

Amado and Gualupe, Potters, Oaxaca, Mexico

The peaceful semi-rural town of Santa Maria Atzompa, at the outskirts of Oaxaca, Mexico, is home to several clay artisans. Amado and Guadalupe's home has a large front yard with chicken and goats running around. They are 9 people at home, 3 of them are their little granddaughters. Guadalupe has been a green-pottery artisan since she was a little girl. Amado, who is now 60, used to work at a local crafts store, where he was in charge of packaging. He lost his job recently and now helps his wife. They have two sons, Juan and Roberto. Juan works as a taxi driver and Roberto works in a crafts store. Neither has social insurance. As Guadalupe explains, "Juan recently underwent surgery and did not work while recovering from the operation. He had been working for 20 years for the same employer with no social security (although his pay was slightly more than the minimum wage), but there were weeks in which he didn't get paid. He has a little baby, so he needs insurance. He and his family enrolled with *Seguro Popular* [insurance scheme for low-income people operated and funded by the Government of Mexico]. This is also a problem because there's a shortage of medicines, the service is bad, you don't get attention, and when you get it, you still have to go and buy the medication."

Amado and Guadalupe work from home as potters, and sell what they produce at a local cooperative crafts store. They have built an oven in their yard for firing the pottery, but Amado explains he will soon have to build another one. "Right now my wife is learning how to work with glaze as it doesn't contain lead. We have to pay for the courses too, but we must do it because the government will ban the sale of green pottery with lead... people use these products to eat from. I will have to build a special oven for Guadalupe so we can bake pottery with glaze, you can't use the same oven that has been used to bake with lead. As you know, pottery involves much work. We have to wake up early to press and mix the clay, make the figures, bake them (not every day); and with so much work there are times that we don't eat until seven at night. This work is very laborious and the days that we bake, we spend the entire day baking. We have felt the impact of the crisis in the last 6 months. We have not sold enough products. There is no comparison to past years. This year, sales are very low, tourism dropped tremendously. We continue to sell for the same prices. What's more expensive for us is the cost of food: beans, oil, rice, vegetables, etc. In order to sell more, my wife is making different products, such as pots with designs, plates, cups, decorations for the walls, etc. "