobacco will reduce the total Hoffman analyte delivery when the treated reconstituted tobacco is incorporated into the blend.

Generally, foam fractionation is the process of separating and concentrating chemicals, colloids, and other species that exhibit air-liquid surface activity. The air-liquid surface activity of proteins is well-recognized. Certain classes of chemicals are removed or degraded in this aqueous tobacco extract by entraining a gas or gas mixture (e.g., air, nitrogen, ozone, oxygen, or ammonia) with a diffuser or aspirator and separating the resulting foam using a foam fractionation system. The foam may also be generated by agitation. Surface active components of the solution absorb to the surface (i.e., the gas-liquid interface) of the foam bubbles as the foam bubbles move through the liquid. The bubbles leave the surface of the liquid forming a foam column, and the surface active components are removed with the foamate.

Two important characteristics of the foam are the large gas-liquid interfacial area and the interstitial liquid. As the foam height increases, the interstitial liquid drains slowly through the foam's lamella, removing soluble non-adsorbing species and concentrating the surface active species. As the liquid drains, the lamella becomes thinner and gas diffusion increases between the bubbles. Eventually, the foam collapses yielding foamate enriched with the surface active species.

Two approaches enhance the extent and efficiency of chemical removal. First, the extraction conditions can be modified, such as by changing the pH, temperature, or ionic strength, to increase extraction of non-water soluble components of tobacco. Second, the extraction can be treated, such as with chelates, activated charcoal, clays, ion exchange resins, molecular imprinted polymers, and/or surfactants, to enhance the adsorption of a particular chemical or chemical class. The resultant treated tobacco extract would then be applied to tobacco sheet material in accordance with practice known in the art. The tobacco can be refined to the level where it can be slurried and processed in the foam fractionation system, wherein the treated slurry could be combined with other additives and be cast and dried into a tobacco sheet in accordance with normal practice.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The aspects and advantages of the present invention will be better understood when the detailed description of the preferred embodiment is taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. **1** is a flowchart of a method of the instant invention for reducing Hoffman analyte precursor content of tobacco via foam fractionation.

FIG. **2** is a schematic of the foam fractionation system.

FIG. **3** is a graph showing soluble protein concentration for extract (ext) and foamate (foam) samples collected during three trials of the foamate fractionator.

FIG. **4** is a graph showing soluble protein extract efficiency (ppm soluble protein/kg tobacco) at four batch sizes.

FIG. **5** is a graph showing the relative soluble protein levels for extract at four different batch sizes.

FIG. **6** is a graph showing the relative soluble protein levels for foamate at four different batch sizes.

FIG. **7** is a graph showing relative soluble protein levels for extract at four different air flow rates.

FIG. **8** is a graph showing relative soluble protein levels for foamate at four different air flow rates.

FIG. **9** is a graph showing foamate generation rate versus enrichment for air flow rate experiments.

FIG. **10** is a surface plot describing the amount of time needed to achieve a specific reduction in the extract at a given foamate enrichment.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

While this invention is susceptible of embodiments in many different forms, there are shown in the Figures and will herein be described in detail, preferred embodiments of the invention, with the understanding that the present disclosure is to be considered as an exemplification of the principles of the invention, and is not intended to limit the broad aspects of the invention to the embodiments illustrated.

The instant invention is a novel method of reducing Hoffman analyte precursors, specifically proteins and other undesirable molecules, which can be implemented in the paper reconstituted tobacco process. Referring first to FIG. **1**, utilizing a reconstituted tobacco paper making process, tobacco or tobacco stock **52** is soaked in a solvent **54**, such as water, distilled water, tap water, deionized water, water-miscible solvents, and combinations thereof, to form a soluble portion (i.e., tobacco slurry) **56**. The tobacco stock **52** maybe natural tobacco (e.g., tobacco stems, such as flue-cured stems, fines, tobacco byproducts), reconstituted tobacco, tobacco extracts, blends thereof, and other tobacco containing material. Optionally, to enhance protein removal, the pH **58** of the soluble portion **56** maybe adjusted in the range of from about 3 to about 10 using various inorganic acids or bases, such as HCl or KOH. The water (or aqueous) extract **50** is separated, for example via centrifugation **60**, from the insoluble portion **62**, which is comprised of mostly fibers. The insoluble portion **62** is manipulated to form a tobacco sheet material **64**. However, from about 0.5% to about 10.0% by weight of dissolved solids may still remain in the aqueous extract **50**.

Meanwhile, the conditions of the aqueous extract **50** maybe modified by favorably adjusting pH, temperature, and/or ionic strength **66**. For example, the pH may be adjusted within the range of from about 3 to about 10 to enhance protein removal depending on various factors. Furthermore, the aqueous extract **50** may be treated by the addition of chelates, activated charcoals, clays, ion exchange resins, molecular imprinted polymers, and/or surfactants **68**. Such modification and treatment serve to enhance the extent and efficiency of protein and biomolecule separation from a resultant treated aqueous tobacco extract **50**.

Now also referring to FIG. **2**, the resultant treated aqueous tobacco extract **50** in a tank **14** is subsequently processed and concentrated in the foam fractionation system **70**, by removal of proteins and other undesirable molecules, such as clay, activated charcoal, MIPS, etc. The extract concentration (i.e., batch size) varies, and a more comprehensive description of preferable batch size is described in the Examples below. The aqueous tobacco extract **50** from the tank **14** enters a foam fractionator **20** at an extract entrance **15**, the amount being regulated by a valve **18**. The foam fractionator **20** may be one of many different embodiments. A gas supply **10** is provided by a pump **16** and an air valve **12** to regulate the amount of air flowing through the entrance **11** and into the foam fractionator **20**. The gas can be air, nitrogen, ozone, oxygen, ammonia, or mixtures thereof. Foam may also be generated by injecting air or gas by a Venturi tube or via agitation. The air velocity and bubble size (related to volumetric air flow) can vary, and a more comprehensive description of preferable volumetric air flow rate is described in the Examples below.

The gas **10** bubbles through the aqueous tobacco extract **50**. Surface active components of the aqueous tobacco extract **50**, such as proteins and other undesirable biomolecules, adsorb to the gas-liquid interface of the bubbles as the bubbles move through the aqueous tobacco extract in the foam fractionator **20**. The bubbles leave the surface of the aqueous tobacco extract liquid, forming a column of foam **33** on top of the aqueous tobacco extract. Extract pool height **34** and the foam height **32** are variables related to foam generation rates, and are described in more detail in the Examples. As the foam **33** height increases, the foam **33** enters a foam collector **22**, in which the interstitial liquid drains slowly through the foam's lamella, removing soluble non-adsorbing species and concentrating the surface active species. As the liquid drains, the lamella becomes thinner and gas diffusion increases between the bubbles. The foam **33** eventually collapses, yielding a foamate enriched with the surface active species (i.e., proteins and other undesirable biomolecules.) The foamate flows through a foamate exit **27** into a foamate collector **24**, to perhaps be discarded **77**, or further concentrated by recirculation **75** through foam fractionation **70**. This further recirculation may be either through the same foam fractionator or a series of foam fractionators in tandem.

The residual aqueous tobacco extract **76**, having reduced protein content, may then be applied to tobacco sheet material **78**, or recirculated **74** through foam fractionation **74**. Simultaneously with recirculation **74**, the residual aqueous tobacco extract **76** may be treated with chelates, activated charcoals, clays, ion exchange resins, molecular imprinted polymers, surfactants, and combinations thereof. Note that recirculation of the foamate and/or the residual aqueous tobacco extract may include recirculation in either the same foam fractionator or, preferably, a series or plurality of foam fractionators in tandem, which can each have their own unique settings and configurations (e.g., pH adjustments) to optimize protein removal at each subsequent foam fractionator.

A more comprehensive understanding of the invention can be obtained by considering the following Examples. However, it should be understood that the Examples are not intended to be unduly limitative of the invention.

EXAMPLE 1

A foam fractionator **20** (i.e., protein skimmer) used for this Example, from Emperor Aquatics, Inc. (Pottstown, Pa.) and similar to the example shown in FIG. **2**, consisted of a foam collector on top of the main body, two injector valves, a counter flow by-pass, an inlet, and an outlet. Flow through

the system was created by an external pump and controlled by a gate valve at the outlet. The amount of air injected, and thus the amount and quality of the foam generated, was controlled by a valve on the air inlet of the large injector, the liquid flow valve to the small injector, and the counter flow by-pass. The flow rate of air into the injector was set to 0.5 L/min.

Tobacco extract was prepared by extracting 10.4 kg of a 50/50 mix of flue-cured scrap tobacco (FS) and burley scrap tobacco (BS) in 113 L of water at 71° C. for 30 minutes. A typical full batch size would be about 10 kg of tobacco to about 100 L (i.e., about 100 kg) of water, having a tobacco to solvent ratio from about 1:100 to about 1:10. Tobacco may be soaked at optional temperatures ranging from about 63° C. to about 100° C., for at least about 30 minutes. The liquid was separated from the solid tobacco material with a basket centrifuge. The extract was recirculated through the foam fractionater and samples of the extract and foamate (i.e., collapsed foam) were collected every hour. The samples were analyzed for soluble proteins. The process was repeated three times.

Surface active components (e.g., soluble proteins) of the solution adsorb to the surface of the bubbles and are removed with the foam. The surface activity is determined by the degree of hydrophobicity of the molecule, colloid, complex, etc. Proteins prefer to be at the air/water surface of the bubbles and will be removed with the bubbles. Here, the proteins have hydrophobic side chains. These side chains are the driving force for a protein's conformation and adsorption to the bubble surface and removal by foam fractionation. Highly soluble compounds, like ions, have low surface activity unless complexed with a "collector" which facilitates removal. Most collector research has been applied to metals and use chelates or colloids to remove the metal ions by foam fractionation. Collectors for tobacco extract may also include activated charcoal, clays, ion exchange beads, molecular sieves, and molecular imprint polymers (which can be specific to a class of compounds, like tobacco specific nitrosamines). Colloids can be self-formed from biopolymers, like proteins and lignins, by reducing pH and/or temperature after caustic extraction.

FIG. **3** shows the soluble protein concentrations in the extract and foamate during the four hour test for each run. After four hours (T4), the foamate was enriched 35 to 89%. The variability in these results is due to how the foam is collected. Foam is collected at the top of each unit. Collapsed foam drains out the port into a graduated cylinder. Because the foam does not consistently collapse and drain, and often coats the housing and drain tubing, quantitative assessment of the foamate is less than optimal. The extract did not show a dramatic change in soluble protein concentration due to the relative amounts of extract and foamate. During the four hours, less than a liter of foamate was collected versus over 100 L of extract. In all three runs, the soluble protein level for the sample collected at time one hour (T1) is greater than at time zero. Using T1 as the starting level, the relative concentrations at T4 range from 72% to 104%. The results demonstrate soluble protein removal from the tobacco extract by the foam fractionator.

Foam fractionation successfully removed soluble proteins from aqueous tobacco extract. In the discard fraction, enrichment of approximately two-fold was achieved. Reductions of almost 30% were measured in the processed extract, demonstrating the use of foam fractionation as a physical means of removing proteins from tobacco extract.

EXAMPLE 2

Next, optimization of processing parameters to achieve a 50% reduction in soluble proteins was determined by investigating tobacco batch size and air flow rate. The optimum batch size was determined to be a 25% ratio of tobacco to water. The greatest reduction in soluble protein in the extract was measured at an air flow rate of 5.0 L/min. Foam generation rate, which is related to air flow rate, is also a critical factor. Using a combination of theoretical derivations and empirical results, the time to achieve a desired protein reduction in the extract for a given enrichment was modeled. This experiment tested the model by controlling the foam generation rate for a fixed batch size and air flow rate.

The foam fractionator as previously described was used. For the batch size studying, extracting 10.4 kg of a 50/50 mix of FS and BS is defined as a full batch. Additional sizes of 10% (tenth), 25% (quarter), and 50% (half) of full batch sizes were processed. All batches were extracted in 113.5 L of water at 71° C. for 30 minutes. The liquid was separated from the solid tobacco material with a basket centrifuge. The extract was recirculated through the foam fractionator and samples of the extract and foamate (i.e., collapsed foam) were collected every hour.

Referring again to FIG. **2**, the optimization parameters are the extract concentration (related to batch size), air velocity and bubble size (related to volumetric air flow), and the extract pool **34** and foam heights **32** (related to foam generation rates). FIG. **4** shows the soluble protein extraction efficiency for the four batch sizes tested. The smaller batch sizes were more efficient at extracting the soluble proteins. FIG. **5** and FIG. **6** show the soluble protein concentrations in the extract and foamate during the four hour test for each batch size tested. After four hours, the amount of soluble protein in the extract was reduced from 4% to 34%. The foamate was enriched from 66% to 271%. With respect to extraction efficiency and foamate enrichment, the one-quarter and one-tenth batch sizes are comparable. One-quarter batch size is preferred as a compromise of maximizing concentration without sacrificing performance.

Referring now to FIG. **7** and FIG. **8**, there is shown the results from the air flow experiments for relative soluble protein levels in the extract and foamate, respectively. Similar to the batch size experiments, the inconsistency in the shape of the curves is due to not controlling all the variables, specifically in the foamate generation rate. FIG. **9** shows the trend associated with foamate generation rate. As expected, the slower the generation rate, the greater the enrichment. The slower rates allow more time for the liquid held up in the space between the bubbles to drain, thus reducing the dilution of the protein adsorbed onto the bubble surface. Based on the reduction of soluble protein in the extract, the air flow rate of 2.0 L/min was selected.

A combined theoretical model was developed from the results. Starting from mass balance equations, the foamate volume, V_f, relationship to soluble protein reduction in the extract, r, foamate enrichment, e_t, and initial extract volume, V_0, is

$$V_f = \frac{V_0(1-r)}{e_t}.$$

Using the relationship shown in FIG. **9**, the amount of time needed to generate the foamate volume at a given enrichment can be calculated. The model defines a response surface, as shown in FIG. **10**, for the amount of time needed to achieve a specified soluble protein reduction in the extract at a given foamate enrichment and an initial extract volume of 100 L.

The foregoing detailed description is given primarily for clearness of understanding and no unnecessary limitations are to be understood therefrom, for modifications will become obvious to those skilled in the art upon reading this disclosure, and may be made without departing from the spirit of the invention and scope of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A process for removing Hoffman analyte precursors from tobacco, comprising the steps of:

soaking tobacco in a solvent to form a soluble portion;

separating said soluble portion into an aqueous tobacco extract and an insoluble fibrous portion;

subjecting said aqueous tobacco extract to a foam fractionation system;

bubbling a gas though said aqueous tobacco extract in said foam fractionation system to form bubbles, wherein said Hoffman analyte precursors preferentially adsorb to a gas-liquid interface of said bubbles as said bubbles move though said aqueous tobacco extract, and wherein said bubbles accumulate to form a column of foam on top of said aqueous tobacco extract, said foam having said Hoffman analyte precursors preferentially adsorbed thereto; and

moving said foam into a foam collector, wherein said foam collapses yielding a foamate enriched with said Hoffman analyte precursors.

2. The process of claim **1**, wherein said solvent is selected from the group consisting of water, distilled water, tap water, deionized water, water-miscible solvents, and combinations thereof.

3. The process of claim **1**, wherein said tobacco is comprised of tobacco particles selected from the group consisting of natural tobacco stems, flue cured scrap tobacco and stems, burley cured scrap tobacco, fines, tobacco byproducts, reconstituted tobacco, tobacco extracts, and combinations and blends thereof.

4. The process of claim **1**, wherein said tobacco is soaked in said solvent at a temperature of from about 63° C. to about 100° C. for at least about 30 minutes.

5. The process of claim **1**, wherein said tobacco and said solvent are in a ratio of from about 1:100 to about 1:10.

6. The process of claim **1**, wherein said aqueous tobacco extract has dissolved solids from about 0.5% to about 10.0% by weight.

7. The process of claim **1**, further comprising adjusting the pH of said soluble portion within the range of from about 3 to about 10 prior to separating said soluble portion.

8. The process of claim **1**, further comprising adjusting the pH of said aqueous tobacco extract within the range of from about 3 to about 10 prior to subjecting said aqueous tobacco extract to said foam fractionation system.

9. The process of claim **1**, further comprising treating said aqueous tobacco extract with chelates, activated charcoals, clays, ion exchange resins, molecular imprinted polymers, surfactants, and combinations thereof, prior to subjecting said aqueous tobacco extract to said foam fractionation system.

10. The process of claim **1**, wherein said gas is selected from the group consisting of air, nitrogen, ozone, oxygen, ammonia, and combinations thereof.

11. The process of claim **1**, wherein said gas is injected into said foam fractionation system at a flow rate of from about 0.5 liters per minute to about 5.0 liters per minute.

12. The process of claim **1**, further comprising recirculation of said foamate.

13. The process of claim **12**, wherein said recirculation occurs through a series of foam fractionators, each of said foam fractionators uniquely configured for protein removal optimization.

14. The process of claim **1**, further comprising recirculation of said aqueous tobacco extract after it has been subjected to said foam fractionation system.

15. The process of claim **14**, wherein said aqueous tobacco extract, after being separated from said soluble portion, is treated with chelates, activated charcoals, clays, ion exchange resins, molecular imprinted polymers, surfactants, and combinations thereof, during said recirculation.

16. The process of claim **14**, wherein said recirculation occurs through a series of foam fractionators, each of said foam fractionators uniquely configured for protein removal optimization.

17. The process of claim **1**, wherein after separation from said aqueous tobacco extract said insoluble fibrous portion is manipulated to form a tobacco sheet material.

18. The process of claim **17**, wherein said aqueous tobacco extract is applied to said tobacco sheet material after subjecting said aqueous tobacco extract to said foam fractionation system.

19. A process of separating proteins from tobacco containing proteins employing foam fractionation, comprising the steps of:

soaking tobacco in an aqueous solvent to form a tobacco slurry;

extracting said tobacco slurry to form an aqueous tobacco extract and an insoluble fibrous portion;

introducing said aqueous tobacco extract into a foam fractionator;

introducing gas bubbles into said foam fractionator to bubble though said aqueous tobacco extract, wherein said proteins preferentially adsorb to a gas-liquid interface of said bubbles, and wherein said bubbles accumulate on top of said aqueous tobacco extract to form a foam;

allowing said foam to collapse and yield a foamate enriched with said proteins; and

removing said foam containing said proteins from said foam fractionator.

20. The process of claim **19**, wherein said solvent is selected from the groups consisting of water, distilled water, tap water, deionized water, water-miscible solvents, and combinations thereof.

21. The process of claim **19**, wherein said tobacco is comprised of tobacco particles selected from the group consisting of natural tobacco stems, flue cured scrap tobacco and stems, burley cured scrap tobacco, fines, tobacco byproducts, reconstituted tobacco, tobacco extracts, other tobacco containing material, and combinations and blends thereof.

22. The process of claim **19**, wherein said tobacco is soaked in said solvent at a temperature of from about 63° C. to about 100° C. for at least about 30 minutes.

23. The process of claim **19**, wherein said tobacco and said solvent are in a ratio of from about 1:100 to about 1:10.

24. The process of claim **19**, wherein said aqueous tobacco extract has dissolved solids from about 0.5% to about 10.0% by weight.

25. The process of claim 19, further comprising adjusting the pH of said tobacco slurry within the range of from about 3 to about 10 prior to separating said tobacco slurry.

26. The process of claim 19, further comprising adjusting the pH of said aqueous tobacco extract within the range of from about 3 to about 10 prior to introducing said aqueous tobacco extract into said foam fractionator.

27. The process of claim 19, further comprising treating said aqueous tobacco extract with chelates, activated charcoals, clays, ion exchange resins, molecular imprinted polymers, surfactants, and combinations thereof, prior to introducing said aqueous tobacco extract into said foam fractionator.

28. The process of claim 19, wherein said gas bubbles are formed by injecting a gas into said foam fractionator, said gas selected from the groups consisting of air, nitrogen, ozone, oxygen, ammonia, and combinations thereof.

29. The process of claim 28, wherein said gas is injected at a flow rate of from about 0.5 liters per minute to about 5.0 liters per minute.

30. The process of claim 19, further comprising recirculation of said foamate.

31. The process of claim 30, wherein said recirculation occurs through a plurality of foam fractionators, each of said foam fractionators uniquely configured for protein removal optimization.

32. The process of claim 19, further comprising recirculation of said aqueous tobacco extract after it has been introduced into said foam fractionator.

33. The process of claim 32, wherein said aqueous tobacco extract is treated with chelates, activated charcoals, clays, ion exchange resins, molecular imprinted polymers, surfactants, and combinations thereof, during said recirculation.

34. The process of claim 32, wherein said recirculation occurs through a plurality of foam fractionators, each of said foam fractionators uniquely configured for protein removal optimization.

35. The process of claim 19, wherein after extraction of said tobacco slurry said insoluble fibrous portion forms a tobacco sheet material.

36. The process of claim 35, wherein said aqueous tobacco extract is applied to said tobacco sheet material after subjecting said aqueous tobacco extract to said foam fractionator.

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