

# How To Make LPs Greener

Vinyl records are famously enjoying a renaissance, despite their less-publicized impact on the environment. Now, a handful of record-related startups are going green.

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We've all heard the good news about vinyl, a steady drumbeat of recovery over the past two decades. After **bottoming** out at 857,000 units in 2005, LP sales have increased every year since, **surging** another 14% to 49.6 million units last year.

The bad news hasn't made quite as many headlines, but it's very clear: vinyl records are pretty terrible for the planet. In fact, vinyl *anything* is pretty terrible for the planet. That's because it's made from polyvinyl chloride, better known as PVC, which Greenpeace **calls** "the single most environmentally damaging type of plastic" in the world.

PVC is used in everything from records to pipes to kids' toys because it's versatile and cheap. But producing—and, eventually, disposing of—the material comes with many **negatives**. On top of that, the record pressing process itself entails environmental consequences from the use of boiler chemicals and the burning of fossil fuels.

Fortunately, there are a handful of companies throughout the LP supply chain working to make records greener. And the technology is incredibly nifty. So, in honor of Earth Day—and Record Store Day, which took place this past weekend—let's take

a look at some of the advancements.

Just today, Dave Newell—also known as Enoch of the Florida rap group CYNE—teamed up with his wife, Betsy Bemis, to open Audiodrome Record Pressing. Located in Gainesville, it's the first solar-powered record plant in the U.S.

In addition to running on renewable energy, the facility uses steamless presses with closed-loop chiller systems to conserve water. Audiodrome can plug recycled PVC from rejected records into its system to make new LPs. Packaging options include compostable cornstarch, biodegradable paper, and sugarcane shrink wrap.

“There is something about vinyl records that people find meaningful,” said Bemis in an announcement. “They allow us to physically participate in the experience and build a tangible connection between the artist and the listener in a way that no other format does. It can be a beautiful thing. But the environmental cost of communion doesn't have to be so high.”

Across the industry, a number of high-profile albums are now available on recycled vinyl, from Greta Thunberg's documentary soundtrack to Coldplay's *Music of the Spheres*. But there's another option: biovinyl, a plant-based substitute for the PVC-based material. It can be fed into machines like those at Audiodrome, or at any traditional record pressing plant.

Evolution Music's **Evovinyl** is a particularly promising option. Made from sustainable “Bon Sucro” certified sugarcane, these records work just like traditional LPs and can be recycled, too. They also come with energy savings of around 15%, according to the company, due to lower temperature thresholds for production.

Larry Jaffee, author of the book *Record Store Day: The Most Improbable Comeback of the 21st Century*, is working with Scandinavian partners to set up a geothermal-powered pressing plant in Iceland. The company, known as Thermal Beets, would work with Evolution Music to make LPs out of sugar beets and produce them with minimal environmental impact near Reykjavik.

The possibilities for greening extend even deeper into the musical ecosystem. For example, **Rheom Materials** (a startup I invested in) recently completed a plant-based guitar pick prototype. I helped get samples out to a handful of acts, including Guster, which **used** the picks in a recent show in Houston. Perhaps someday Rheom will make an entirely bio-based electric guitar.

To be sure, these technologies are still young, and none of them have achieved scale in an industry dominated by the likes of Taylor Swift and Target. But when it comes to vinyl records, consumers can vote with their wallets—that's what got LPs back into big box stores (and coffee shops, and bookstores, and Cracker Barrels) in the first place.

Artists can certainly make a major difference. Swift herself has shown she isn't afraid to pressure large music distributors, whether pushing Apple for better terms for musicians or **putting** her music back on TikTok despite Universal's stance.

Swift's fans have shown a willingness to shell out for anything she releases. Why not greener LPs?