



Testimony of Adam Gardner

Co-Founder of Reverb and Vocalist/Guitarist for Guster

Before the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming

“The Grass Greener: The Future of Biofuels”

October 24, 2007

Chairman Markey, Ranking Member Sensenbrenner and ladies and gentlemen of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify. It’s an honor to be part of this dialogue. As a musician who spends most of his time either on the road in a tour bus or on stage in a t-shirt, I also thank you for the opportunity to wear my suit to something other than a wedding or a funeral. As you know, my name is Adam Gardner and I’m a member of the band Guster. Four years ago, my wife and I began to provide information on environmental sustainability to the live music community as we toured. Our concerns and actions on this front have expanded ever since.

My band Guster started touring from our home base in Boston in 1993. Whether an artist immediately hits it big on the radio and MTV or builds their audience from the ground up like my band did, touring is critical to growing and sustaining every band’s career– a process that calls for a great deal of travel as we meet and play music for people across the country in venues ranging from small-town bars and clubs to big city sports arenas and stadiums. In the early days we started with a small van, but have grown to include a caravan of tour buses and 18-wheel trucks for our equipment.

As we toured, we met and talked with people of all ages and from all walks of life about the importance of environmental sustainability and energy independence. Traveling to

numerous campuses, we observed that students were hungry for information about environmental sustainability – and that they were eager to work with us to spread the word about climate change. Once we calculated how much fuel the buses and trucks that we and other bands rely on to travel drink up, we knew that we wanted our actions to match our beliefs. We were sarcastically nicknaming our tour bus the “Earth-Eater” and were ready to make a change. We began to think about the energy footprint of the venues in which we played. Out on the road I discovered that many other bands also lamented the negative environmental impact of their tours but didn’t know how or where to start.

In response, my wife Lauren Sullivan, who has been working in the environmental community as long as I’ve been playing in a rock band, and I decided to create Reverb, a non-profit organization dedicated to educating and engaging musicians and their fans to promote environmental sustainability. This partnership was a literal and figurative marriage of the music industry and the environmental movement. Over the past few years, we’ve collaborated with over 45 major national tours to implement various greening efforts including waste reduction and recycling, using biocompostable and reusable catering supplies, providing eco-friendly merchandise for fans, reducing and neutralizing carbon emissions from power used at venues, hotels, and travel, adding environmental addendums to bands’ contracts with venue promoters requesting eco-friendly products and practices, setting up a fan outreach Eco-Village of local and national non-profit groups at shows, and coordinating local biodiesel suppliers to come out to concert venues and fill up bands’ touring fleets with biodiesel. Reverb also launched the “Campus Consciousness Tour,” now in its third year, to bring all the elements listed above to college campuses across the country while adding daytime activities such as open Town Hall Forums with band members, student groups, faculty and administrators to discuss sustainability on campus, and what students can do to make a difference.

To date, Reverb’s efforts have reduced CO2 emissions by more than 25,000 tons. We’ve also coordinated the use of more than 250,000 gallons of cleaner, safer biodiesel fuel in touring fleets, involved more than 1,400 local and national environmental groups in the

Reverb Eco-Village and reached more than 4.4 million concertgoers face-to-face. This year, Guster released a carbon neutral CD—a first for the major label conglomerate Warner Music Group, and Reverb is currently working with Warner Music Group to reduce and neutralize the carbon footprint of their headquarters in New York City. In addition to my own band, Reverb has “greened” many other tours including Grammy-award-winning artists such as Dave Matthews Band, Alanis Morissette, John Mayer, Norah Jones, and Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Key to the approach in our efforts, we avoid preaching to people. It's not really our style. But more importantly, it's not really necessary. By providing a forum to connect activists with eco-friendly businesses and community leaders in a fun, compelling setting at concerts, we can generate interest and raise awareness not only among those looking to learn more, but even those who are there just to get a free sample of an organic yogurt smoothie. We also inspire people to change by showing them simple ways to achieve real results. The drive to defeat global warming and create greater energy independence is real on the grassroots level. I have seen it first hand. We are trying to do our part, but we want to be part of a larger, broader effort.

Of all of the soup-to-nuts eco-friendly efforts Reverb provides for bands, biodiesel is the one that seems to spark the most interest and conversation on the road with everyone from truck drivers to high-powered record label executives. I suppose this is because biodiesel appeals to so many different stakeholders and has a wide array of possible uses and benefits. Biodiesel allows us to power vehicles while also protecting the environment, facilitate our independence from dangerous foreign oil dictatorships, and can support jobs in local and rural communities. The use of biodiesel is radically changing the music touring industry, and there's no reason why we couldn't continue to broaden its reach.

For Guster, making strides toward kicking our own oil addiction hasn't been easy. We had to leave our first bus company to find one that would allow us to put B20 in the tanks! At the time, there were only one or two such companies in existence, and many, many times that number of skeptics. One of the biggest hurdles was, and continues to be,

finding places to refuel – Reverb’s most requested service from bands is the coordination of local biodiesel suppliers to deliver and fuel them up at venues. This is because around the country there are still too few biodiesel pumps –just around 1,100. But along the way, we’ve met people who are working hard to change that. For example, Venu Gupta, Superintendent of Buildings and Fleet for the City of Milwaukee, is fueling a million gallons this year of B10 biodiesel in his municipal fleet and plans to increase that blend to B20 in 2008.

Through Reverb, Guster has been able to share what we’ve learned and open the door for many bands to learn about green touring. We’ve also created a demand and converted our former skeptics into vocal advocates. We now work with a number of different bus and truck companies, drivers, and mechanics who believe biodiesel is cleaner for engines and can work just as well or better than traditional diesel fuel. By the way, there is no modification necessary to use biodiesel, with the exception of some older vehicles that may need fuel lines replaced, any diesel engine can run on biodiesel—you just put it in. Pioneering artists like Neil Young, Willie Nelson and Bonnie Raitt have been circling the country using biodiesel for several years now. My fellow musicians and I are eager for the day when we can take our biodiesel bus to play a concert in front of fans who drove there in their own biodiesel or plug-in hybrid powered cars.

While we’ve made great strides in biodiesel production and use in this country, there are a number of ways we could continue to improve. The energy bills that the House and Senate passed this summer have several provisions that are vital to promoting the availability of biodiesel. The Senate bill increases the production of advanced renewable fuels like biodiesel from sugar, wood, or plant material. Without this increase, it will be extremely difficult to expand Reverb and encourage others to use biodiesel on a regular basis. The House bill has several provisions that develop a greater infrastructure for biofuels and permit franchise retail fuel station owners to advertise and place E85 and biodiesel pumps at their stations. Congress must allow retailers to respond to consumer demand.

In addition to Congressional improvements to biodiesel productions, corporations can do more as well. Some auto companies, for instance, still void the warranty of owners who use biofuels. Most biodiesel is used in a blend with petroleum diesel of somewhere between B5 and B20 – we need to break down barriers that are holding us back from using pure B100. It's also important to encourage the development of this industry in ways that are compatible with good environmental stewardship – it would be horribly ironic to go from reliance on irresponsible oil companies and vehicle manufacturers to a biofuels industry dominated by large-scale commercial farming at the expense of small farmers, community economics and environmentalism.

This year, Guster was thrilled to play with Willie Nelson at Farm Aid, where we not only heard firsthand from small family farmers who want to be part of the solution to our climate and energy security problems, but where I also had the pleasure of meeting the founders of the Sustainable Biodiesel Alliance. The Sustainable Biodiesel Alliance (SBA) is a non-profit group whose mission is to promote sustainable biodiesel practices, including the harvesting, production and distribution of biodiesel fuels in collaboration with a wide array of partners from farmers to renewable energy experts, the SBA drafted Sustainable Biodiesel Principles, that include both environmental and social considerations. I'd like to share with you an overview of these principles:

Environmental Considerations:

- Reduce greenhouse gas emissions caused by fossil fuels **-both direct and indirect** forms that contribute to **growing, transporting and processing** biofuels.
- Energy and resource conservation principles that cut back on **total consumption**.
- Production should not **degrade soil, contaminate water resources, or add to air pollution**.
- Biofuel production should not lead to the **destruction, degradation or declassification of high conservation value areas**, areas of high biodiversity; habitats of rare, threatened or endangered species; or rare, threatened or

endangered ecosystems. Protected areas, including forested areas, should not be declassified or appropriated for biofuel crop production.

- Biofuels should ideally be **derived from non-Genetically Modified Organisms** feedstocks. Until then, the use of GMOs for production should be made transparent, so that buyers can make informed decisions about their feedstock.
- Biofuel crop production should minimize, and eliminate whenever possible, the use of **dangerous agrochemicals**. Agrochemicals that are hazardous to the environment, workers, and local communities should be used only as a last resort.

Social Considerations:

- **Food security**, making sure local communities play an integral part of the development of the biofuel industry.
- **Family and smallholder farmers should not be displaced** to grow or harvest biofuel feedstocks. Farmers should receive **fair compensation** for biofuel feedstocks and the products they produce.
- The **health and safety of workers** and communities should be protected. In addition, fair wages for agricultural workers and workers at biofuel production facilities should be ensured.
- Communities and farmers producing biofuels should have, to the greatest extent possible, **ownership of biofuel production** and processing facilities. Income generated from biofuel production should be kept to the greatest extent possible, within local producing communities from the feedstock to processing facilities.
- Strategies for **local consumption** should be prioritized over transporting or exporting biomass or biomass energy and products away from the communities and regions that produce them.

Far too often, our country's approach to protecting the environment is to do "less bad" which slows the harmful destruction rate down, but doesn't prevent it. Sustainable biodiesel offers the unique opportunity for a fuel product that is not just "less bad" than petroleum diesel, but is an actively good fuel that can reinvigorate our local economies

and actually replenish and revive the environmental damage we've caused. Of course, this is only if biodiesel and all biofuels adhere to principles such as the ones laid out by the Sustainable Biodiesel Alliance.

The challenge and the response to biodiesel has been uplifting. On my path I've encountered so many inspiring, motivated, and truly selfless individuals who are determined to create and propagate positive change. I'd like to say two things in closing. First, I want to clearly express that the desire for a new direction in our country's energy policy is out there. It's strong--and it's growing. College kids, who are typically at the center of advocacy and activism, look at politicians and entrenched interests and see only our slowness to act in the face of a global climate crisis. Excuses, whether they're about the importance of large automakers or the difficulty of producing clean and renewable energy technologies, don't really register. Young people want change, and they expect it from us. If we lead, they will eagerly follow.

Second, our efforts at Reverb have shown that it's possible to make a difference. The only things required are vision and commitment. Admittedly, the music industry was receptive to change, but there are other heavy carbon producing industries that will require more than voluntary actions and goals, and that is where leadership from Congress needs to play its part. It's easy to get lost in abstraction when discussing major policy shifts -- if we do this, then what about that? If we mandate percentages of plug-in hybrid cars, or mandate the use of biofuels, what will happen to the auto industry? Like the live music scene, commercial industries will adapt if they are shown a compelling reason to do so—and a legislative push from Congress would send a strong message, setting forth guidelines for positive change.

It's human nature to preserve the status quo unless something motivates a change. Vice President Gore and his quest to save the planet have made admirable inroads in raising the public consciousness, but we can't stop there. We need practical solutions to these problems. I hope that by sharing our practical solutions with you, that we might broaden your reach and deepen our fight. All it takes is a commitment. Strong legislation from

the American government on this issue could change the face of the world forever, and immensely for the better.

###