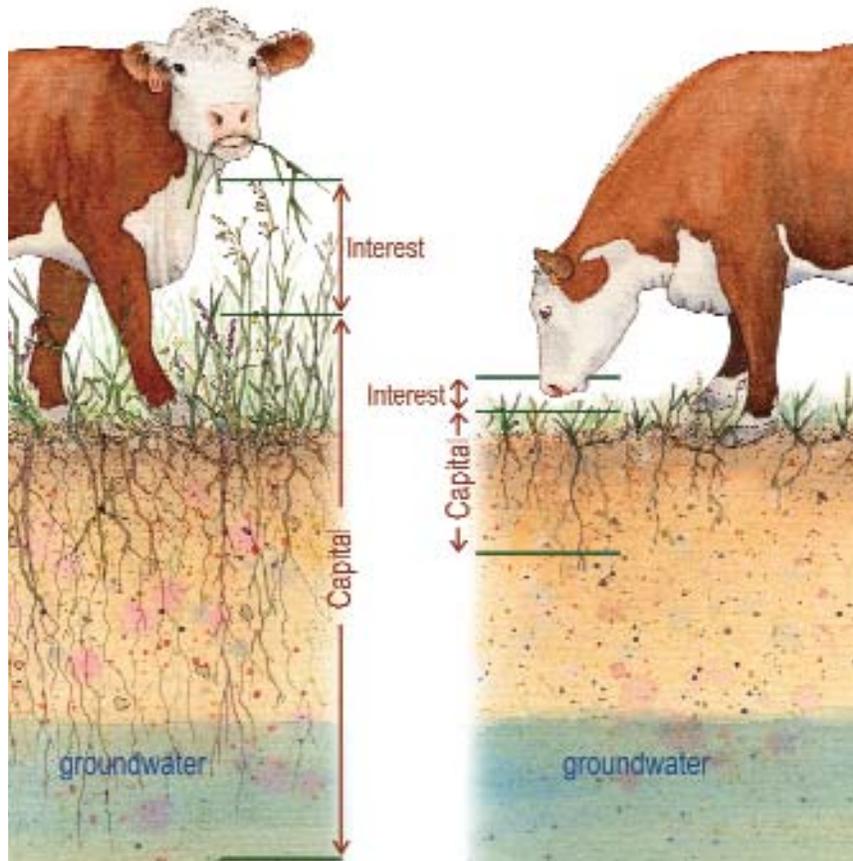


# Maintain Your Range Capital - Live Off the Interest

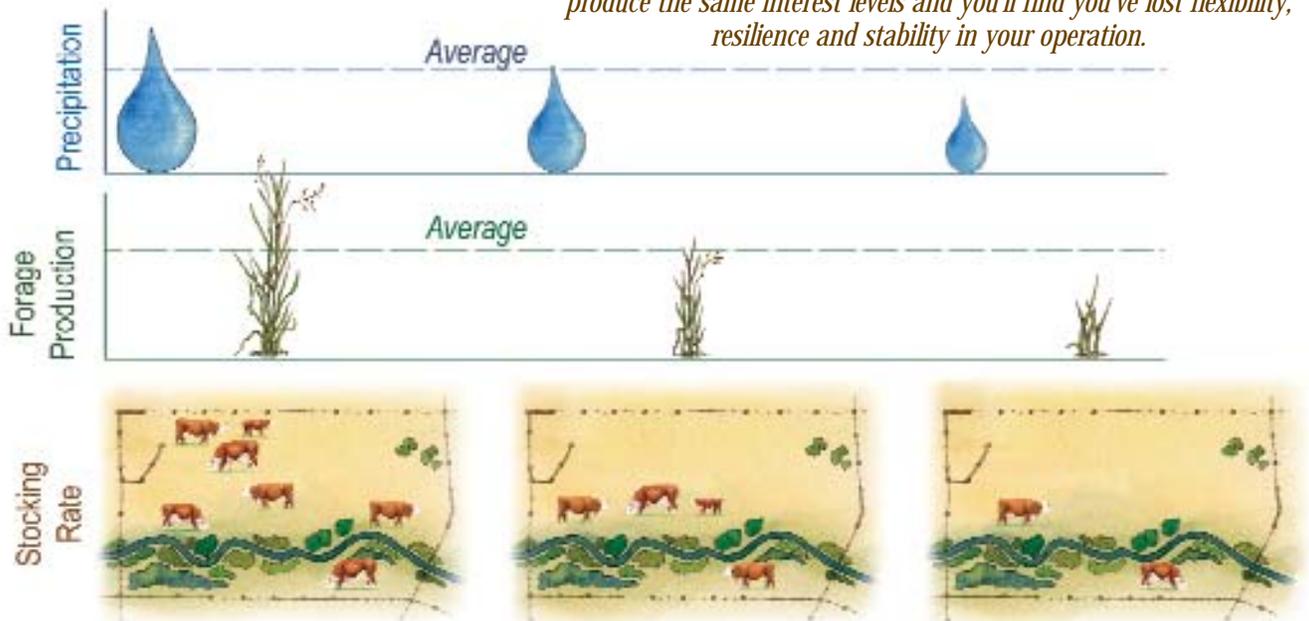
How do you know how many cows to graze on a pasture? To maintain your pasture and any riparian areas in that pasture you should be thinking about these things:

- ◆ how much forage is being produced?
- ◆ how much does a cow eat?
- ◆ when I do the math how many cattle can be safely grazed, and for how long?

Carrying capacity is the maximum amount of forage that can be grazed while still maintaining the plant community. It's like the red line on a tachometer. Running the engine consistently above the red line will shorten engine life and may cause it to break at an inopportune time. There is much wisdom in the old stockman's saying; "if you keep down the shoot, you'll kill the root". Grazing or browsing too much of the leafy material, the collector of solar energy, will wear the plant down and reduce its ability to store energy in its roots for regrowth in the next season. Heavy grazing, over long periods of time, results in shallow plant roots. This makes the plant dependent on surface moisture instead of tapping deeper, more abundant supplies of water. Pastures can become very vulnerable to drought conditions with a combination of shallow roots and no litter to conserve available moisture. A conservative level of grazing, which leaves forage as carryover helps retain moisture for additional growth. *"It takes grass to make grass."*



*In your range or pasture bank account you have capital - the plants that sustain your operation. If that capital is maintained and managed well, with attention to carrying capacity and other range management principles, your investment will pay handsome dividends of grass interest on a sustainable basis. However, if you dip into the capital, it can't produce the same interest levels and you'll find you've lost flexibility, resilience and stability in your operation.*



*The primary limiting factor for plant growth is water. There is considerable variation in precipitation in Alberta, on an annual basis and variation between years. That variation causes forage quantity, and therefore the number of livestock that can be supported on a pasture, to vary. Planning your pasture use on the basis of average or high precipitation values could have you coming up short of forage in some years.*