

Paul Young

Tir Na n'Og



In Irish mythology Tir Na n'Og (pronounced Cheer-Nah-Og) is the land of the young. It's a realm where beauty, health, abundance and joy abound.

The name is quite well-suited to Paul Young's farm near Marquette, Iowa. Sitting on the porch of his 1858 farmhouse, Paul can see colorful rows of vegetables, an historic red barn of post and beam construction and a lush field with grazing Scottish Highland Cows. His Border Collie Sile joins him, comfortably lounging in the summer breeze. (The dog is, Paul says, "next to useless, but a good companion.") All in all, it's a picturesque scene and one that rural Iowans relate to and celebrate most heartily. It smells like rich earth, the evening sun lights up the blue broccoli leaves and time seems to slow down just enough.

When Paul bought the farm 10 years ago it wasn't his intention to grow vegetables for sale. But things evolved and the gardening, something Paul has always liked, suited his country rhythm well. He bought a tractor and a tiller and dove into an acre and a half plot. He isn't sick of all the weeding yet and he loves trying out new varieties and new methods. "I don't know what's wrong with me," he says, "but I just can't quit." Today, Paul grows around three acres of produce each year.



Garlic is of particular interest to him. Over a five-year period he has cultivated 32 different, gourmet garlic varieties in order to find the ones best suited to his location and the ones most popular with market shoppers. Paul says most people think garlic is garlic, but when he can get them to branch out and try a new variety they realize that hotness, garlic intensity and depth of flavor vary widely. Through the season, he also grows asparagus, radishes, blueberries, broccoli, leeks, cabbage, peppers, eggplant, kale and carrots. He grows green and yellow cauliflower (for the Packer fans) and purple and yellow cauliflower (for the Viking fans) and okra as homage to a time spent living in Texas.

Paul farms as sustainably as possible. He avoids synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, even on the large crops that he harvests for Luther College each year (about 20,000 pounds of onions, potatoes, broccoli, and carrots). He composts for most of his

nutrient needs, rotates his crops to keep down bugs and disease, and plants cover crops to enhance the soil profile. Even though he isn't certified organic, he follows the guidelines. Paul doesn't want pesticide residue on his produce and the cost for following organic practices actually comes in lower.

You can find Paul Young and the produce from Tir Na n'Og at the Farmers Markets in McGregor Friday afternoons.

"I strongly believe in localizing our food supply and encourage people to eat seasonally using local produce to can, freeze and preserve."

