



Q2 2026 · QUARTERLY BRIEF

# The 2026 *Digital-Asset* Brief.

Q1 2026 marked an inflection: **\$14.2B of spot Bitcoin ETF inflows** — the largest quarterly institutional accumulation in any commodity ETF in history. We cover the structural buyer shift, regulatory bifurcation, and the AI × crypto intersection.

BRIEF

Q2 2026

MARKET OUTLOOK

**BRIEF. Q2 2026 MARKET OUTLOOK · RISE RESEARCH**

Q1 2026 spot Bitcoin ETF inflows of \$14.2B mark the largest quarterly institutional accumulation in any commodity ETF in history (prior record: SPDR Gold, Q1 2009, \$12.8B). The structural buyer base has materially shifted from individual to RIA. Regulatory regimes are bifurcating sharply between the US (permissive, post-ETF) and the EU (cautious, MiCA-restricted). The AI × crypto intersection — specifically verifiable compute markets and machine-to-machine payment rails — is emerging as the dominant Q2–Q4 narrative.

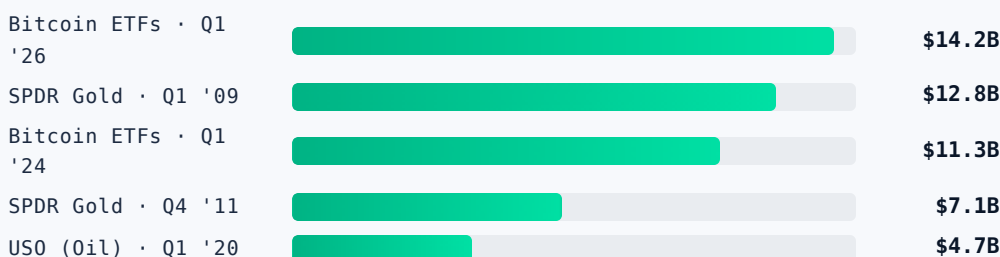
**§ 1 · The Q1 inflow milestone**

## \$14.2B is a category record.

Q1 2026 was a watershed quarter for institutional crypto. Spot Bitcoin ETF net inflows reached \$14.2B — the largest quarterly accumulation in any commodity ETF in recorded history. The prior record (SPDR Gold, Q1 2009, \$12.8B) was set in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. The Bitcoin ETF inflow milestone was set without an analogous macro driver — pure category expansion.

**FIGURE 1 · LARGEST QUARTERLY INFLOWS · COMMODITY ETFS · 2004–2026**

### Spot Bitcoin ETF Q1 2026 inflows set the all-time category record



SOURCE: BLOOMBERG, RISE RESEARCH AGGREGATION · NET INFLOWS BY QUARTER.

The buyer-base composition has also shifted. In Q1 2024, the dominant Bitcoin ETF buyer was the individual retail investor. By Q1 2026, RIAs (registered investment advisors) account for an estimated 58% of Bitcoin ETF flow — a structural shift in the institutional category that has compound implications.

**§ 2 · Regulatory bifurcation**

# US vs. EU.

The regulatory regimes are diverging materially. The US, post-ETF, has settled into a permissive equilibrium for major digital assets — spot Bitcoin and spot Ethereum ETFs are approved, exchanges operate under fairly clear (if still imperfect) rules, and stablecoin legislation has finally cleared committee. The EU's MiCA framework, implemented in 2024–2025, has produced a more restrictive environment particularly for non-bank stablecoins and for DeFi platforms.

JURISDICTION	SPOT BTC ETF	SPOT ETH ETF	DEFI POSTURE	STABLECOIN POSTURE
United States	Yes	Yes	Permissive (post-court)	Permissive (post-legislation)
European Union	Limited	Limited	MiCA-restricted	Bank-only for >€200M
United Kingdom	Yes (since '25)	Pending	Light-touch	Sandboxed
Hong Kong	Yes	Yes	Permissive	Permissive
Singapore	Yes (limited)	Limited	MAS-licensed	MAS-licensed

## § 3 · The AI × crypto intersection

# Our Q2 conviction.

We believe the most important narrative emerging in 2026 is the convergence of AI and crypto. Three specific intersections are worth monitoring:

- **Verifiable compute markets.** As AI inference moves toward distributed compute markets (think: rentable GPU networks), crypto rails offer the verifiable settlement infrastructure these markets need. Several Layer-2s and dedicated infrastructure projects are positioning for this.
- **Machine-to-machine payment rails.** AI agents transacting with other AI agents need a payment layer that doesn't depend on human signature, has sub-second settlement, and is programmable. Stablecoins on fast crypto rails (Solana, Base, etc.) are the leading candidates.
- **Decentralized AI inference markets.** Projects like Bittensor, Render, and others are building markets for AI inference that don't depend on the major centralized providers. We are cautious on most of these but the category is large.

*"The crypto thesis of 2017 was decentralization. The thesis of 2021 was DeFi. The thesis of 2024 was institutional adoption. The thesis of 2026 is AI-native rails. The previous theses didn't disappear — they just stopped being the marginal narrative."*

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#### § 4 · Rise Capital house view

## Our Q2 positioning.

Our current allocation, as published in **Conviction Q2 2026**:

BUCKET	ALLOCATION	QUARTER-OVER-QUARTER	RATIONALE
Bitcoin	50%	unchanged	Core conviction
Ethereum	25%	unchanged	Cash-flow thesis intact
Large-cap alts	15%	+2%	AI-narrative L1s
Small-cap specs	5%	+1%	AI × crypto theses
Stablecoin reserve	5%	-3%	Deploying into Q2 weakness

#### Q2 WATCH LIST · WHAT WE ARE MONITORING

### Three things to watch this quarter.

(1) RIA flow share — if it crosses 65% of Bitcoin ETF inflow, the institutional category transition is structurally complete. (2) MiCA implementation effects — how much European DeFi liquidity migrates to US/HK/Singapore rails. (3) Verifiable compute project KPIs — is there real AI workload settling to crypto rails, or just narrative momentum?