EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FROM

REDUCING THE LABOR OF BEGINNING AGRICULTURAL LABOR ECONOMICS RESEARCH

2025 AAEA POST-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP

JULY 30, 2025 **DENVER, CO**

Workshop Overview

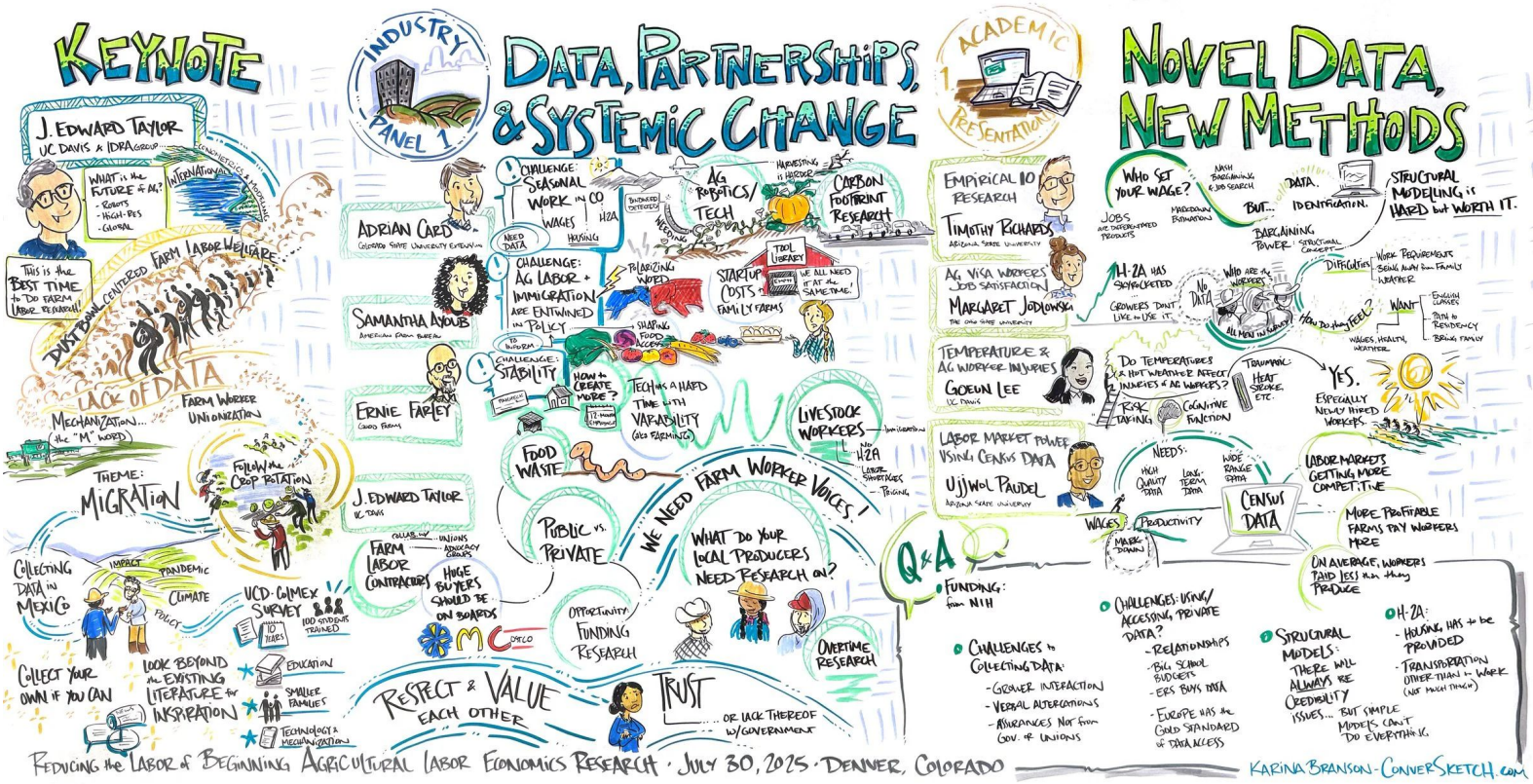
As the **agricultural sector adapts** to **shifting labor markets**, **technological advancements**, and a **changing climate**, understanding the evolving landscape for **farm workers** has never been more critical. This AAEA post-conference workshop featured presentations and discussions from **industry, government, and academia** to explore essential topics related to the U.S. farm workforce and the agri-food system. The collection of expert insights, panel discussions, and roundtable working groups generated a portfolio of **research ideas** centered around **improving farmworker well-being** and simultaneously **supporting a thriving agricultural and food system**.



Workshop Goals

The workshop aimed to **advance research on U.S. farmworkers** by aiding participants, especially young and emerging scholars, in **developing novel, impactful, and answerable research questions** that can improve the well-being of farmworkers while fostering a more resilient US agri-food system.

Lessons from the Morning Sessions



The workshop featured a keynote presentation from **J. Edward Taylor** covering the **history of farm labor** economics research with an outline of key players, topics, and data collection efforts. He emphasized that **today is the best time in history to research farm labor** and motivated the next generation of researchers with questions like **"what is the future of agriculture in a world of farm labor scarcity?"** and documenting the components of an **ideal project**, including policy relevance, novel theoretical and empirical methods, and potential for outreach and impact.

The first panel of industry representatives discussed **data availability**, employers' **constraints in raising wages**, differences in **crop and animal** agriculture, the challenges in developing effective and **affordable ag technology**, **reducing food waste**, and assessing agriculture's changing **carbon footprint**. The speakers provided many suggestions for researchers, including: **amplifying the farmworker voice** in data and research, studying the **effects of policies** (like overtime, H-2A, and immigration) in different states and sectors, creating **year-round farm employment opportunities**, and documenting the roles of **farm labor contractors** and grocery **retailers** in farm working conditions.

The first panel of academic researchers showed how **novel data sources** and **empirical methods** can be applied to address pivotal questions in farm labor economics. The researchers motivated the importance of **structural modeling** in studying farm labor markets and suggested a variety of data sources that can be used to estimate key parameters in empirical industrial organization research, exemplified how to study workers who are left out from national surveys by **self-administering surveys** to understand the determinants of **job satisfaction for H-2A workers**, introduced **workers compensation claims** as a valuable data source for understanding farmworker injuries and illnesses, with an application to **heat illnesses** in California, and showed how **restricted access US Census micro-data** can be used to study farmworker **wages, employment, and job transitions**.

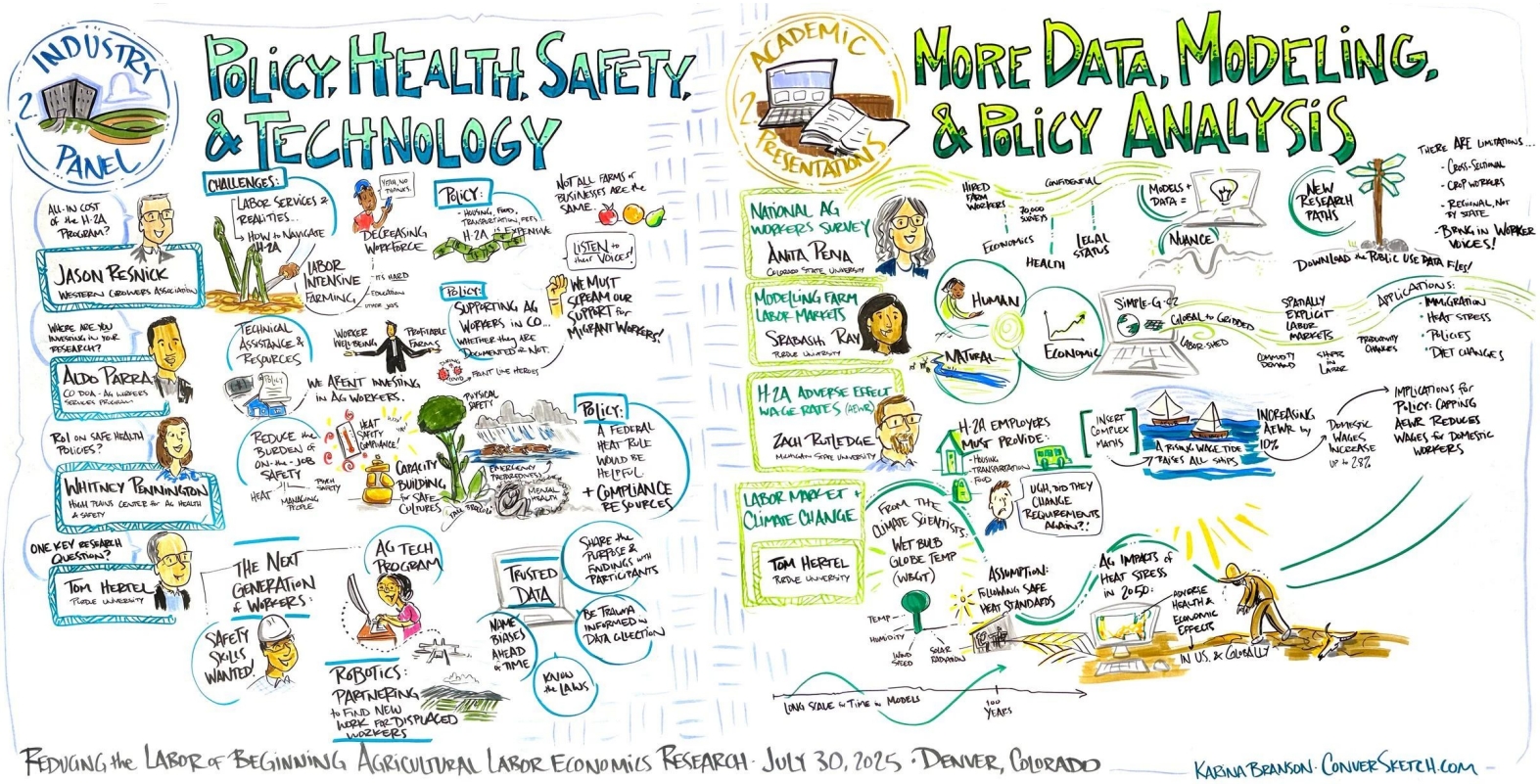
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY FROM

REDUCING THE LABOR OF BEGINNING AGRICULTURAL LABOR ECONOMICS RESEARCH

2025 AAEA POST-CONFERENCE WORKSHOP

JULY 30, 2025 **DENVER, CO**

Lessons from the Afternoon Sessions



The second panel of industry representatives focused on strategies and research to **improve worker health and safety** outcomes, the human and business case for **H-2A visa and immigration policy reform**, and the need to **invest in farmworkers** and promote **data-driven decision-making** among policymakers and employers. The speakers provided many suggestions for researchers, including: conducting worker **needs assessments**, studying the effects of compliance education and culture change on **workplace safety**, documenting the **return on investment** (ROI) from policies and practices that enhance worker wellbeing, **building trust** with workers before conducting surveys, and weighing the complex **ethical considerations** in conducting research that emphasizes the roles of bad actors in farm employment.

The second panel of academic researchers showcased more **widely used data** sources on U.S. farmworkers and demonstrated how they have been applied in **reduced form estimation and partial equilibrium modeling** frameworks to address important policy questions. These data sources included:

- National Agricultural Workers Survey (**NAWS**)
- The USDA's Farm Labor Survey (**FLS**)
- The BLS's Quarterly Census of Earnings and Wages (**QCEW**)
- The USDA's Census of Agriculture (**CoA**)
- **H-2A** Programmatic Data from the US Foreign Labor Certification

Researchers showcased how these data sources and modeling frameworks like SIMPLE-G and GTAP can be used to study the effects of policies, ranging from **H-2A wage-setting** to **agricultural conservation** initiatives, farm labor market dynamics, including reductions in **labor supply** and **changes in farmworker mobility**, and climate conditions, especially **heat**.

Our Key Take-Aways

The workshop concluded with **round table discussions** focusing on different themes from the day. Speakers and participants worked together to **generate impactful research questions** and identify appropriate data sources and methods for answering them, within their chosen theme. We identified **five topic areas** as crucial for future economics research and posed several feasible research projects appropriate for economists within each

