

13 Review of Ajitsuke Kazunoko Product and Process

Ajitsuke kazunoko is made from both salted and frozen herring roe. Japan imports significantly more frozen herring roe from Atlantic Canada for ajitsuke kazunoko production than from any other country.

The most popular flavours of ajitsuke kazunoko include "shoyu" or soy sauce (light and dark) and "mentai fumi" or hot chili pepper. Other flavours include Japanese mayonnaise, "mirin" or (sweet sake), skipjack and chinese vegetables.

The product is generally found in 80 g, 300 g, 500 g and 2 kg (institutional size) packages. The price of the flavoured roe to the consumer is approximately half that of the more traditional shio kazunoko at ¥500-¥700 per 100 g (approximately \$40.00 to \$55.00 per kg). (ASI Intech, 1988.) Because of its relatively low price, ajitsuke kazunoko is rapidly becoming a staple seafood within many areas of Japan.

Gift pack ajitsuke kazunoko is made primarily from the largest, full-shaped roe sections (Atlantic Canadian Grade 2). This product is attractively packaged, as per Japanese custom, making it suitable for gift-giving during the New Year's season. The sales for gift pack ajitsuke kazunoko are in fact limited to the festive season. Ajitsuke kazunoko products can be frozen prior to distribution without affecting textural qualities.

Year-round distribution of ajitsuke kazunoko is targeted for consumption on a regular basis and utilizes smaller and broken pieces of Atlantic Canadian roe. However, during high-demand periods, larger pieces of roe may be broken to meet this demand.

Japanese processors utilize individual methods of processing ajitsuke kazunoko. The following describes the standard processing stages from a frozen block of roe:

- Defrost in 5 per cent salt (w/v) for 12 hours.
- Wash in 5 per cent, 7 per cent then 10 per cent salt (w/v) for 12 hours each.
- Cure in 20 per cent salt solution (w/v) for two days.
- Grade according to size, shape and texture.
- Desalt in freshwater, changing water four times over a 12- to 20-hour period.
- Add flavour by soaking in seasoning solution overnight.
- Package.

In addition, some processors bleach the washed and cured roe by using a hydrogen peroxide soak which is subsequently removed from the roe by enzymes.

When utilizing salted roe, the roe is desalted before adding the various flavours, negating the need for the preliminary processing stages.

14 Further Processing of Atlantic Canadian Roe

Problems with exceeding production capacity could be alleviated by freezing whole fish and processing into a salted roe product at a later date. Further processing of Atlantic Canadian roe promotes retention of the desirable shape of the body cavity and should improve textural qualities of the roe. This method is being utilized for Pacific and Dutch herring roe.

The majority of Japanese trade companies and processors indicated that salting Atlantic Canadian roe would not be advisable because of the increased cost to Atlantic Canadian processors, possible loss of flavours due to salting and larger Japanese import duty imposed on salted (12 per cent duty) rather than frozen (5 per cent duty) goods. A few of the processing companies did express interest in a value-added product being produced by Canada but the deciding factor will be price.

Prior to embarking upon production of a salted roe product, Canadian processors would benefit from establishing a direct link with a Japanese processing company interested in purchasing the product. However, the complex organization of the Japanese industry presents a barrier to the introduction of semi-processed products. Inability to gain direct access to the Japanese processor potentially interested in the semi-processed product, has continually frustrated marketing attempts thus far.