

cool jobs

David Hughes

Age: 39

Job title: Operations manager at the Union Square Greenmarket

Time on the job: 8 years

Hours: 14 hours on Saturdays, 10 hours each on Mondays and Fridays, and 12-14 hours on Wednesdays, plus office time on Thursdays



JAMES MONROE ADAMS IV

produce king of

Union Square

Managing the city's busiest Greenmarket

As the weather gets warmer, business booms at local Greenmarkets. The city's flagship location — the Union Square Greenmarket — also happens to be set in one of the city's most eclectic parks. David Hughes runs the market, sometimes rising before 4 a.m. to make it from his New Jersey home to Union Square by 5. And he may not get to leave until 7:30 at night.

In between managing dozens of farmers, conversing with neighborhood characters and offering advice to patrons, he often spots celebrity shoppers at the high-profile market.

Gina Salamone

How does the Union Square Greenmarket compare with others in the city?

It is the biggest market. It's four days a week and we've got over 140 producers over the course of the week. Saturday is our busiest day, with about 80 producers here. Add all that up, it's about 16,000 acres of cultivated farmland that are

directly linked to this. And we're in a magical park in Manhattan. Just about everything happens in this park. There's a tremendous energy in here.

Do the farmers all get along or is there fierce competition?

It's healthy competition. It all goes to serve the customer. You put 70 people in tight quarters, all sorts of things happen. My job is really just to negotiate all of that, make sure that each farmer comes in and gets the space that's assigned to them. The space is always changing. The person who's in this spot must be mindful that next week Mr. Smith is going to have extra space and you might have to move over a little bit.

What's the benefit of shopping at a Greenmarket?

There are varieties of food here that you don't see at supermarkets. There's actually a woman here who cultivates fresh ginger, a local ginger, which is very hard to grow. And it's nothing like you see in the store. And you have to men-

tion the characters. The park is full of them. That's what I love about this job.

One woman just asked you if you wanted to buy a picture.

Natalie has been coming here for years and years and she's a painter and she sells her pictures here. Every week she asks me what my name is.

How often do celebrities come by?

All the time. Last week, I saw John Turturro in here. Susan Sarandon, last Saturday I saw her. Howard Stern comes by. There's always someone. I've seen PJ Harvey here a few times.

What are their favorites?

Howard always gets fish here. Susan, I see her buying plants here quite often.

Besides celebrities and passersby, who are your other customers?

There are chefs who shop this market. There are caterers, florists, event planners. We have stores who buy from here.

What are some of your other duties when you're not managing farmers?

Advocator. We give school tours to children, so we're educating them about food and local food and why it's important we eat that. And there's always a surprise film shoot or other event that will get booked in and around here. A lot of food television personalities come in. Martha Stewart, the Food Network, they all do shoots in here.

What fruits and vegetables are in season now?

Right now is rhubarb, a very seasonal thing. Fiddlehead ferns just came in, asparagus. There are fresh strawberries as well, Swiss chard, lots of field greens.

How can customers make the most of their visit?

Come talk to us at the manager's station. We're here to help you at the two green tents. Look at our literature, take a recipe from the stand. And you can have a direct conversation with the farmers about what they're growing, what's good today, what's coming in next week.